

Greater WFH adoption seen improving employment outlook

By John Victor D. Ordoñez
Reporter

MORE remote and hybrid jobs will help boost employment this year with companies growing more flexible on work arrangements even with the easing of the public health emergency, according to the online job portal JobStreet.

"The market has reopened and as we've seen the number of ad postings and applications on our website (are) back to our 2019 or pre-pandemic situation," Philip A. Gioca, country manager for JobStreet Philippines, told *BusinessWorld* in an interview last week.

"The difference is that the old roles and positions in 2019 are redefined now since remote work is now more prevalent."

He said he is optimistic about employment improving this year.

The unemployment rate eased to a three-year low last year to 5.4%, the lowest since the 5.1% posted in 2019, the last full year before the coronavirus pandemic.

Job quality was also at a three-year low as under-employment, an indicator of workers looking for more work, hit 14.3%, against the 14% recorded in 2019.

In September, the Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) revised the implementing rules and regulations of the Telecommuting Law to bolster protections for work-from-home (WFH) employees, should they decide not to work in the office.

Workers in a WFH scheme are not classified as field personnel, except when their hours of work "cannot be determined with reasonable clarity," according to the revised rules.

In a study released by JobStreet on March 1, about 46% of respondents said they prefer hybrid work, 28% are looking for fully remote work, and 26% said they want to work on-site.

Mr. Gioca said the online job search platform is collaborating with the DoLE to study the employability of senior high school students.

The upcoming study will seek to determine where senior high school students best fit in the workforce and to find out whether they are landing high-quality jobs, he said.

"Now, employers in the Philippines are taking skills and attitude over educational attainment when seeking new hires, which is a great equalizer," Mr. Gioca said.

"Graduates from the top schools now have to be driven differently when looking for work and take into account attitude and skills."

SC strikes down PAL policy of retiring female cabin crew at 55

THE Supreme Court (SC) has voided a 2005 agreement between Philippine Airlines, Inc. (PAL) and its cabin crew which set the retirement age of female flight attendants at 55 and males at 60, on the grounds that it discriminated against women.

The retirement ages had been agreed by PAL and the Flight Attendants and Stewards Association of the Philippines.

In a statement on Thursday, the court said it granted the appeal of female

flight attendants to void the agreement because it denied them employment by reason of age.

PAL failed to prove that female flight attendants aged 55 to 59 were unable to perform critical duties, such as opening emergency doors and attending to passengers in cramped working conditions.

"This deprived them of benefits attached to employment, such as income and medical benefits, five years earlier

than their male counterparts, without any factual basis," the High Court said.

The court has yet to upload the ruling on its website.

Senior Associate Justice Marvic Mario Victor F. Leonen said the policy failed to uphold the equality of men and women provided for under the Constitution, Labor Code, and conventions on eliminating forms of discrimination against women.

He said the agreement also violated the female flight attendants' right to security of tenure and the accompanying employment benefits.

"Aside from being repugnant to the Constitution, laws, and international convention, the Court found that the compulsory retirement provision in Section 144(A) of the Agreement was not voluntarily agreed upon by petitioners," the tribunal said. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

OPINION

Probationary employee acting without authority

I have a young employee, a new-hire fresh graduate who is such an eager beaver that he ends up doing a lot of things outside

of his authority and job description. Yesterday, he allowed two of our student-trainees to bring home company-owned laptops so they can continue working at home. Three weeks previously I had spoken to him about such lapses. He told me he wants to be empowered in order to exceed my job expectations. How do I manage this person? — North Star.

Employee empowerment is not absolute. Management must draw the line between the things that can and cannot be done by employees, regardless of their work experience, educational orientation and background. In many organizations even management has limited authority. They can't simply make decisions on some things.

Even more so if they're new to the organization and lack the expertise to make sound decisions. In your case, company laptops must be secured at all times and must not be brought out of the office without authorization. This policy applies to the contents of the laptops, whose loss could compromise trade secrets.

The laptops could also be stolen by student-trainees or anyone they meet on the road if they use public transport.

There's nothing wrong with empowering people — it has many advantages. One of them is giving workers the chance to identify issues and solve them. Another is that it frees up management from focusing on mundane issues. A third is that it motivates ordinary employees to work on challenging assignments. However, these are subject to limitations, especially if the employee has not passed his probationary period.

You have reasonable grounds to be concerned about this. If anything bad happens, you can't wash your hands of any responsibility because of command responsibility.

THREE CURES

The motivation of your newly hired worker is admirable, except that it is misplaced at this point. He has not yet passed probation and has not paid sufficient dues to be considered empowered. You've already spoken to him about similar incidents in the past, but this time, an informal talk may not be the right option for you.

What could possibly work with him? Explore the following:

One, allow the employee to understand the folly of his actions. This requires an enormous amount

of fact. Start by asking him how he would deal with situations like the loss or damage to the laptops. How would he recover from such losses or damage? What's the basis of his perceived "authority?"

In the first place, what are those tasks that can't be completed during normal office hours by student-trainees? Are they allowed by the university or college that sent them to work as on-the-job trainees?

Further, in almost all organizations, laptops can't be brought out of company premises without the benefit of a gate pass signed by a competent authority. In that case, who issued the gate pass? If an unauthorized employee signed the gate pass, why was it allowed by security? This question could open a can of worms.

Two, ask the employee to explain himself in writing. After your previous conversations, the time has come for you to issue a Notice to Explain (NTE) memo that lists specific provisions of your company's code of conduct. If you can't find any such policy, your best recourse is the Labor Code, Criminal Code, Civil Code or any Supreme Court decisions that you can use to justify your inquiry.

Generally, however, the best argument is to tell him that employers are still liable even if the worker is not authorized. This is the essence of "vicarious liability," a legal doctrine that allows another person to be charged with the unlawful act or omission of another, unless the former has proven that it had exercised due diligence.

"Vicarious liability" is more or less similar to another legal doctrine called "respondet

superior" — both Latin words translated to mean "the master must answer" for any loss or damage done by the "slave." In other words, that presumes the negligence of a worker is also presumed to be the negligence of the employer.

Last, emphasize the worker's limited or zero authority. It's prudent to categorically state that the worker does not possess any authority to make such decisions without prior verbal or written approval. You can amplify this by discussing office protocols and other administrative guidelines.

Related to this is the principle of chain of command that requires every worker to report and direct any communication to his line leader, supervisor, manager or boss unless there's a clear emergency that could warrant the bypass.

Nevertheless, create every opportunity to engage your worker by discussing his personal interests and goals, at least in areas where you have the power to further his career. The worker may be tempted to argue about empowerment. If that happens, steer the person away from his interpretation of what an empowered employee should be.

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Factory, from SI/1

The Marcos administration also expects more Chinese tourists to visit the Philippines after China relaxed a number of coronavirus restrictions amid domestic outrage.

Last month, the Philippine Senate ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest free trade agreement, covering nearly a third of the global population and about 30% of its global gross domestic product.

The agreement involves the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and partners China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

The trade deal that took effect in 2022 is heavily supported by China, whose trade with member countries accounted for 30.4% of its total foreign trade value, according to a May 2022 analysis by China Briefing.

"It's also difficult to diversify our trade away from China when the government has in fact entered into various agreements including RCEP and investment deals with Beijing," Mr. Purugganan said.

"Our entry into RCEP makes this more difficult as we made additional concessions under the trade deal," he said. "Studies show that our imports from China will increase as a result of these concessions."

China's exports are very competitive compared with other counties, George N. Manzano, an economist at the University of Asia and the Pacific, said in an e-mail. China is also a robust market for Philippine exports.

In 2021, China accounted for 57% of Philippine exports of copper, 71% of ores, 65% of mineral fuels, 30% of fish and crustacean and 13% of electrical machineries.

In terms of imports, China supplied 40% of Philippine imports of iron and steel. It also supplied 64% of Philippine imports of articles of iron and steel, almost 80% of edible fruits and nuts, 34% of fertilizers and 23% of plastics, Mr. Manzano said.

The disruption of supply chains is among the consequences of significantly minimizing trade with China, the economist said, noting that the local electronics sector and other Philippine industries rely heavily on Chinese imports for their raw materials and intermediate products.

"As China recovers from coronavirus restrictions, its import demand will again increase, benefiting the world's exporters, the Philippines included," he said.

But there is a case for greater diversification away from China and toward other countries considering the Philippine's economic security, Mr. Manzano said.



REUTERS
EMPLOYEES work on the production line of American infant product and toy manufacturer Kids II, Inc. at a factory in Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, China, June 22, 2021.



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Megaworld formally begins development of Northwin Global City, Bulacan's first-ever cbd

The 85-hectare master planned 'global business district' is envisioned to bring in more jobs and help Bulacan become a center of business, trade, and tourism in Central Luzon

Property giant Megaworld is formally beginning the construction of Bulacan's first-ever central business district (CBD), which is envisioned to become a major catalyst for economic growth and development in the province dubbed as the "gateway to Northern Philippines."

Megaworld is investing P98 billion to develop the 85-hectare Northwin Global City along North Luzon Expressway (NLEX) into a "global business district" for Bulacan. The development is envisioned to mirror the same kind of vibrancy and dynamism that characterizes Megaworld's other pioneering township developments like Eastwood City in Quezon City, Uptown Bonifacio and McKinley Hill in Taguig City, and Iloilo Business Park in Mandaue, Iloilo.

"We are delighted to finally bring our vision for Bulacan's first-ever global business district to reality here in Northwin Global City. It is both a pleasure and an honor to work together with the Provincial Government of Bulacan, as well as the two progressive municipalities of Marilao and Bulacan. We hope to be able to add great value to them and their respective constituents by helping create jobs and opportunities as we continue developing Northwin Global City into Bulacan's very own world-class central business district," says Kevin L. Tan, chief strategy officer, Megaworld.

In 2022, the province of Bulacan bagged the 2022 Most Business-Friendly Province award from the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI). It was also named as the 10th Most Competitive Province in the country by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and was cited for its stellar good governance practices after receiving its sixth Seal of Good Local Governance from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG).

Straddling the municipalities of Marilao and Bocaue in Bulacan and located just 20 kilometers away from Metro Manila, Northwin Global City features a 16-hectare CBD called "Northwin Main Street." The district, which draws inspiration from the master plan behind New York City's Fifth Avenue, will soon feature corporate buildings, shophouses, hotels, and mixed-use commercial towers that are all just a short walk away from one another.

The township will also have several high-rise residential condominiums, foremost of



which is the 23-storey 9 Central Park that was launched last year. Features French industrial architecture inspired by Greenwich West in New York City, 9 Central Park offers 478 'smart home' units that each come with a wireless smart home system. This will provide residents the ease and convenience of controlling several features, including lighting and appliances, via a dedicated phone app.

Other features of Northwin Global City include its very own lifestyle mall, educational institutions, and curated gardens and parks that make up about forty percent (40%) of the entire development. The township will also boast several iTownship features, such as the installation of solar-powered and LED streetlights, underground cabling system, fiber optic cabling, bike lanes, a stormwater detention facility for flood prevention, intermodal transport terminal, and other sustainable infrastructure for mobility and connectivity.

More importantly, Northwin Global City will also feature one of the stations of the 147-kilometer North-South Commuter Railway, also known as the Manila-Clark Railway Project. Once completed, future residents, locators, and even visitors of the township will have the most convenient access to and from the Clark International Airport and the soon-to-rise New Manila International Airport (NMAIA) in Bulacan.

Northwin Global City can be easily accessed from the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), the Makati Central Business District, and Bonifacio Global City via the Skyway 3 towards NLEX, which will only take around an hour during normal traffic.