

## Competition for talent primary determinant of benefits offerings

EMPLOYERS in the Philippines view the competition for talent as the main factor in determining the benefits offered to employees, advisory group Willis Towers Watson (WTW) said.

In its 2023 Global Benefits Trends survey, WTW said 80% of the 5,233 employers interviewed in the Philippines view competition for talent as the main consideration when budgeting for benefits programs.

“While employers desire to improve benefits, there is increasing pressure to manage costs and optimize the value of benefit programs,” it said.

“Companies that can differentiate themselves and implement holistic benefits programs will stand to gain a strong advantage against their competitors.”

WTW said employers weighed the rising cost of hiring and seeking out suitable talent against their capacity to meet the needs of employees without comprising business goals.

Some 64% of employers cited the persistence of inflation as a variable to look out for in budgeting for benefits programs.

August headline inflation unexpectedly accelerated, the first rise in seven months, to 5.3% from 4.7% a month earlier.

Employers also see health benefits; mental health support; career training and development; and risk and insurance benefits as the most important offerings to include in their packages for employees, WTW said.

“The key now will be to develop a truly equitable approach that not only tailors to the individual needs of the workforce,” Maria Nellisa Abrera-Badal, director of health & benefits at WTW Philippines, said.

“This approach should also ensure that the value of their investments is optimized to become more cost-effective.”

— **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

# Overseas teacher training urged to address skills gap in STEM

By **John Victor D. Ordoñez**  
Reporter

THE GOVERNMENT needs to sponsor overseas training programs for teachers to bridge the proficiency and learning gap in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, a legislator said.

“I think times are changing and we have to (be familiar with upcoming) technology; we have to learn with that so we can have a better future,” Isabela Rep. Faustino Michael Carlos T. Dy III told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a youth upskilling summit organized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Philippine Business for Education (PBED).

“We have to reevaluate our teachers’ educational programs;

maybe we need more seminars abroad for them to learn new concepts,” he added.

In a July report, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said the Philippines should use education technology to bridge the skills gap or risk job losses due to rapid technological advancement.

During Wednesday’s summit held at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza in Pasay City, USAID Office of Education Director Thomas Leblanc urged private sector representatives and officials from the Departments of Labor and Employment (DoLE) and Trade and Industry (DTI) to implement more upskilling programs for out-of-school youth.

The USAID’s Opportunity 2.0 program, which was started in 2020, helped over 37,000 youth land jobs through financial literacy and skills training programs, it said in a statement on Wednesday.

Rosanna A. Urdaneta, deputy director general for policy and planning of the Technical Skills and Development Authority (TESDA), said TESDA and DoLE will work with USAID in developing entrepreneurial workshops and agricultural training and livelihood programs for out-of-school youth.

“We are hoping for a continued harmonious collaboration with the private sector to be able to elevate the quality of education and contribute to the development of globally competitive Filipinos,” she said.

Meanwhile, USAID on Thursday signed an agreement on enhancing policy research and capacity building in the education sector with the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), which is composed of Philippine congressmen and senators.

Students in the Philippines and Indonesia are more than

a year behind in their learning because of the coronavirus pandemic, McKinsey & Co. said in a report published in April 2022.

The ADB estimates that 21% of children from middle-income countries who are of school age by 2030 will not learn basic primary-level skills.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Director-General Gilbert F. Houngbo has urged the government and employers to boost investment in education and to equip teachers with modern skills to address youth unemployment.

Under the proposed 2024 national budget, education will get P924.7 billion, 3.3% higher than this year.

“Education is about continuous learning and teachers need to adapt to effectively transfer knowledge to our kids,” Mr. Dy said.

OPINION

## How HR managers should solve problems

**I pity our department’s human resources (HR) manager. He’s perceived to be incompetent; many employees see him as a mere office clerk who can’t make decisions on almost anything. I’m sure there’s a way to handle this situation that would not diminish his person. Can you help him? — Rainbow Connection.**

You don’t have to zero in on your HR manager. He’s not the only person who may be suffering from this issue. I’m sure there are many managers who fit the description of “mere” office clerks who don’t have the capacity to make decisions on their own. You can probably find it elsewhere in your organization, hiding in plain sight.

This happens all the time because of bad systems and procedures. A good example is the leave application policy. How many signatories do you need to approve an employee vacation leave, say for one day? How about three or five days? In many companies, all applications for leave, regardless of the number of days, must be approved by several signatories.

The approval process starts from the line leader, supervisor, manager, even up to the department head. Even for a one-day leave, the application form itself tells you that multiple signatures are required. No ifs, no buts. That’s the policy. And yet, they’re the same organizations that promote “empowerment” in their corporate values, vision and mission statements, if not in their public statements.

What are we missing? Simply, they don’t walk their talk. Or worse, they don’t know what they’re doing. At times, when confronted with this issue, they would tell you that consensual decision-making is one of their core values. Is it? If so, the context is wrong. We use consensual decision-making when we’re talking of a complex problem like terminating an employee, among others.

LEAN HR

If you trust your team leaders, supervisors and managers, then show the way. Empower them. Observe a one-on-one supervision policy. Let them decide on the leave applications of their own employees without the concurrence of other supervisors and managers. The immediate boss knows best. No other signatories should be made to provide approval under normal circumstances.

That way, the immediate boss can exercise his thinking faculties instead of relying on other managers to do the thinking for him. Make one-person approval the standard policy, regardless of the number of days being requested. Just the same, allow senior officials to intervene if the number of days being requested is out of the ordinary, like when an employee is planning to take the bar exam and needs three months of leave, even without pay.

Peter Drucker was right: “So much of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to work.” You need to step back to consider what’s

value-adding to company operations rather than send an indirect message that the team leaders and line supervisors are not trustworthy.

This issue came to me again whenever I think of how Lean HR can help us. One-person approval means everything will be faster. No more delays. It’s either a yes or no for the immediate boss. If no approval is given, then the employee can lodge an appeal to higher-ups.

Lean HR is the application of kaizen and lean thinking to HR processes. It is focused on identifying what is useful and what is non-value adding in a work process. Eliminating the useless baggage to make the system dynamic and robust. The idea is to create efficient flows for the employee, customer or other stakeholders. To simplify the problem-solving process, your HR manager and other managers should

ask the following questions, using the acronym THINK as a memory jogger:

**One, is it true?** Is the employee idea, request or suggestion logical and valid? Is it being supported by reliable documents to prove its worth? If there are no available documents to support them, what steps would you undertake? What would happen if management rejects the proposal?

**Two, is it helpful?** Would the request, if approved, make everyone’s work easier? Is it beneficial only to the employee or other employees similarly situated? How can it be beneficial to all and be in the best interests of the organization?

**Three, is it inspiring?** Can it motivate other workers and their managers to improve their work standards or exceed management expectations? If so, can we share the best practices to others? If not, why not?

**Four, is it necessary?** Is it imperative for all stakeholders to follow for the betterment of the organization? Is it the best approach to display one’s capacity as an efficient problem-solver and decision-maker? In what other circumstances can this idea or suggestion be applied?

**Five, is it kind?** Does it give reasonable credit to the right people? Does it give due respect to the people who were instrumental in making that policy possible? What’s the fastest way to make an intelligent decision? What kind of problem are you best at solving?

The acronym THINK is not my original idea. It has been around for some time now; we just can’t identify the person who coined it in the first place. Whoever may have come up with it, it’s my brief and simple prescription for what you should do under the circumstances. If you want more specifics, I can tell you more about it in the next article.

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## Talent shortage seen making companies more open to hiring former employees

GLOBAL recruitment consultancy firm Robert Walters said the talent shortage can be mitigated by maintaining positive relations with ex-employees.

According to a Robert Walters survey, 90% of managers in the Philippines have expressed a willingness to re-hire ex-employees.

“In the light of the growing talent shortage, nurturing positive relationships with ex-employees is advisable,” said Alejandro Perez-Higuero, director at Robert Walters Philippines.

Mr. Perez-Higuero said that such workers possess advantages like familiarity with the company and culture, which will minimize adaptation time and training costs.

“Re-hires quickly contribute and can even play a role in succession planning. But as you explore the possibility of re-hiring, it is crucial to assess the reasons for their departure and growth during their absence, ensuring a mutually beneficial arrangement for both parties,” he added.

The survey also found that 78% of professionals are open to returning to their previous employer, while 88% said they remained in some form of contact with their previous manager.

Around 47% of workers surveyed said that they left to seek better pay, while 42% left to improve their career progression.

“While the global recruitment market has slowed slightly in 2023, candidate shortages continue — and so the fact there is a pool of talent open to re-joining business should excite leaders,” Toby Fowlston, chief executive officer of Robert Walters, said.

“In light of this research, companies who are looking to hire can consider re-engaging with alumni... ‘boomerang employees’ could well be a solution to skills shortages,” he said.

However, Mr. Fowlston said employers should manage the return of boomerang employees especially if they are returning to a more senior position. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

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