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Please send articles to the Issue Editor.

Editorial address

The UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations

Bonifacio Hall, Emilio Jacinto St.

University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City 1101

Tel/Fax +63-2-89207717

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Please contact the Circulation Manager at solair@up.edu.ph

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Contents

Preface	v
The Adverse Economic and Labor Market Shock of Protracted COVID-19 Community Quarantine Measures in the Philippines <i>Emily Christi A. Cabegin</i>	1
From Office Desks to Home Set-ups: Filipino Workers' Transition during COVID-19 <i>Virgel C. Bingham, Rosalio A. Aragon, Jr. and Jose Maria G. Bingham</i>	31
Work Arrangements, Work-related Stress, and Worker Mental Health of Public Sector Employees in the Time of COVID-19 <i>Endee Kristel A. Lim</i>	58
Frontline Workers in UP Pampanga during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Transition to the Blended Learning Modality <i>Patrick C. De Leon</i>	99
Viewpoint Human Resources as the Greatest Assets in Work Organizations <i>Maria Catalina M. Tolentino</i>	113
Retrospect 10th Asia ILERA Regional Congress: A Historic Virtual Gathering <i>Maragtas S.V. Amante</i>	118

Preface

The year 2021 was the height of the pandemic that brought about sudden shifts in many countries – they closed their borders, imposed strict lockdowns, tested and isolated infected persons, and imposed heavy penalties on health protocol violators. The Philippines was worst hit by the pandemic, as it was late in announcing lockdowns, in formulating mechanisms for contact tracing, and lacked coordination among government agencies. The military approach of the national government, with the Inter Agency Task Force (IATF) composed of several military officers, received strong public criticisms. The pandemic weakened countries' economies in varying degrees, as indicated in increased unemployment rate, inflation rate, and decline in GDP. It had a quick, direct impact on economies resulting from lockdowns that forced many establishments to close, lay off workers, or reduce work hours. This issue of the Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations (PJIIR) was started in the midst of the health and economic crisis that caused sudden changes at work such as work from home (WFH) arrangements, online dispensation of tasks, reduced mobility in the usual performance of duties, challenges in sustaining daily communication due to weak IT infrastructures. Nonetheless, the editorial team was able to compile academic papers that document and analyze the impact of the pandemic in the country and other critical issues.

Emily Christi A. Cabegin in her paper *The Adverse Economic and Labor Market Shock of Protracted COVID-19 Community Quarantine Measures in the Philippines* examines the negative shock of stringent long-running stay-at-home measures to suppress the COVID-19 contagion on the Philippine economy and the labor market in 2020. The protracted economic lockdowns plunged the Philippine economy into its deepest recession in the postwar period. The supply shock created from mandated business closures and travel restrictions engendered a demand shock when the extended lockdowns triggered a massive loss of jobs, work hours and incomes, and reduced labor quality and aggregate labor productivity. The drop in GDP in 2020 was largely explained by the plunges in both investment and household

consumption spending. The pandemic-induced economic recession exacerbated the already elevated levels of youth unemployment and adult underemployment. The paper cautions the government against imposing prolonged intense lockdowns across the nation or major island groups without due consideration of their longterm effects on the economy and human capital.

The paper entitled *From Office Desks to Home Set-ups: Filipino Workers' Transition during COVID-19* by **Virgel C. Bingham, Rosalio A. Aragon, Jr. Jose Maria G. Bingham** looks into the situation of teleworkers in the Philippines in light of the following variables: WFH frequency, physical work area, social context, and amenability to WFH. A piloted, self-constructed questionnaire was used to poll 363 WFH respondents situated in Metro Manila. Teleworkers have sophisticated technology and use tools like Email, Zoom, Viber, and Messenger to communicate. The most popular WFH schedules are five times a week, daily, and twice a week. Because many people live in tiny dwellings, the most frequent WFH set-up is in the bedroom rather than the living room. Teleworkers are generally open to WFH, especially those without children or elderly relatives. This research advises governments and companies to examine their WFH arrangements.

Endee Kristel A. Lim's study *Work Arrangement, Work-related Stress, and Worker Mental Health of Public Sector Employees* in the time of COVID-19 contributes to the pool of literature looking into the stress and mental health of civil service workers by considering the impact of shifts in work arrangement as well as the overall effect of the health crisis. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, results show that work-related stress and worker mental health do not significantly vary in terms of work arrangement. Analysis of responses from the Focus Group Discussion, however, suggest differences in the kind of stress experienced by each group. Meanwhile, the impact of CoVID-19 was consistently significant across all demographic categories such as sex, age group, marital status, job role, designation, and length of service, and on both work arrangement types. This paper recommends policy and program reforms at the national and organizational level, which

include developing financial and health assistance programs and implementing compassionate work-related policies.

Patrick C. De Leon's study *Frontline Workers in UP Pampanga during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Transition to the Blended Learning Modality* discusses how UP Pampanga's frontline workers dealt with the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to a blended learning modality by exercising moderate discretion in the execution of their tasks and in rationing services. They possess the characteristics and work conditions or problems of street-level bureaucrats, particularly resource scarcity, and the relatively little guidance they receive from state university officials. The study recommends: (1) observing fairness in dealing with all the staff regardless of employment status and place of residence; (2) allowing the staff to have flexibility in operations such as taking exceptions to impractical and costly rules; (3) reskilling and upskilling of staff that go beyond trainings on data privacy, gender sensitivity, health and safety protocols, mental health, and those sponsored by their Human Resource Development Office; (4) allowing the staff to exercise discretion and autonomy in the execution of their tasks; and (5) triangulating the procedures and results of this study in future studies that take into account the perspectives of other stakeholders.

An opinion piece by **Maria Catalina M. Tolentino** entitled *Viewpoint: Human Resources as the Greatest Assets in Work Organizations* speaks about the theories that explain how people find employment, how people may be retained and developed by the organizations. The author advises that a workplace must be an environment not only of structures but of capabilities to execute new strategies appropriate for utmost human resource development. Old perceptions and misperceptions about work and outdated practices must be rectified.

Finally, **Maragtas S.V. Amante** provides a retrospect about the *10th Asia International Labor and Employment Relations Association (ILERA) Virtual Congress*. The congress assembled a panel of esteemed scholars that shed light on the new possibilities in the world of work. Labor and employment relations in the future should ensure the dignity of