

OPINION

What to do with an adverse employee morale survey

Low compensation and toxic boss-subordinate relations are major employee issues that came out from the recent employee opinion survey conducted by our human resource (HR) department. However, the department does not seem to want to recognize the validity of those issues. If you're the HR head, how would you handle this situation? — *Banana Boat.*

The first question you should answer is, how do these two issues affect the company's attrition rate? If the turnover rate is in the single digits, in the vicinity of 7%, then it's a healthy number and is no cause for alarm. Employee resignations are not exactly bad.

What is worrisome is any direct correlation between the two issues you mentioned alongside a two-digit turnover rate. Definitely, you could conclude that employees are not happy with their salary and work relations with their boss.

But why does HR refuse to acknowledge the result of its work? This is worrisome. If HR doesn't want to believe its own work, then who will? One option for you would be to hire a third-party service provider to lend an independent view and an objective opinion that will be accepted by both labor and management.

HR should not be the sole arbiter of the survey findings. If the result is contrary to management expectations, then it has more reason to publish it to improve employee trust and as a manifestation of proactive, two-way communication.

WHAT TO DO

The most important part of people management is generating employee trust. If you collect feedback and don't act on it, then what's the use? Next time, you may not be able to get the information you want. Of course, everything has its limits and much depends on the organization's capacity to meet employee expectations.

However, it requires honest management commitment, along with a considerable amount of time and effort. To do this, management may have to take the following steps:

One, summarize the survey result for sharing with employees. Focus on the adverse findings and how management intends to resolve those issues. At the same time, highlight all positive feedback and acknowledge the cooperation of employees in making the organization a vibrant workplace.

Going back to the two issues, if employee perception shows that salary is low, then cite an independent industry survey showing the contrary. In most cases, wrong perceptions are debunked by calculating the annual total equivalent for the right context.

Likewise, identify the most common issues between line executives and their workers without naming names.

Two, release the survey result within a reasonable time. Avoid giving the impression that management is indecisive or hiding something. Any delay gives the impression that management is not serious in seeking feedback. It may be better to admit sometimes that management has no ready answer rather than provide a haphazard reply that destroys its credibility. If more time is needed, explain the reason for the delay.

Always be professional and polite. Make everything clear. Avoid using any buzzwords or jargon unless everyone is familiar with those terms. If necessary, translate your message into *Taglish* (Tagalog-English) to be easily understood by factory workers.

Last, conduct the employee survey every year. This way, you can detect improvements from year-to-year. Ensure the anonymity of respondents and aim for as much as 70% of the work force.

Having a greater number of workers in the survey is imperative as it would help diminish minor issues that are often magnified by few disgruntled workers. Regardless of the issue, whether it's low pay or internal conflicts between bosses and subordinates, a quick resolution will prevent escalation and keep bystanders from improperly intervening.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Sharing information and allowing the workers to participate in management up to a certain extent is the key to a proactive, two-way communication process. Giving people a voice will help them build confidence in working with management. However, this is easier said than done.

Part of the problem is when top management extols the virtues of communication without actually implementing practical approaches to convert their "inspirational" talks into reality. In fact, many of their actions often translate into a command-and-control approach to management, rather working in a way that shows trust and confidence in the workers.

There are many things to be done to promote two-way communication, not only within departments but throughout the company. Having an annual survey taking in the opinions of a majority of employees must be supported by individual engagement dialogue and team kaizen problem-solving.

Whatever you do, distinguish between data and facts. Data are important, but facts are more important. Consider this: High attrition rates are data while low salary and toxic bosses are facts.

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IN THE WORKPLACE

REY ELBO

ELBONOMICS: Data are important, but facts are more important.



LRT-1 operator, Ateneo tie up to offer courses in railway engineering

LIGHT RAIL Manila Corp. (LRMC), the private operator of Light Rail Transit Line 1 (LRT-1), said on Thursday that it will collaborate with the Ateneo de Manila University on designing courses that it hopes will generate more railway workers.

"Under the intended arrangement, LRMC is working with ADMU in designing railway engineering courses and programs," the company said in an e-mailed statement.

Ongoing railway projects include the LRT-1 Cavite Extension, the Manila Metro Rail Transit System-7, the Metro Manila Subway, the North-South Commuter Railway, and the Mindanao Railway.

"We live in an exciting time for our railway sector, with several infrastructure projects taking shape and more sustainable modes of transport being pushed," according to LRMC President and Chief Executive Officer Juan F. Alfonso, who is also a member of the advisory board of

the Ateneo Research Institute of Science and Engineering.

There is a need to support the "growing need for highly-skilled, competent, and world-class rail workforce as the country develops further the local railway industry," the company said.

Ateneo is working on preparing courses in Transportation and Society, Principles of Railway Transportation, and Railway Management and Engineering.

The first course is a general course on transportation that will be an interdisciplinary elective, the company said.

"The second course a technical interdisciplinary course intended for students with majors under the Department of Electronics, Computer, and Communications Engineering, while the third course, a major elective, will be open to all Computer Engineering students taking the railway engineering track and to all students taking the minor program in railway engineering," it added.

LRT-1 will serve as Ateneo students' laboratory for their five-month internship program.

Students will be exposed to railway maintenance and construction management, project management, and working in a corporate setup, LRMC said.

The company noted that it is also discussing with the university how railway innovation and technology can be the subject of research projects to be undertaken by students or faculty.

LRMC is a joint venture of Ayala Corp., Metro Pacific Light Rail Corp. and Macquarie Infrastructure Holdings (Philippines) Pte. Ltd.

Metro Pacific Investments Corp. is one of three Philippine subsidiaries of Hong Kong's First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being PLDT, Inc. and Philex Mining Corp. Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., maintains interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**

Fresh COVID wave sweeps Asia, NZ warns of pressure on hospitals

WELLINGTON/TOKYO — A new wave of coronavirus infections is rapidly spreading through Asia, prompting warnings for residents from New Zealand to Japan to take precautions to slow the outbreak and help prevent healthcare systems from being overwhelmed.

The renewed surge in cases, mostly of the BA.4/5 Omicron variants, provides a further challenge for authorities grappling with the economic fallout of earlier waves of the pandemic while trying to avoid extending or reintroducing unpopular restrictions.

The New Zealand (NZ) government on Thursday announced free masks and rapid antigen tests as it tries to relieve pressure on the country's health system, which is dealing with an influx of both COVID and influenza patients during the southern hemisphere winter.

"There's no question the combination of a spike in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, the worst flu season in recent memory and corresponding staff absences are putting health workers and the whole health system under extreme pressure," Ayesha Verrall, Minister for COVID-19 Response, said in a statement.

New Zealand, which has a population of 5.1 million, has almost 69,000 currently infected with the virus. Of those, 765 cases are in hospital, which has caused increases in wait times and surgeries to be canceled.

In Japan, new COVID-19 cases have surged to levels not seen since early this year. The government has called on people to be especially careful ahead of an upcoming long weekend and imminent summer school vacations.

Japan reported almost 95,000 cases on Wednesday and newly infected patients

have increased by 2.14-fold compared to the last week, according to a government spokesperson.

"The number of new cases is rising in every prefecture in Japan, and it seems to be rapidly spreading," Health Minister Shigeyuki Goto said at the start of a committee meeting on dealing with the coronavirus.

Tokyo raised its alert level to the highest tier. "Tomorrow, we will hold a meeting of the task force to decide on measures to be taken this summer, taking into consideration the national trend and the opinions of experts," Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said at a meeting.

Like New Zealand, South Korea was praised for its response early in the pandemic, but by Wednesday, daily cases there had tripled in a week to more than 39,000.

Officials and experts expect South Korea's new daily cases to reach 200,000 by around mid-August to end-September and are expanding inoculations of booster shots but not planning renewed curbs.

Australia warned it could be hit with its worst COVID-19 outbreak over the next few weeks fueled by the BA.4/5 Omicron variants. Authorities said "millions" of new infections could be expected, but ruled out any tough restrictions to contain the spread.

"We've moved beyond that ... we're not in the era of lockdowns and those sorts of things," Federal Health Minister Mark Butler told radio station 2GB on Thursday, even as he urged Australians to consider working from home again.

Australian hospital admissions are already hovering near levels seen in the last major Omicron outbreak earlier this year

with its health system also under pressure from high COVID and influenza numbers.

While cases in Thailand have trended down, infections in Indonesia have picked up, reaching the highest since March.

New infections and hospitalizations in the Philippines remain low, but the government has warned case numbers could rise at least 20-fold by the end of the month.

Manila is urging more people to get their booster shots as health ministry data shows only a quarter of eligible adults have received their first booster as of July 12.

Mainland China has reported an average of over 300 locally transmitted COVID daily infections in July, higher than around 70 in June, as Beijing's strict "dynamic COVID-zero" policy helps keep local clusters in check and has prevented any overwhelming of hospitals. — **Reuters**

High energy costs could make it more difficult to cut emissions, emerging nations warn

NUSA DUA, Indonesia — Indonesia and India on Thursday underscored a call by emerging nations for more climate change financing, warning that rising energy prices due to the Ukraine war would make it difficult for countries to cut emissions.

With inflation rising globally amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, some countries, including in Europe, have reverted to coal and other fossil fuel-based power or delayed their energy transition out of concerns over affordability and supplies.

India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her Indonesian counterpart, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, said at a Group of 20 (G20) event in Bali that emerging markets' energy transition should not come at high costs to the public.

They both noted current high energy prices and Sri Mulyani said rising interest rates would also make it more expensive for emerging countries to raise funds for climate action.

"If we cannot pay and you cannot also help, then this is not going to be delivered," she said, referring to Indonesia's plans to build renewable power sources and to phase out coal power plants.

Indonesia and India, among the world's largest coal producers and users, have committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2060 and 2070 respectively.

Rich nations have pledged to provide \$100 billion per year from 2020 to help poorer countries tackle climate change, but have so far failed to meet the promised amount. The Group of Seven (G7) economies last month said they will be paying the full amount every year by 2023.

A US official said the private sector will have to augment government funds to meet the massive global need, noting that some \$250 billion in assets were now available in private environmental, social and governance funds. — **Reuters**

China's tough COVID policy still drags on economy

BEIJING — China has been tweaking its stringent COVID curbs but shows no sign of backing off from its "dynamic zero" policy, and has lagged in vaccination efforts that would enable it to do so, casting a heavy shadow over the world's second-largest economy.

The absence of a roadmap out of zero-COVID and expectations that it will persist well into 2023 leaves residents and businesses facing a prolonged period of uncertainty.

Recent scattered COVID flare-ups, the imposition of lockdowns in some cities and the arrival of the highly-contagious BA.5 variant have added to those worries.

On Friday, China is expected to report that gross domestic product (GDP) grew just 1% in the second quarter, with full year growth forecast at 4%, according to a Reuters poll — far short of Beijing's official target of around 5.5% for 2022.

In addition to a sharp lockdown-induced slowdown, growth has been weighed down by a sputtering property market and an uncertain global outlook.

This week, Shanghai's 25 million people were subject to more

mandatory city-wide testing, and fear of tougher measures or getting caught up in China's zero-COVID bureaucracy continues to exact an economic toll, including on consumption and jobs.

Nomura estimated 31 cities were implementing full or partial lockdowns as of July 11, affecting nearly 250 million people in regions accounting for a quarter of China's GDP.

As the rest of the world tries to coexist with COVID, China points to the lives saved by its tough measures. President Xi Jinping has touted it as an advantage of China's governance system.

Critics say China is hamstrung by the success of an approach that is obsolete now that vaccines have made COVID far less deadly.

China's self-isolation also has long-term economic implications.

"The rest of the world is re-opening and the zero COVID policy in China will probably drive export orders and production to other countries during the supply-chain normalization," Ken Cheung, chief Asian FX strategist at Mizuho, wrote on Wednesday.

Businesses have described how they have been badly hurt and find it hard to plan given the possibility of abrupt lockdowns, while international business groups have been especially vocal about the costs of zero-COVID, with members warning of plans to invest elsewhere.

"The world is not going to wait for China to improve her herd immunity," said Joerg Wuttke, president of the EU Chamber of Commerce.

While China has been spared the ravages of widespread infections and deaths, it therefore lacks herd immunity, with its vast elderly population especially exposed.

However, China has refrained from aggressive vaccination efforts. Last week, the city of Beijing quickly reversed a planned vaccine mandate for entry to crowded places after strong on-line backlash. nL4N2YP19D

China also has not approved the import of more effective vaccines using mRNA technology or fully developed its own.

"The curbs can only be lifted after the country has finished

vaccinating the elderly. This might not be before fall 2023," said Wuttke, who has suggested to Premier Li Keqiang that China set up vaccination tents next to its now-ubiquitous testing kiosks.

China has vaccinated nearly 90% of its 1.41 billion population and given around 56% of its population a booster shot. Still, 30 million Chinese elderly are unvaccinated.

Zhang Zuofeng, a UCLA professor of epidemiology, said a lack of data on the safety of China's vaccines or their effectiveness against Omicron has undermined government and public confidence in them.

"Had China had confidence in its vaccines, with high vaccination rates among Chinese people, it would have already moved from focusing on eliminating COVID infections to mitigation of serious illnesses and deaths," he said. — **Reuters**

FULL STORY

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