The 21st Century Employer: Digital, Agile, and Resilient

Concept Note

Like the tech gurus predicted, the world suddenly became digital, virtual, and connected online.

We are now witnessing a fundamental transformation in the way work is done. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic forced businesses to adapt and adjust policies, practices, and plans. The workplace has suddenly transformed in pace and ways that people have not been accustomed to. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIRe) accelerated and forced businesses to adapt to technological changes and grab such opportunities as remote working, remote learning, e-commerce, and cross-border collaboration.

We now live in the new economy – powered by technology, fueled by information, and driven by knowledge. To survive and succeed in business and careers, people must quickly learn to adapt to peculiarities brought about by five megatrends in the future of work: (a) path of economic globalization, (b) shifting demographic patterns, (c) pace of technological advancements, (d) shortage of skills, and even the (e) changing climate conditions. Before we could adjust to these five megatrends, a sixth emerged – infectious diseases and health emergencies.

True to its advocacy of creating an inclusive work environment, the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) seeks to leverage the opportunities presented by these megatrends via its annual conference of employers. ECOP aims to help prepare and equip businesses with creative approaches to respond to challenges of the future of business and work. By helping to bridge the gaps, ECOP can encourage a new generation of employers to contribute to the economy.

In the past conferences, ECOP focused on the future of work (which is now becoming the new normal) and future-proofing business and industry, in order to survive and thrive in a volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and disruptive (VUCAD) business and policy environment. ECOP developed prescriptions for employers to adjust their workplace, workforce, and the way they work in order to maintain growth, viability, and sustainability.

For its 41st National Conference of Employers (NCE 41), the first virtual national conference, ECOP focuses on an important change driver, the Employer. With the theme, **"The 21st Century Employer: Digital, Agile, and Resilient"**, the conference shall provide an understanding of the key forces shaping the new economy, showcasing successful decision-makers in large and small businesses and their strategies to adapt to the changing world of work and business.

Also, for the first time in ECOP history, aside from the virtual mode of delivery, the NCE will also deliver pre- and post-Conference webinar sessions that will revolve around the central topics of

digital transformation, agility, and resilience. These pre- and post-sessions are designed to complement the Conference-proper topics.

The Digital Employer

The accelerated digitization and digitalization of many aspects of human life, together with the onset and acceleration of the FIRe, made it necessary for businesses to undergo digital migration of business operations. Digital transformation also enables new business models such as online selling, which led to new products, service offerings, and virtual customer experience. Digital transformation puts pressure on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to revisit their current strategy and explore new business opportunities, as life cycles of products, services, and business models continue to shorten. The impact of digital transformation varies but usually leads to increased revenues, decreased operating costs, improved customer satisfaction, optimized operations, and enhanced employee engagement. Creative digital solutions give businesses a competitive edge. Those who embrace technological advancements will thrive; those who don't will fall in the digital revolution.

In the new normal, digital transformation ceases to be an option – it is an imperative for business survival and success. The 21st century employer must be, first and foremost, digital. Customer behavior honed by the current pandemic now expect entrepreneurs to integrate e-commerce into their business model, engage in digital marketing, utilize social media platforms, and use creative digital solutions to reinvent customer experience.

In the pre-Conference session entitled **"Digital Employer: 5 W's and 1 H"**, our speakers will provide the context and lay down the conditions by which a digital employer must exist and thrive, especially in crisis situations such as today. They will also attempt to clarify the differences among the terms digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation.

In the Conference-proper session entitled **"Migrating from Brick and Mortar to Digital Operating Modes"**, successful entrepreneurs from small and large companies alike will discuss strategies to leverage digital tools and innovations in building new systems from the ground up and improving current digital tools.

In the post-Conference session entitled **"Digitizing the Employer, Employee, and Customer Experiences"**, speakers will tackle the digital economy and how employers, employees, and customers maximize the opportunities it presents. They will also talk about the shift to a cashless society, its benefits, as well as the challenges we confront in terms of readiness, availability, and accessibility.

The Agile Employer

In the old economy, the big swallowed the small. In the new economy, the fast will eat the slow. Over the past decades, globalization became a powerful change driver, particularly through the influence of cross-border cooperation and international competition. Rapid advances in information and communication technology further

fanned globalization, as technology made data sharing and connectivity easier. These developments made enterprises more decentralized in structure and more agile as decisions are devolved to the units or persons closest to the customer. The coronavirus pandemic even made the equation more complex and forced businesses to rethink traditional ways of doing business in order to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. Employers must embrace technology and digital solutions to support flexible work arrangements and provide digital channels to customers, vendors, and employees. In addition, the crisis posed not only health risks to millions of people across countries, but also made imperative creative solutions in addressing needs for lifelong learning, TVET, apprenticeships, and skills development. To be agile in the new normal, employers must effectively match workers' skills to new roles, which will replace task-specific jobs.

In the pre-Conference session entitled **"Strategy, Structure, and Skills Set of an Agile Employer"**, speakers will talk about the right mix in transforming and developing an agile organization and how this mix should be embedded in the company culture. These three requirements should be able to prepare any organization in dealing with the rapid changes of the world work and continuously be at a competitive advantage.

In the Conference-proper session entitled "**Enhancing Entrepreneurship and Skills Development amidst New Work Realities**", speakers will discuss how employers can reskill and upskill their workforce in order to deliver unmatched customer experience in the most agile manner. Employers will be more agile if they have viable labor market information, can anticipate changes in the way business is conducted globally, and quickly leverage the impact of technological advances. To help ensure agility, enterprise-based education and training to address gaps in emerging hard and soft skills will be the most viable training strategy.

In the post-Conference session entitled **"Becoming Agile in the Global Market: Cross-border Coopetition"**, resource persons will dwell on the global mindset and how a global employer needs to be agile in order to take advantage of cross-border cooperation and competition and use this for business gains. This is also important in becoming a globally competitive organization.

The Resilient Employer

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how businesses can be effective catalysts for social and economic progress as they have the capital, platform, technology, and human resources needed to deliver scalable innovative and sustainable solutions. As the world continues to suffer social and economic disruptions during the pandemic, the private sector took the initiative to keep businesses afloat and save millions of jobs, while simultaneously helping the community in the fight against the pandemic. Despite the private sector's efforts to keep the economy afloat, close to three million jobs were lost in three months from the onset of the pandemic, increasing the unemployed Filipinos by seven million as of April 2020. While the business sentiment is gloomy until a vaccine or cure is developed for the pandemic, employers continue to find ways to bounce back.

Resilient organizations have a few things in common. Early on, they anticipate changes that will impact their business, accept the new work realities and adjust their operating modes accordingly, develop new ways of doing things, empower their workforce by developing new skills required by the market – including initiative, adaptability, sense of ownership, and shared responsibility, and instilling a 'never-say-die' culture.

Resiliency in the face of the current crisis requires a deliberate effort to shift towards an inclusive and sustainable approach in doing business. According to the Business+ publication of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), there is a low level of awareness of the term "inclusive business" and what it means, as well as how the Inclusive Business model is applied to different business sectors and industries.

In the pre-Conference session entitled **"Resilient Employer: Never-say-Die Culture and Business Continuity"**, our speakers will talk about how the world-famous Filipino resilience is applied in business. They will also discuss what makes for resiliency in a business organization to ensure continuity. Creating a culture of resiliency and the never-say-die attitude will also play a crucial role in becoming an adaptable and flexible employer who can withstand any crisis in the future.

The third session of the Conference-proper, entitled **"Crisis-proofing the Future of Business and Work",** will feature business leaders who shall showcase best practices and private sector initiatives to ensure business resiliency and continuity, and how to contribute to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially in a post-lockdown and post-pandemic business environment.

In the post-Conference session entitled **"Bouncing Forward: New Covenants for Shared Responsibility"**, speakers will tackle the right formula for one to be able to bounce back, sustain operations, and recover from any crisis that hit the business and economy. They will also highlight the importance of a renewed covenant and commitment between management and workers towards achieving a common goal.

Policy Reforms to Restart the Economy

After discussing the megatrends that impact the future of work and the paragon of a 21st century employer, the Conference will localize the discussion and develop policy directions and reforms that can help the government implement strategies to restart the Philippine economy. To enhance employers' collective digitalization, agility, and resiliency, a national action on 1) improving Internet connectivity and massive digitization will be needed; 2) developing a globally competitive Filipino workforce that is trained to react quickly to changing market conditions; and 3) a stimulus package, including investor-friendly fiscal, economic, monetary, and labor policy reforms, that can enhance business viability, resiliency, and sustainability. This national action shall be in the context of preserving jobs and restarting the Philippine economy during and post-COVID-19.

In the pre-Conference session entitled **"Benchmarking Lessons Across Countries"**, resource persons from around the globe will share their experience, practices, and lessons learned on how they were able to re-open the economy and re-enter the

workplace after the lockdowns and what interventions were in place to facilitate the smooth transition into the new normal.

The last Conference-proper session on **"Reigniting the Philippine Economy through Policy Reforms"** shall dwell on finding creative solutions to facilitate the shift to a more digitized and digitalized economy. The purpose of the session is to delve on instituting policy reforms at the governmental level to further intensify Philippine economic recovery. The discussion will focus on finding creative solutions to facilitate the shift to a more digitized and digitalized economy. A sharing of varied perspectives among experienced individuals will enrich existing approaches and provide a clearer picture of which gaps and lapses in the path of recovery could be addressed and augmented through actionable policy reforms and recommendations.

In the post-Conference session entitled **"Transitioning to New and Flexible Ways of Doing Business and Work"**, the tripartite partners from across the globe will weigh in on how organizations may be able to adapt, survive, and thrive in the new economy. They will also discuss policy recommendations and the role that the private sector must play in order to usher a smooth transition.

Through this Conference, ECOP aims to develop concrete recommendations and commitment on how to initiate the workplace transformation in response to the 21st century megatrends now unfolding. The change drivers force business leaders to redefine the 21st century employer as *digital, agile, and resilient*. The Conference recommendations will also help legislators, regulators, and policy-makers in aligning their efforts with business realities, as businessmen and employers continue to develop creative solutions in 1) meeting the minimum requirements of the law, 2) coping with the emerging trends and demands of the changing global environment, 3) bouncing back from business downturns, and 4) crisis-proofing the workplace.