

Digitizing healthcare to require big IT skills push

By John Victor D. Ordoñez
Reporter

HEALTHCARE workers in the Philippines need to develop information and communications technology (ICT) skills as more healthcare firms shift to digital platforms, according to a healthcare management services and solutions company.

"During the pandemic, we saw an increase in the utilization of

digital technology in general," Carelon Global Solutions President Rajat Puri told *BusinessWorld* in an e-mail.

"What the industry should do is to invest in training and skill programs to come up with hard skills and refine them to cater to the healthcare industry."

Philippine healthcare companies should guide healthcare workers on interacting with customers through digital media, he added.

Carelon, which rebranded from Legato Health Technologies in January, has two offices in the Philippine capital region and two more in Iloilo.

The company specializes in using digital tools to streamline operations for healthcare organizations.

Mr. Puri said his company has started implementing artificial intelligence (AI) to boost client efficiency.

"When we talk about digitalization and AI as complementary

skills, it cannot be seen as reducing the need for labor, as labor will always be there," he said.

Nora K. Terrado, head of Carelon Global Solutions Philippines, said in February that the health management information systems market in the Philippines has the potential to expand with the enhancement of talent development, infrastructure, and ease of doing business.

She said the market could be worth P28 billion by 2028 if the

industry focuses on these growth enablers.

The Asian Development Bank has said the pandemic increased the need for digital skills with companies continuing to shift towards digitalization.

The Department of Labor and Employment has said it is working on narrowing the gap between worker skills and employee needs this year through upskilling programs.

The Philippines ranked 80th out of 133 countries in the Institut

Européen d'Administration des Affaires' (INSEAD) Global Competitive Index 2022. INSEAD evaluated how countries and cities grow, attract and retain talent.

"As we're looking at investing in AI and digital technologies which is a must, I also believe that the need for upskilling labor will be more important than ever because the world is moving," Mr. Puri said.

"It's very clear that whatever Filipinos are working on, it's evolving with digitalization."

OPINION Rejection letters

We receive daily follow-ups from applicants, and it takes so much time to answer them. As much as we'd like to be professional in our dealings, we have to prioritize our heavy workload. What's the best way of managing this situation, especially for applicants who were rejected? — *Starry Night*.

Many of us can't handle everything, even if we wanted to. But we must do something to project a professional image for the organization. We do it in the hope of maintaining goodwill with all applicants who might be customers as well.

Over the long term, the roles could just as easily be reversed — they could become the recruiters while we could be applicants. If you're looking for a good example of the Golden Rule, you can start with your current situation.

Make yourself amiable to everyone. Be decorous and decent at all times. I know this may be difficult to do. Fortunately, it's not impossible.

STRATEGIES
Take a few steps back to reflect on your

situation. Think of the best approach to help you perform at your finest. Consider the following strategies:

One, insert a disclaimer in your job ads. Part of the ad should say something like this: "Due to the numerous applications we're receiving every day, we regret we can't reply to applicants following up by e-mail, text, phone calls, or personal visits to the office." If you have this in your ad, rational applicants would readily understand the situation.

If some applicants persist despite the disclaimer, that's a good reason for you to reject them for poor reading comprehension or failure to follow simple instructions. At any rate, when rejecting people, it's better to remain silent. No talk, no mistake.

Two, send a bulk e-mail to all rejected applicants. As soon as you've hired someone for the vacated post, your best approach is to send a generic "thank you" e-mail to all rejected applicants. You can assign this task to a human resource clerk, or

even to a temp working off a template that you provide.

Without encouraging false hopes, inform applicants that you're keeping their curriculum vitae (CV) on file for future reference. Encourage them to update their CVs as needed, to be sent to a dedicated e-mail address. Also, you can ask them to follow the company's social media accounts for the latest job vacancy announcements.

Last, write an appreciation e-mail to special applicants. These include the number two and three candidates on your shortlist, applicants for executive positions and individuals who were recommended by a government official. Show your genuine appreciation for their interest in your organization, regardless of how you feel.

You must be careful not to betray your true feelings, especially in the case of applicants recommended by politicians. Much depends on the specific circumstances. Sometimes, it's better not to write a rejection letter at all if you run the risk of bruising someone's ego.

You'll be able to identify the ego cases by the time you're done with the interview process.

BASIC RULES
To further demonstrate your professionalism, write the best rejection letter appropriate for certain individuals. There's no such thing as "one-size fits all" template that accommodates all personalities. In general, follow basic rules in communication:

One, thank the applicant for their interest in your organization. The candidate has taken the trouble to update their CV, contacting you, wearing their best clothes and showing up for the interview. These are valuable to applicants. What's the best way to convey your appreciation? Try something like this:

"We enjoyed our time with you when we met on (interview date) and carefully considered all your answers to our competency-based questions for (the position being advertised...)"

Two, explain the objectiveness of the hiring process. Be diplomatic in saying that the best candidate with strong credentials won out, in the judg-

ment of a management panel. Use "we" and "our" to indicate that a collective decision was made. You can reinforce this impression by saying something like: "Our chosen candidate has clearly shown us how he plans to quickly turn things around and sustain these initiatives over the long term."

Last, end with a positive impression. Write something that could give the rejected applicant the equivalent of a firm handshake and a warm smile. This could mean a lot to a rejected applicant. Your cordiality will be remembered by the recipient, who may come off with the impression that the decision was a close one.

Try a parting statement along these lines: "We really appreciated the opportunity of meeting you in the course of the hiring process. We wish you the best of luck!"

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US April trade deficit widens to six-month high

WASHINGTON — The US trade deficit widened by the most in eight years in April as imports of goods rebounded while exports of energy products declined, a trend that if sustained, could result in trade being a drag on economic growth in the second quarter.

The increase reported by the Commerce Department on Wednesday was the biggest since April 2015 and pushed the trade gap to the highest level in six months. It led economists to expect that trade could chop off as much as 2.5 percentage points from gross domestic product (GDP) this quarter, unless imports reversed course, a tall order given the persistent strength in domestic demand. A strong dollar and slowing global demand could curb exports.

"The terms of trade are worsening and this will bring down second-quarter estimates of real GDP growth closer to the 1% stall speed where bad things can happen and the economy can stumble and go over the cliff," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York.

The trade deficit jumped 23.0% to \$74.6 billion. Data for March was revised to show the trade gap narrowing to \$60.6 billion instead of the previously reported \$64.2 billion. The government

revised the goods trade data from 2018 while the trade services figures were revised from 2017.

Those revisions showed the trade deficit was not as large as previously thought in the first quarter. As a result, economists expect the government to raise its GDP growth estimate for the January-March quarter to as high as a 2.3% annualized rate when it publishes its third estimate later this month.

The revisions to the trade data followed on the heels of last week's solid construction spending data. The government's second estimate of first-quarter GDP last month showed trade made no contribution to the economy's 1.3% growth rate after adding to GDP for three straight quarters.

Adjusted for inflation, the goods trade deficit shot up 16.5% to \$95.8 billion in April. Goldman Sachs lowered its second-quarter GDP growth tracking estimate by half a percentage point to a 1.7% rate.

EXPORTS PLUNGE
Goods imports rose 2.0% to \$263.2 billion in April, boosted by motor vehicles, parts and engines. There were also increases in imports of industrial supplies and materials, though petroleum

imports fell to the lowest level since August 2021.

Imports of consumer goods surged \$1.8 billion, driven by cellphones and other household goods. Food imports were the lowest since December 2021. Imports of services decreased \$0.4 billion to \$60.4 billion, weighed down by declines in transport and travel. Overall imports increased 1.5% to \$323.6 billion.

Exports of goods plunged 5.3%, the most in three years, to \$167.1 billion. That was the lowest level since February 2022.

Exports are being crimped by slowing global demand. Though the dollar gave up some gains early in the year in the wake of 500 basis points worth of interest rate increases from the Federal Reserve since March 2022, the greenback has regained ground in recent weeks against the currencies of the United States' main trade partners. That trend could make US-made goods less competitive on the global market in the months ahead.

"The recent strengthening in the trade-weighted US dollar since mid-April will put further downward pressure on exports and upward pressure on imports," said Matthew Martin, a US economist at Oxford Economics in New

York. "Fluctuations in the dollar effect the trade deficit with a lag."

Contentious West Coast port labor negotiations, which have caused temporary disruptions could impact trade data in the coming months. More than 22,000 dockworkers at ports stretching from California to Washington state have been working without a contract since last July.

April's drop in goods exports was led by a sharp decline in exports of industrial supplies and materials, mostly crude oil and fuel oil. Exports of industrial supplies and materials, which include petroleum, were the lowest since November 2021.

There was also a big decline in exports of consumer goods. Exports of services, however, increased \$0.2 billion to a record \$81.9 billion, lifted by travel and other business services. But exports of financial services and government goods and services fell.

Overall exports fell 3.6%, the largest drop in three years, to \$249.0 billion. That was the lowest level since March 2022. The services surplus was the highest since March 2021.

The nation's goods trade deficit with China widened to \$24.2 billion in April from \$22.6 billion in March. — *Reuters*

TikTok seeks up to \$20B in e-commerce business this year

BYTEDANCE-owned TikTok hopes to more than quadruple the size of its worldwide e-commerce operations to as much as \$20 billion in merchandise sales this year, relying on growth in Southeast Asia, Bloomberg News reported on Wednesday, citing people familiar with the matter.

The increase compares to last year's \$4.4 billion in gross merchandise value, representing the worth of total goods sold through its online marketplace TikTok Shop, the report said, adding that the company is betting on markets such as Indonesia. — *Reuters*

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Google, Meta use 'bullying tactics' against Canada news bill — PM Trudeau

OTTAWA — Alphabet's Google and Meta Platforms are using "bullying tactics" against a Canadian push aimed at ensuring financial support for news publishers, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

The proposed legislation is designed to compel internet giants like Google and Meta's Facebook to negotiate commercial deals and pay publishers for their content.

The US technology companies say proposals in the bill, dubbed the "Online News Act," are unsustainable for their businesses.

Google and Facebook have run tests this year to limit some users from viewing or sharing news content in Canada as a potential response if the legislation is passed into law in its current form.



breaking law passed in Australia in 2021.

Google says the rules in the bill are more stringent than those enacted in Australia and Europe, and has proposed amendments "to align with international norms" to address the company's concerns.

"We've come to the table with reasonable and pragmatic solutions that would make the bill work the way it's intended to and increase our investments in the Canadian news ecosystem," said Google Spokesperson Shay Purdy, reacting to Mr. Trudeau's remarks.

The bill "has some serious problems that make it unworkable for our products and services," Mr. Purdy added.

The legislation passed Canada's House of Commons in December and is in the un-

elected upper chamber of the parliament, which rarely blocks legislation cleared by the lower house.

Canada's media industry wants tighter regulation of tech companies to prevent them from elbowing news businesses out of the online advertising market.

"The various internet giants like Meta are posting every year record profits while at the same time local independent news is struggling across this country," Mr. Trudeau said. "We will continue to make sure that these incredibly profitable corporations contribute to strengthening our democracy."

Last week, Meta said the bill was fundamentally flawed. The company says news has no economic value for its platforms. — *Reuters*

"The fact that these internet giants would rather cut off Canadians' access to local news than pay their fair share is a real problem, and now they're resorting to bullying tactics to try and get their way — it's not going to work," Mr. Trudeau told reporters in Ottawa.

The bill, introduced in April 2022, is similar to a ground-