

## MEANINGFUL WORK FOR FILIPINOS

This study aims to make a theoretical contribution toward a Filipino view of meaningful work that could guide both researchers and practitioners in business ethics. Several studies indicate that meaningful work has positive effects to both employee and organizational outcomes. It relates to employees' wellbeing, mental health, and job satisfaction (Tommasi, et al. 2020; Bailey & Madden 2016; Veltman 2016; Steger, et al. 2012). On the part of the organization, meaningful work promotes organizational citizenship and commitment, work engagement, increased productivity, increased level of motivation and performance, employee retention, and reduction of employee cynicism (Yeoman, et al. 2019; Michaelson, et al. 2014; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009). However, according to Bailey and Madden, meaningful work is a complex and profound concept, "going far beyond the superficialities of satisfaction or engagement." (Bailey & Madden 2016, p. 6) Managing meaningful work implies "a great ethical responsibility" on the part of the management, for it is "an experience that reaches beyond the workplace and into the realms of the individual's wider personal life" (p. 14). Because meaningful work is about finding fulfillment in one's work, it is a normative and an ethical concept.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that meaningful work depends on some objective characteristics of work itself independent of workers' subjective experience is based on erroneous assumptions (Vu & Burton 2021; Tommasi, et al. 2020; Yeoman, et al. 2019; Veltman 2016). "Even the business ethicists discussing the objective conditions for meaningful work tend to see that the employer's moral responsibility to provide certain objective conditions is based on the fact that providing these conditions makes it possible for the individual to experience subjective meaningfulness at work." (Martela & Pessi, 2018) A number of paradigms have been proposed to understand the sources of meaningful work, but a non-Western approach has attracted little attention. This is lamentable. Since the publication of Hofstede's work on national cultures (1967-1973), elements associated with the dominant culture of a country have been studied to discover their influence and relevance to business management and human resource practices. Congruence between organizational practices and national culture is necessary (Reiche 2018). This implies that knowledge of local culture and ethical system is essential for international managers (Vu & Burton 2021; Ilagan, et al. 2014; Selmer & Corrina 2011). Likewise, the interconnection between culture, ethical beliefs, general ways of thinking, deeply ingrained values and prejudices, and emotional expressions have been articulated in various studies. In developing a model of meaningful work for Filipinos, it is necessary to look into the mix of philosophical, cultural, historical, social, and professional elements that shape the Filipino *weltanschauung*. Further, the continued globalization of organizations and diversity in the workplace require better understanding of non-Western cultures and cross-cultural approaches to management and business ethics practices. "Intercultural competence is indispensable to internationalization of organizations." (Francisco 2006) According

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<sup>1</sup> Meaningful work is distinct from the *meaning of work*, "meaning of work is descriptive, it tells us about the specific meaning framework one attaches to work, while meaningfulness is evaluative, it is an evaluation of one's work based on how well it fulfills certain values or characteristics." (Martela & Pessi, 2018)

to a study of Sanchez-Runde et al. (2013), an in-depth understanding of ethical conflicts in the global business is hampered by overreliance on Western paradigms.

Because some authors have argued that meaningful work has positive valence that has *eudaimonic* rather than hedonic content, a virtue-ethics approach to meaningful work has been used (Tablan 2019; Veltman 2016; Beadle & Knight 2012). Virtues are enduring character traits or dispositions to act that are essential in order to live a good life. For Aristotle, our actions when habitually performed have a major influence in the kind of persons we become and in our overall well-being. The lack of virtues is a sign of deficiency in character. Virtue ethicists emphasize that our work has a profound influence in shaping our character and living a fulfilled life.

This essay develops a paradigm of meaningful work from a virtue-ethics framework that is meaningful and relevant to Filipino realities, their distinct national heritage, and their common vision of a fuller and satisfying life that Filipino and international managers who have little familiarity with Philippine culture and philosophy can consider as one of the models in measuring and promoting meaningful work among Filipino workers. In developing a Filipino virtue ethics, I draw from scholarly articles on Filipino philosophy, literature, psychology, sociology, management, organizational studies, and history that use both empirical and qualitative methodologies including statistics, interviews, historical survey, literary criticism as well as theological, phenomenological, and linguistic analyses. While most research in management in the Philippines reflects Western models, they also show nuances of national culture (Ilac & Salvosa 2017; Blando 2017; Alfariz, et al. 2014). Philippines is the 39th largest economy in the world. Prior to the global pandemic, Tholons ranked Philippines among the top outsourcing destinations in the world in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Because of \$6.9 billion direct investment of United States (2019), almost all major American MNC's have factories and offices in the country. All of this is due to Filipinos' high proficiency in English, service orientation, and strong work ethic. On the other hand, some of the challenges for foreigners who are doing business in the Philippines are related to cross-cultural conflicts and miscommunication (Munoz & Welsh 2006). In addition, there are more than 2.2 million Filipinos in many parts of the world who work in various fields – from education, health/medicine, information technology, domestic care giving, service industry, and entertainment.<sup>3</sup> Filipinos are one of the largest communities of immigrants in Europe and North America.

This study analyzes the most common character traits that are indigenous to Filipinos and are exhibited in their day-to-day activities and interactions. They are also observed among first generation Filipino immigrants and even among US-born Filipino Americans (Mina 2015; Aguila 2015; Sanchez & Gaw 2007). These virtues are *Pakikisama* (go along with), *Bayanihan* (cooperation), *Pakikiramdam* (sensitivity), *Malasakit* (caring), *Hiya* (shame), *Utang na Loob*

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<sup>2</sup> See *Tholons Releases 2019 Services Globalization*

<https://cdn.newswire.com/files/x/1c/4e/a6848f69d35452c9cbc4162ed7d5.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos#text>. This is not simply due to the lack of employment in the Philippines as there are many other developing countries that can provide the needed workers to economically developed nations. Character traits and interpersonal skills are the reasons why Filipinos are hired as social support workers in many countries (Saito, et al. 2010).

(gratitude), and Family Orientation.<sup>4</sup> I make no claim that all Filipinos carry these virtues. In fact, due to Western influence and materialistic management, these virtues are diminishing in the workplace. However, “It is very unlikely,” According to Lanaria (2013, p. 243) “that indigenous values which have withstood the vagaries and contingencies of history for centuries are about to be phased out in contemporary times by the forces of modernization and globalization.” By focusing on Filipino virtues, I do not imply that Western virtues such as justice, courage, or prudence are unknown in the Philippines, this is obviously false. But the practice of standard Western virtues in the Philippines is also influenced by Filipino virtues. Filipino worldview is described as collectivist that emphasizes interdependent self-construal. Courage for many Filipinos is less of a virtue if the goal is simply to further one’s own benefits at the expense of others. Referring to justice, Sison and Palma-Reyes (1997, p. 1520) write, “The appeal to justice seems to be restricted either to legislation or to the courts, which is the arena different from that of business.” Instead, Filipinos tend to be non-confrontational and prefer to “have recourse to arbitration procedures brokered by neutral third parties, such as elders.”

## A FILIPINO VIRTUE ETHICS

Early scholars in Philippine studies, most of them are foreigners who are not familiar with virtue ethics as an interpretative option (Reyes 2015a, p. 150) regard Filipino virtues as *values*. They did not have at their disposal the more recent scholarship that uses Aristotle’s virtue ethics framework in interpreting non-Western ethical systems such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and African Philosophy (Tablan 2019; Van Kemenade & Al-Salmani 2019; Gier 2009). Nonetheless, many of them agree that these so-called Filipino values connote behavioral patterns and are sometimes designated as *traits*. While they are rooted in Filipino culture, they are not just cultural preferences but standards of goodness and a measure of one’s character. But to consider them as *values* is a philosophical mistake (Reyes 2015b). Values are general beliefs that incline us to choose one way or another and normally pertain to broad goals like happiness, freedom, health, etc. “The problem with ‘values’ is that the concept is too broad, and is often simply conflated with the notion of something ‘good’ or ‘important’. It also carries with it a very subjective understanding of what constitutes a ‘good’.” (Reyes 2015a, p. 150) To identify something as a value does not explain what it is, but how we feel about it (Reyes 2015a). The subsequent value-approach taken by Filipino scholars in developing a Filipino philosophy makes them vulnerable from attacks of foreign critics for trying to extract philosophy from culture. Such approach may also lead to a purely descriptive ethical methodology and consequently, to a relativist ethics.

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<sup>4</sup> Filipino writers struggle to find the equivalent English concepts for these terms. Many of these terms “were present in the Tagalog language before the Spanish arrived and were words used in a tribal and animist context.” (Reyes 2016, p. 51) Following Philippine scholars, I use terms that are derived from Tagalog – the basis of the Filipino national language. Among many linguistic subgroups in the Philippines, Tagalog is the dominant economically, politically, and culturally. Different ethnic groups in the country have their own indigenous rendering of these concepts. Language itself is a carrier of meanings and that the literal translation does not fully capture the nuances of the Filipino terms. They lose their actual cultural and behavioral meanings when translated (Rungduin, et al. 2016; Rungduin 2014). Thus, I will consistently use Tagalog words after giving a rough literal translation in English the first time they appear in this essay.

Lacking a philosophical framework, early Filipinologists struggle on how to understand and categorize these values and to determine which ones are objectively good. The general consensus is that they are bi-polar or ambivalent (Dy 1994) and thus, not authentically ethical. A few even go so far as to argue that many modern-day problems of Filipinos are due to the predominance of these “values”, leading them to conclude that Philippines has a *damaged culture*.

Reyes argues that the more proper way of interpreting Filipino ethics is through the lens of virtue ethics.<sup>5</sup> This avoids the pitfalls of ethical relativism. Virtues are both descriptive and normative. They are not only descriptions of actual Filipino behaviors, they also establish standards of actions “learned in childhood, reinforced or modified in puberty and adolescence, and put to actual practice in adult life; they constitute the fundamental educational mechanisms that mold an individual into an acceptable member of ... society.” (Jocano 1997, p. 115) The lack of these virtues is a sign of having a bad character, lacking in refinement (rudeness) or education, and poor breeding, that can result in one being looked down, censured, or excluded from a group. Like Aristotelian virtues, Filipino virtues define appropriate behaviors, specifically in social relations, and determine the kind of person one is. They are applied to both actions and persons.<sup>6</sup> As these standards are internalized, they become constant guidelines where one bases her judgments when met with moral problems and dilemmas, especially during those moments that require on-the-spot decisions. As Aristotle notes, virtues are our second nature. “Among Filipinos, these are a matter of fact, taken for granted, because they are what they are born into and grow up with. It is only when these behaviors come in conflict with Western ways that the Filipino gives them a second thought.” (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino 2000, p. 57)

However, there are fundamental differences between Aristotelian and Filipino virtues. Aristotle’s argument is predicated on the claim that we have a final end (*telos*) and virtues enable us to achieve it. If the human *telos* for Aristotle is *eudaimonia* (flourishing), in the Filipino context, this flourishing cannot be understood in an individual sense, but flourishing with and for *Kapwa* (others/fellow humans). Filipino virtues promote, not necessarily excellences in human function or *arete* (this may be secondary) but excellences in human relations. The aim is to establish harmonious and reciprocal flow of social interaction and strong connection where all parties experience endearing and enduring relationships. Unlike Aristotelian virtues that can be divided into intellectual and moral, Filipino virtues are rooted in *Loob* (core/deep inside), they have both rational and emotional contents.

## **LOOB AND KAPWA**

A careful survey of literature on Philippine ethical discourse reveals two key concepts: *Loob* and *Kapwa*. *Loob* and *Kapwa* are unique concepts to Filipinos. They are “of much older provenance” than other ethical concepts in Tagalog that express rights (*karapatan*), justice (*katarungan*), or freedom (*kalayaan*) as these are “all modern linguistic innovations designed to address the need to express new realities and ideas” (Guillermo 2016, p. 12). *Loob* is generally regarded as the basic component of moral behavior, the center of indigenous interpretations of

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<sup>5</sup> Reyes uses an Aristotelian-Thomistic framework in developing a Filipino virtue ethics. While I am heavily indebted on the interpretation of Reyes, I believe that an Aristotelian framework is sufficient for the purposes of this research.

<sup>6</sup> So by acting without *Hiya*, one becomes *Walang-Hiya* – the worst judgment of character for a Filipino.

ethical concepts and principles (Agaton 2017). Understanding *Loob* has significant implications for understanding the person as well as the nature and morality of interpersonal relationships from a Filipino perspective.

When asked, many Filipinos know what *Loob* is, but they struggle on how to express it in English.<sup>7</sup> Literally, *Loob* means *what is deep inside*, thus it connotes interiority, the core of one's being. For Filipinos what is of value is the internal rather than external. It is in what is inside where one can find what is true, authentic, and essential. To speak of one's *Loob* is to be authentic, it means to say one's deepest truth and conviction. Not to know the other's *Loob* is not to know the real person. *Loob* is the "person's interior truth since this is the ultimate, organizing center of human reality. It is the very center of his humanity where his ideas, beliefs and behavior life and the true worth of a person are situated." (Agaton 2017, p. 60)

As the inner subject (as opposed to the outside, i.e. the object) and one's authentic self, *Loob* is said to be analogous to the Hindu concept of *Atman*, a term that may refer to physical body, mind, reason, and vital principle. *Loob* is not distinct from the faculties of the person, and inseparable from the body as long as the person is alive (Mercado 1994). It has several dimensions, including intellectual, volitional, emotional, and ethical. Thus, *Loob* is a holistic concept that covers both emotion and reason, heart, and mind – the totality of one's personal experiences, i.e. her wholeness. It transcends traditional physical-mental or corporeal-spiritual dichotomies (De Castro 1999, p. 39). All persons have *Loob* in the sense that they all have mind, reason, etc., - differences are external or outside – yet each person is affected by what is outside differently and uniquely.

*Loob* is a relational understanding of the person (Reyes 2015a).<sup>8</sup> It is part of the essence of *Loob* - of what lies within – to be manifested or expressed outside. "In a way, it is "what-lies-within-that-lives-without." (De Castro 1999, p. 39) *Loob* is sometimes translated as "will" because Filipinos use it to express desire or volition. But *Loob* as *will* is not the will in traditional Western philosophy that is the counterpart of the intellect, for the Filipino worldview is non-dualistic, it does not separate will from intellect or emotion from reason (Mercado 1994). As the inner subject, it can never be known as an object. Rebutillo (2017, p. 251) states: "*Loob* comes to be through its activity: without such activity *Loob* is not; it does not exist." If *Loob* is best expressed by the word will, it must be understood as "relational will" (Reyes 2015b) because *Loob* is known through relationship and interaction. Thus, "it is meaningless to investigate *Loob* without relating it to *Kapwa* and to the values and virtues that emanate from this 'tandem'" (Rebutillo 2017, p. 251).

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<sup>7</sup> I will not go further in mediating the debate among Filipino philosophers on finding the appropriate philosophical terms for *Loob* and *Kapwa* in the English language without committing the risks of superimposition. This applies to the names given to Filipino virtues as well. Rather than searching for the appropriate translations in English, what is important is to understand these concepts in the Filipino context.

<sup>8</sup> For Reyes *Loob* is *potentia* in Aristotelian-Thomistic sense, the power of free choice, or the power to choose (2015, p. 154). *Loob* is power, and moral virtues are excellences of the will. "Now when it comes to the Filipino virtues, they are all in the will, in the *loob*, because that is the only part of the soul that Filipino virtue ethics is concerned with. Perhaps one can say that the Filipino idea of the soul is still compact and holistic, in that the faculty of reason has not yet been extracted or separated."

Literally, *Kapwa* means *both* and *fellow*. For Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000), *Kapwa* means shared identity, it is the expression of the relational aspect of the person. They argue that it is not smooth interpersonal relationship (SIR) per se as claimed by foreign scholars that the Filipinos want to achieve, but unity of self with others.<sup>9</sup> But in contrast to the Western view that defines the other as that which is opposed or different from the self and vice-versa, *Kapwa* is the synthesis of the self and the other. According to Bulatao (1992) the self-construal of Filipinos is contrary to the atomistic and autonomous view of Western orientation where self-governance is of prime value, while opening or sharing of oneself to others is a choice or an option. To define *Kapwa* in reference to the self and the other is already to assume a separation between the two, which is the very thesis that *Kapwa* negates, for the meaning of *Kapwa* is that there is no self that is distinct and oppositional to the not-self/other.

There are two ways to interpret *Kapwa*. We can treat it as a contraction for the word *Kapwatao* (fellow human). This is the notion of *Kapwa* in a limited sense. “This term implies that others should be treated as equals and with dignity. A person without this shared identity ceases to be human.” (Edman & Kameoka 2000, p. 2) It is the obligation to treat the other as yourself, regardless of the other’s individual characteristics or stature of power and privilege. Not to have the sense of *Kapwa* is the worst that can be said to a person, it refers to someone who exploits others for her own good. On the other hand, the word *Kapwa* in ordinary conversation is often attached to a noun such as *Kapwa-nilalalang* (fellow creature), or *Kapwa-manggagawa* (co-worker). It is also used as a qualifier to an action word to suggest reciprocity. Its root words are *ka* (being related to) and *puwang* (space). By itself, *Kapwa* is vague and ambiguous but carries an innate ethical dimension for it suggests the notion of togetherness “that bridges a gap or eliminates a space between two beings. That being so, the term *Kapwa* appeals to accept the Other fellow-being who is similar to me, and at the same time different from me.” (Meneses 2019, p. 8) *Kapwa* is only *Kapwa* from the outside, but in the final analysis *Kapwa* is also *Loob*.

In their highest level of expression *Loob* and *Kapwa* are inseparable. *Loob* is revealed through *Kapwa* while the latter opens itself and embraces the *Loob* until the unity of all is achieved. This is the *telos* of Filipino ethics, the ideal expression of humanity and oneness where all *Loob* is one (*pag-iisang Loob*). This is the moral ideal and the Filipino view of the good life, which is highly collectivist. This unity or oneness (*pag-iisang Loob*) is actualized and made perfect by virtues.<sup>10</sup> Without these virtues “The *Loob* instead of fostering a loving relationship together

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<sup>9</sup> Early works of American social scientists (c. 1940-60’s) that used positivism in analyzing cultural manifestations in the Philippines gave emphasis on smooth interpersonal relationship (SIR) as a fundamental Filipino value. SIR covers three concomitant values (*Utang na Loob*, *Pakikisama* and *Hiya*). Contemporary scholarship done by Filipinos themselves finds such interpretation shallow and reductive (Mendoza & Perkinson 2003, p. 277). While they do not fail to point out the negative valence of these values in terms of passivity, shame, or group thinking, Filipino scholars criticize early works for reducing “the native culture to an implied passivity and by implication, disqualifying it from ever coming up to the Western ideal of “progressive (i.e. capitalist) development” (Mendoza & Perkinson 2003, p. 286). It perpetuates the Asian stereotype of being submissive and serenity-entreaty. Nonetheless, no one can deny that avoidance of social friction is common among Filipinos. They are sometimes reluctant to say no or to disagree just to avoid dispute and preserve harmony.

<sup>10</sup> I see no reason why other Filipino cultural traits that are not inherently relational or have no connection to achieving the Filipino view of a good/fulfilling life (e.g. *manana habit*, *ningas cogon*, *bahala na*, or crab mentality) should be treated as virtues.

with the *Kapwa* becomes an instrument of division and destruction.” (Rebustillo 2017, p. 252) Filipino virtues emanate from the *Loob* and are directed toward the *Kapwa*, and ultimately to his *Loob*. Like Aristotelian virtues, Filipino virtues are guides or skills rather than clear-cut rules, they are situational but not relativistic. The correct exercise of these virtues will depend on the right context, at the right time and according to specific situations. Filipino virtues are not good in and of themselves, they need to be moderated and directed to the right *telos*, otherwise they degenerate into emotionalism, passivity, favoritism, corruption, and factionalism. In the final analysis, your virtues reveal the kind of person you are, i.e. your *Loob*, and enhance your relationship with *Kapwa*.

## PAKIKISAMA

Lynch was one of the first anthropologists to study *Pakikisama* among Filipinos. He explains *Pakikisama* as “a facility at getting along with others in such a way to avoid outward signs of conflict: glum or sour looks, harsh words, open disagreement, or physical violence. It connotes the smile, the friendly lift of the eyebrow, the pat on the back, the squeeze of the arm, the word of praise or friendly concern.” (Lynch 1962, p. 89) This word is derived from the Tagalog *sama* – to go along with, “the lauded practice of yielding to the will of the leader or majority so as to make the group decision unanimous. No one likes a hold-out.” (Lynch 1962, p. 90) For Saito (2010) *Pakikisama* implies friendliness and affinity. By using indirect expressions and euphemism, showing pleasant or jovial attitude, keeping things vague or ambiguous, hiding one’s feelings, avoiding confrontation, harsh words, or disagreements – stressful situations are avoided. “In short, the emphasis is placed on getting along with others and making concessions to them, being sensitive to their feelings and making every effort to be agreeable in the face of difficult circumstances, even to the hurt of oneself.” (Mulzac 2007, p. 86)

The above descriptions focus on conflict and isolation avoidance. It implies that *Pakikisama* is about being passive and “conceding to the wishes of the collective” (Sanchez & Gaw 2007, p. 812) just to preserve camaraderie. The emphasis on going with the flow ignores the fact that *sama* in Tagalog also connotes solidarity. According to Jocano (1997, pp. 65-66) *Pakikisama* “is a willingness to subordinate one’s own interest in favor others, in the spirit of harmony, friendship, cooperation and deference to majority decision so that group goals can be easily achieved.” It can be considered as a cardinal virtue because it is interconnected with and is an essential ingredient of other virtues since it involves sacrificing one’s individual interest and cooperating for the sake of the common good. It means prioritizing the collective good over one’s individual advantage or benefit. Not to show *Pakikisama* is a betrayal of trust. It means a person cannot be relied upon or trusted because she is only thinking of her own welfare (*Walang Pakisama*). Through *Pakikisama* a trusting relationship is built where each member of a group knows that she has some people to depend on, a kind of relationship that is not based on material needs.

*Pakikisama* is indispensable in the workplace. Even if the workload is heavy or difficult and work conditions are wanting, Filipinos are often happy because of positive co-worker relationships (Rungduin 2014; Ilagan 2014). “Further, when they are comfortable to each other and problems at work would not become a burden as they believe there are other employees who can help them.” (Abun 2018, p. 7579) Many Filipinos will go out of their way in order to assist a co-worker even if they do not get anything from it. Being a good worker involves not just technical

competence but interpersonal skills as well. In fact, knowing how to make *Pakikisama* in terms of possessing excellent interpersonal skills is considered by Filipinos as job-related in any workplace (Ilagan 2014). Like other virtues, the exercise of *Pakikisama* depends on context and situations. It can be as trivial as smiling, taking breaks together or sharing meals, or as profound as sacrificing one's convenience, possessions, or priorities in order to help another in times of need or crisis. In business, it could also mean recourse to arbitration procedures brokered by neutral third parties, such as elders, in order to find a win-win solution and avoid lengthy and expensive litigation (Sison & Palma-Reyes 1997, p. 1520). Thus, it is not only a mechanism for conflict avoidance, but also for conflict resolution (Rungduin, 2014 ).

## **BAYANIHAN**

The most common image that depicts *Bayanihan* is that of a house being lifted and transferred to another location by volunteers. This image is both metaphorical and literal. Literal because in many rural villages in the Philippines, this is how residents move their houses. Metaphorical because the essence of *Bayanihan* is to work together to make sure the project will get done. In modern-day setting, this could be construction or maintenance of irrigation canals, harvesting or planting rice, livelihood projects, or community chores. Such activities bring together people from all walks of life – everyone is doing their part, no matter how big or small. Those who are physically able can carry loads, others can provide refreshments, some are entertainers, etc. *Bayanihan* also involves taking turns so others can rest. Today, it is widely practiced both in its original model – house moving, and in many voluntary and civic projects. It need not be a community-initiated project as it may also involve the business sector or non-government organizations.

While *Pakikisama* happens in day-to-day interaction, *Bayanihan* is aimed at a specific project – its fast and efficient completion through self-help and cooperation. This cooperation may be solicited or voluntarily given, but in either case no remuneration is promised except perhaps, that the whole undertaking is accompanied by a festive atmosphere through sharing of food and drinks, jokes, stories, and music. Like carrying a house, *Bayanihan* projects usually involve manual labor. The idea is to unite people in a common task because what cannot be done by a single individual is accomplished by the group. To practice *Bayanihan*, donation of money or goods is not enough. The participant must at least be physically present, for *Bayanihan* is about sharing one's time, labor, and talent.

## **PAKIKIRAMDAM**

This refers to an interpersonal skill that manifests Filipinos' heightened sensitivity that helps them navigate social dealings in a culture where not everything is expressed in words, or expressed directly. It is described by Filipino psychologists as an “emotional a-priori” that involves sensitivity to non-linguistic. Teresita and Darwin Rungduin (2013, p. 19) state that *Pakikiramdam* has both affective and cognitive domains since it involves “sensing the situation, including the feelings and thoughts of others and anticipation of action” in order to determine the appropriate way of interaction.



Of all Filipino virtues, *Pakikiramdam* is probably the one that is most frustrating to many foreigners. In relating with strangers, Filipinos often pass a stage of *Pakikiramdam* or *sensing* each other. In stark contrast to the frankness or straight talk common among Americans, Filipinos have the tendencies to beat around the bush (*paligoy-ligoy*), use euphemism, engage in small talk, and use indirect expression or passive rather active voice. The interplay of verbal and non-verbal cues can cause bewilderment or confusion to non-Filipinos. Fluency in English or even in one of the Philippine languages may not be enough to comprehend whether a Filipino is agreeing or disagreeing.

Reyes (2015b) compares *Pakikiramdam* with Aristotle's prudence, but with qualified differences. Unlike prudence, *Pakikiramdam* is directed toward the *Loob* of the *Kapwa* and has both rational and emotional content. *Pakikiramdam* is a relational virtue, it is a kind of "shared feeling or shared inner perception" (Reyes 2015a, p. 149). It is a combination of empathy and emotional intelligence – to feel and understand the *Loob* of the other (*Kapwa*), which cannot be known directly. Like other virtues it is a skill that can be developed with time, careful attention, and deliberation through socialization and constant interaction. *Pakikiramdam* is needed when relating with someone who is still a stranger. Between friends or when there is already intimacy, *Pakikiramdam* happens spontaneously.

In the workplace, *Pakikiramdam* has several implications. Unlike American familiarity where bonding is quickly established with shake of hands, managers should exert the extra mile to get along and know their workers as individuals as well as their personal circumstances. Constant presence of the management on the shop floor and daily discourse are important to establish good rapport. Oftentimes managers only talk to their employees when there is a problem or to discipline them. This should be discouraged. While Filipino employees do not want to be ignored, direct communication or being straight to the point does not always work. Managers must try to avoid anything that can cause negative emotion even if they are not obvious, for negative emotions in the workplace make it difficult for Filipinos to become productive and concentrate in their work. On the other hand, positive feelings encourage effective work habits (Rungduin 2014, p. 96). This does not mean that management cannot give any negative criticism if it is necessary, but it should always be accompanied by positive feedbacks and reinforcements. Face-to-face interaction should be preferred over emails and memos. If possible, managers should be the ones to facilitate training and development workshops, rather than rely on external consultants, in order to foster trust and credibility. Because it takes time to truly get to know the *Loob*, companies should discourage frequent transfers of managers.

## **MALASAKIT**

This is the virtue of selfless concern for other's wellbeing through caring, emotional involvement, compassion, and commitment without demanding anything in return. To be a perfect virtue, it needs to be related to other virtues like *Pakikisama* or *Pakikiramdam*. Like *Pakikiramdam*, it has an affective element, it means being able to feel the pain of the other as a result of misfortune, or as an outcome of your own wrongful behavior. Thus, *Malasakit* is often translated as emphatic caring. Although *Malasakit* comes during times of tragedies, it is also practiced in day-to-day activities. It is all about alleviating pain, even if no successful solution is found to a problem. Unlike *Pakikisama*, *Malasakit* does not involve reciprocity and it can be directed to non-persons (institutions or physical objects) and even to strangers and enemies. It is

a virtue that is shown to anyone, including those who do not deserve caring, and even to those who do not ask to be cared for or be helped. Still *Malasakit* is *Kapwa*-oriented like other virtues because the idea is to treat the other the way you would like to be treated, or to care for the material possessions of the other as if they were your own possessions.

*Malasakit* effects a sense of frugality and ownership among workers. Workers who have *Malasakit* to company properties will care for them the way they care for their own personal belongings. So if you do not want to willfully destroy or put to waste your personal property – the product of your own sweat, you do the same to company properties. Co-workers are treated as if they were family members, clients are regarded as friends. This will minimize or eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment, office bullying, company theft, expense account abuse, and other harmful and counterproductive behaviors in the workplace. With *Malasakit*, workers will go extra mile to satisfy clients and customers and will avoid wasteful or irresponsible use of company resources. They will not only relate with each other as family members do, they will also treat the office as their own home where they live and grow together as persons, not simply a place to work from 8 to 5.

## **UTANG NA LOOB**

Rungduin et al. (2016) explain that *Utang na Loob* has a multi-layered meaning as it connotes reciprocity, gratitude, acknowledgement, and appreciation that may be bestowed to the giver who may be a person, an organization, or a country, and extended to those who are close to the giver. Examples of instances that generate *Utang na Loob* are: borrowing money, receiving food or help during times of needs or calamities, asking help in harvesting rice, looking after one's children, or being helped in finding job. But because the “debt” (*utang*) is from within (*Loob*), it is not debt in the sense of expecting to get the equivalent of the good deed done or the material thing given. What is owed is intangible and thus cannot be repaid by material things, i.e. it is understood to be non-repayable. “The magnitude of the feeling of indebtedness depends on the gravity of needfulness of the person” (Agaton 2017, p. 63) and not on the worth of what is given. The key concept here is not the word *utang* (debt) but *Loob*, what is owed is not money but goodwill. There is an implicit expectation in the consciousness of the receiver that the act of goodness ought to be returned, but at the same time she knows that such act cannot be paid equally or fully. Hence, *Utang na Loob* is both conditional and unconditional in nature (Rungduin 2016, p. 14).

*Utang na Loob* is often misunderstood as a kind of unwritten contract for mutual advantage (*quid pro quo*). In his study, Reyes clarifies that it is not a commercial transaction because the sense of obligation is “self-imposed” rather than a result of external pressure. A demanded *Utang na Loob* is not a virtue. Just like other virtues, it emanates from the goodness of one's within (*Loob*) and must be expressed freely out of goodwill. It is a virtue of the receiver, not the giver. The goodness that is done to a person should bring out the goodness of the *Loob* of that person. When one gives, there should be no strings attached, otherwise it rules out *Utang na Loob*, and the giving and receiving become a mere commerce rather than a virtuous interaction.

*Utang na Loob* often signifies an ever-present sense of obligation because it creates a cycle of return of favor since the act of gratitude generates the return of kindness that eventually creates a sense of indebtedness on the original giver, who is now the recipient of the act of kindness. This

is due to the fact that, as mentioned above, what is owed is immaterial so no amount of money can fully repay it, not because the giver is always expecting something in return. “By no means does utang-na-loob indicate that all favors thus invoked must be granted; a diplomatic, sincere, and honest explanation may be used to convey non-compliance with a request.” (Mina 2015, p. 21) Not every good act generates *Utang na Loob*. A good act that is done with ulterior motive, for the sake of profit, or when the person is being paid or benefiting for doing the service does not merit *Utang na Loob*. “In effect, it is understood that *utang na loob* is a communal trait that is seen between those who helped and those who were helped.” (Rungduin, et al. 2016, p. 22) The goal of *Utang na Loob* is to strengthen *Kapwa* relationship, not the repayment of favor per se. It is not “merely a debt to be repaid to a good or kind deed previously done by someone. It is a priori being responsible to someone in the name of human solidarity.” (Lanaria 2013, p. 249) For Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) a better rendering of *Utang na Loob* in English is solidarity because it ultimately strengthens the bond that ties Filipinos to their family, community, firm, or country. *Utang na Loob* is a way of recognizing our dependence on others to live a fulfilling life.

This virtue has broad manifestations in organization. It creates relations between different groups or bridges social classes as well as serves to redistribute/balance resources and workload (Lorenzana 2015, p. 9). The gender, age or social status of the giver is irrelevant. A network of people is necessary for the attainment of all goals, particularly in business. *Utang na Loob* promotes an expanding and self-sustaining solidarity that encourages workers to share and help whoever is in need. In addition to strengthening contractual obligations, *Utang na Loob* goes beyond contractual reciprocity or professional engagement as it adds emotional and personal dimension to the latter. On the other hand, *Utang na Loob* may be an occasion for conflict of interest as employees might feel obligated to return favors to clients and suppliers at the expense of the firm’s interest. But this should not be the case. *Utang na Loob* is both a social norm and a communal trait that includes responsibility for the common good. “A collaborative expectation of people does not necessarily consider the benefactor to receive expected terms of repayment but rather, prosocial behavior as part of the community is much anticipated from the beneficiary.” (Rungduin, et al. 2016, p. 22) Finally, when employees are promoted or given salary increases, management should emphasize that these are based on merit and company productivity, and not a kind of gifts that employees must repay with *Utang na Loob*.

## **FAMILY ORIENTATION**

Nothing is more important to Filipinos than the family – no other institution in the Philippines commands as much commitment, sacrifice, and affection like it. The family is not only the basic unit of Philippine society, it is also the primary socializing force. It is in the family that the Filipino individual is born and grows into a mature adult. Major decisions are made in consultation with family members. Young Filipinos choose the career that is favored by their family as parents are expected to finance the education of their children until college or even graduate studies. Unlike other Western cultures where children are pushed to early autonomy, independence is not a matter of urgency in the Philippine culture. In some cases, this is not an issue at all. Children are not expected to leave the family home, fend for themselves, and find their own place in the world. Instead, most of them help in the farm or family business and at times, contribute to the education of their younger siblings and continue to live with their parents until marriage or even when they have families of their own. In many cases, Filipino households

are multi-generational. Family orientation has a strong influence in business organizations in the Philippines where family corporations are plenty and are very successful. The pervasiveness of family also underscores the constitution of Philippine political dynasties, “even religious organizations are not saved from the encroachment of family interests” (Ramirez 1984, p. 43).

Many social scientists tend to focus on the “close” term in the expression *close family ties* that is commonly used to describe families in Asia. The Filipino family, however is not “close knit” in the sense of being rigid and exclusive. While parenting is mostly done by parents, responsibility is often shared with other relatives and even with the eldest sibling. Family roles and relationships are negotiated rather than fixed. The head of the household could be the parents, grandparents, or one of the siblings too. Filipino family is characterized by diffusiveness and non-specificity of relationships. Filipinos tend to use the term family (*familia* in Spanish or *mag-anak* in Tagalog) ambiguously as it refers to a “system of reckoning relationships among members of the group either by blood (consanguineal), by affinity (in-law) or by *compadrazgo* (ritual).” (Jocano 1997, p. 90) When this relationship is established, one is accepted as *kapamilya/hindi ibang tao* or one of us. Not to be a family member is to be *ibang tao* i.e. outside the group or not one of us, something like a stranger. In addition to one’s immediate and distant relatives – the family network extends to include relationships created through social alliances like weddings or baptisms. Relationships are not exclusively consanguineal but are multilinear and intertwined, your paternal uncle could also be your godfather in baptism, and this will make the latter both a brother and a *compadre* of your father. Even long-time family friends are addressed as uncles or aunts both as a sign of respect and acceptance to the family circle.

While family orientation can be considered a value (a conception of what is good or object of intentional feelings), we can also consider it as a virtue in the Philippine context as it requires specific behavioral patterns or dispositions. “It provides the people with a uniform and specific frame of references for their actions. Through recognized relationships, as indicated by kinship terminologies, they know what behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate for what kind of interactions; what social etiquette is necessary and what to disregard” (Jocano 1997, p. 92). What is essential in virtue ethics is the cultivation of character. In the Filipino context, this cultivation takes place in the family. The family is ideally the first school of virtue. To recognize someone as a family member is to treat that person in a certain way. Respect for the elderly is expressed by placing their hands in one’s forehead, using *po* and *opo*, and showing *Malasakit* when they are old. Family members should be willing to make personal sacrifices for each other and through this, the virtue of *Pakikisama* is harnessed. “In small barrios, or within a family setting, *Hiya* forces a web of self-censure which ranges from the maintenance of family harmony to the prevention of acts of violence.” (Llora 2003, p. 41) As parents exert their best efforts to raise and educate their children to give them a better life, the latter manifests *Utang na Loob*, which serves to further strengthen the binding relationships of love, loyalty, and *Pakikisama*. Children are expected to take care of their aging parents when they are already grown up. Thus, sending parents to home care is very uncommon in the Philippines because to do so by their children is not to have *Utang na Loob*.

Cultivation of virtues in the family is both deliberate – through oral instructions and systems of reward and punishment, or indirect i.e. through examples and daily interaction. Through the widely accepted practice of extended family and the mechanism of seniority where older family members have greater authority and command respect and obedience from the younger ones, virtues are handed down from generation to generation. Those who show these

virtues are admired and emulated as being “good people” by other family members, and this in turn, reinforces such behaviors to the following generations. Character is cultivated by acquiring these traits, and since these traits have something to do with family dynamics, these are relational and interactive. Family relationship becomes the reference point in gauging the exercise and excellences of these virtues. Describing the development of a Filipino as he matures from childhood to adulthood, Jocano (1997, p. 117) writes: “As he begins to participate in the adult world, the child learns further that he can engage in harmonious relations with other members of the community through the reckoning of kinship ties which exist between them.” Eventually these traits are internalized and become an enduring part of one’s *Loob*.<sup>11</sup>

In the Filipino context, to treat the other virtuously is to treat them as if they were part of your family. This is how the other becomes *Kapwa*. The common expression is *hindi iba* (not a stranger). The family is not only the setting where virtues are cultivated but the reference point as well and the measure of excellence in practicing them. It is in the family that Filipinos learn the value and significance of human relationships, it is here where they grasp the deep meaning of *Kapwa*.<sup>12</sup> Much has been said already about the self-construal of Asian cultures, i.e. the notion of self is collective. For Filipinos, self-identity is construed in reference to belonging or being a part of a family. Philippine family functions “in a complex process of a natural support system of reciprocity and mutual caring to which the individual’s concept of self is strongly subsumed.” (Sanchez & Gaw 2007, p. 812) To be a *Kapwa*, i.e. to do to the other what you like the other to do unto you, is no different from treating the other as if she were a member of your family.

## **HIYA**

Filipino philosophers often disagree about the essence of this virtue and whether it is a virtue at all. *Hiya* is commonly translated as shame, sense of inferiority, modesty, timidity, embarrassment, or sense of propriety (Dagmang 1996). It is often depicted as a kind of inhibition or fear of making mistakes or losing face in public as a result of having a low sense of worthiness or self-esteem. It inhibits competitiveness and arrests one’s actions (Sanchez & Gaw 2007, p. 812) that may result in withdrawal behavior. Because of *Hiya*, one is hesitant to express her views to avoid being laughed at or embarrassed. Some describe *Hiya* as deference to authority, a kind of feeling when one is face-to-face with someone of greater authority or importance. Bulatao (1992) explains that *Hiya* is a painful emotion felt during occasions perceived to be dangerous to one’s ego: e.g. when one is unable to pay debt or fulfill her promise / obligation, or when one is unable to live up to others’ expectations.

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<sup>11</sup> The Tagalog word for internalization is *pagsasaloob*.

<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that the Filipino family is perfect. Like other institutions it is subject to human frailties, imperfections, and external treats (economic, technological, global influences). The major concern of many overseas Filipino workers (OFW) is that the foundation of their family relationship is becoming weak because of physical separation. But since for majority of Filipinos, the family is the most dependable psychological support system and the only institution to rely on in the absence of social safety nets usually provided by the government like adequate retirement benefits, unemployment insurance, institutional care for elders, universal health care, and affordable education, the Filipino family manages to be both resistant and resilient in the face of challenges, and when necessary, makes concessions and compromises to remain the bedrock of Philippine society.-

The distinction made by Reyes (2016) between passive and active meanings of *Hiya* is helpful in understanding it as a virtue. Although these two are not mutually exclusive, misinterpretation happens when these two are confused and conflated. As passion, *Hiya* is a negative and passive emotion that is felt when one is in an uncompromising situation or has done a socially unacceptable action. Because of this *Hiya*, Filipinos will spend money or extend help or hospitality to visitors although they do not have enough, even to the extent of borrowing money just to avoid the negative feeling.<sup>13</sup> But in an active sense *Hiya* involves skills for not offending anybody. As a virtue *Hiya* is not passion or an affective state. Reyes offers two definitions of the virtue of *Hiya*, one particular “a virtue of a person that prevents other people from suffering” (2016, p. 76) and a more general one: “a virtue of a person that controls individual wants for the welfare of the other person.” (p. 77)

To understand *Hiya* as a virtue, Reyes compares it to the virtue of temperance (*temperantia*) of Thomas Aquinas, a way of controlling one’s inclination or impulses. Temperance “involves a habitual self-control and restraint, especially when it comes to natural bodily desires of food, drink and sex.” (Reyes 2016, p. 67) While close to temperance, what makes *Hiya* different is that like other Filipino virtues, it is relational. *Hiya* is about showing consideration, it is “temperance towards others” to promote their welfare, rather than temperance to achieve mastery of oneself. Not to have *Hiya* is to be inconsiderate to others, to think only of oneself or one’s benefits, and to satisfy only one’s own needs or desire without any consideration to the needs of others, e.g. eating all food in the table and not leaving something for others.<sup>14</sup> Like temperance, *Hiya* plays a central role in the exercise of other Filipino virtues. Recall that for Aristotle, virtues can turn into vices because they both belong to the same continuum. Excellence in action lies in a choice lying in the mean relative to a situation as determined by practical wisdom. *Hiya* is a kind of self-censure to avoid overacting or inaction in order to best approximate the golden mean. Without moderation, *Pakikisama* can turn into group thinking and submissiveness, family orientation into nepotism, and *Bayanihan* into passionate but short-lived commitment. Excess of *Utang na Loob* can compromise one’s judgment that may lead to corruption or bribery.<sup>15</sup> *Pakikiramdam* and *Malasakit* are often misinterpreted as “innate aversion to rational structures” (Sison & Palma-Reyes 1997, p. 1523). When too much, they degenerate into sentimentalism and subjectivism exhibited in popular culture in the form of TV melodramas and romantic films. While this is self-evident among Filipinos, perhaps the lack of appropriate terms in the Filipino language to express the excess or defect of these virtues makes it hard to conceptualize or identify with precision their moderateness.

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<sup>13</sup> Related to this kind of “hospitality” is the practice of gift-giving in the Filipino workplace during Christmas celebration.

<sup>14</sup> In Filipino dining, it is common that the last piece of food is left uneaten as everyone in the table gives others the chance to enjoy it.

<sup>15</sup> An essential component of *Utang na Loob* as a virtue is the concept of golden mean or moderation. Not having it, one becomes ungrateful – a moral defect. Excessive *Utang na Loob* however, becomes a kind of blind loyalty or obedience in order to return a favor. In fact, most Filipinos will not accept favor or help in order to avoid having *Utang na Loob*. The implicit understanding is that it should not be overused or abused. To demand *Utang na Loob* is looked down, it is a manifestation of being shameless or no *Hiya* because it is taking advantage of people who are in need.

*Hiya* involves a kind of empathy, to feel how others would feel in the same situation. “In general, the virtue of *hiya* is a quality of one’s *Loob* that makes him control or sacrifice an individual desire for the sake of the *Kapwa*’s welfare. ... To be called *walang hiya* (without *hiya*) means that you are only thinking of yourself, of how to satisfy your impulses and desires, even at the cost of your *Kapwa*.” (Reyes 2016, p. 165) With *Hiya*, one tempers her desire to act, express her views, or say exactly what she means in order not to offend or hurt her *Kapwa*. It requires placing oneself in the shoes of the other and assessing what is the appropriate manner of acting or feeling from that vantage point, in consideration of time, context, and situation.

## FILIPINO VIRTUES AND MEANINGFUL WORK

To provide Filipinos with meaningful work, managers must recognize that they have particular needs and desires that must be met (Abud, et al. 2018; Blando 2017; Lamoya, et al. 2015; Angeles, et al. 2015). “Many individual moral dilemmas that arise within business ethics can best be understood as arising from a tension between the type of person we seek to be and the type of person business expects us to be.” (Hartman, et al. 2018, p.87) Filipino workers’ needs are other-oriented (Lamoya, et al 2015; Ilagan 2014). Among other things, they want “belongingness and perceived family, opportunities for growth and development, being challenged by task and opportunities to meet other people” (Rungduin 2014, p. 89). Consistent with many studies on the topic, meaningful work for many Filipinos is not simply about collecting paycheck. For them, “coworker relations is an integral part of how they view their job.” (Ilagan 2014, p. 137) Professional relations become embedded in personal relation while economic transaction is personalized.<sup>16</sup> Meaningful relationships in the workplace – the quality of relationship with co-workers and the sense of belonging to an organization – is important (Ilagan 2014, p. 122).<sup>17</sup> In several surveys, Filipinos rate career related needs as low in importance, this implies that many Filipino workers will sacrifice a challenging career for the sake of family or personal relationship. This is not to say that designing work to be interesting and challenging is unimportant. But in providing Filipinos with meaningful work, positive co-worker relationship is as important as the nature or complexity of job tasks. Even in the issue of employee loyalty, Filipinos tend to be loyal workers because they want to preserve personal relationships that are created in the workplace. On the other hand, negative relationship in the workplace is the strongest source of dissatisfaction and turnover, especially in relation to perceived unfairness, neglect, or failure to understand the personal circumstances of employees, conflict with colleagues, and berating or shaming employees in public (Rungduin 2014). Promoting meaningful work is more than practicing justice and fairness. For Filipino workers, fairness is expressed and felt through harmonious relationship (Rungduin 2014).

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<sup>16</sup> *Suki* – a term that is present in all major Philippine languages, refers to personalized relationship between a businessperson and a customer characterized by loyalty, trust, and honesty. *Suki* transforms commerce into personal relationship. It is a bond that may even extend to friends and family members of the client that can last for a lifetime.

<sup>17</sup> See also Blando (2017).

Understanding Filipino culture and getting to know the defining characteristics of Filipinos and their ethical system is important, especially for foreign managers and entrepreneurs who want to do business in the Philippines or who work with Filipinos abroad. Filipino virtues are *Kapwa*-oriented, which means that they are about relationality and reciprocity. Filipinos expect others, even foreigners to treat them the way they treat each other, i.e. Filipinos like to be treated in accordance with these virtues. Even if Filipinos understand that people of different cultures do not have high regard for these virtues, they will feel hurt or offended if they are treated otherwise. These virtues set the standards of human behavior per se, and they shape Filipino social interaction, especially in the workplace where they spend most of their waking hours. For most Filipinos, foreigners who speak frankly are blunt, those who are too forward or overconfident lack *Hiya*, and inability to show *Pakikisama* is a defect in character. To gain respect from Filipinos, managers whether foreigners or not must show *Malasakit* to their employees. This means caring for them personally, not to treat them as a mere instrument of production.

Promoting meaningful work also has positive benefits to businesses in the Philippines, for “organizational support is believed to be influenced by relationships employees have in their organizations.” (Rungduin 2014, p. 94) Studies done on effective management in the Philippines indicate that successful firms are those that have formed effective relationships, not only with customers but also with employees, suppliers, and dealers (Angeles, et al. 2015; Lamoya, et al. 2015; Gupta & Kleiner 2001). More than competent and visionary leadership, the quality of relationship, especially between managers and subordinates, is very significant in achieving team effectiveness among Filipinos. “Rather than just being able to work together, Filipinos place a premium on being able to exchange personal experiences and stories” (Alafriz, et al. 2014, p. 118). Filipino virtues can create better interaction in the company and minimize tensions and interpersonal conflicts that interfere with the operation of the company or its overall growth and productivity. They are indispensable moral guides for building and cultivating personal relationships (Lorenzana 2015, p. 10). A Filipino who experiences meaningful work through meaningful relationships in the workplace is a highly participative and engaged worker. As one business consultant wrote, Filipino virtues mold “the type of workers who will provide the most return on investment to the company... they are the ones who contribute most to the organization.”<sup>18</sup> These traits “mold workers to become more competent in terms of their knowledge, skills and attitude” (Adanza 2014, p. 3). Knowing what makes work meaningful for Filipinos will also enable managers to align company goals and priorities with employees’ vision of a good life, and develop effective and culturally sensitive human resource management strategies. Further, since virtues involve skills, Filipino virtues that enhance interpersonal skills and empathy are very relevant in service-oriented professions in health care, hotel and restaurant industry, communications, education, public relations, and public service. *Kapwa* orientation is said to be the root of Filipino hospitality that is very important in the travel and tourism sector.

Currently, managerial focus to create meaningful work tends to be task or skill oriented i.e. elimination of monotonous jobs, job enrichment, job rotation or by improving job-fit. These may be necessary but not sufficient as Filipino workers are more relationship than task-oriented (Alafriz, et al. 2014). According to management professor Edna Franco of Ateneo de Manila University (2010) “it is still possible that employees will find meaning in their work even in the

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<sup>18</sup> See Joselito Mallari, *On the Lost Virtue of Malasakit* April 15, 2014  
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140415135443-145691153-the-lost-virtue-of-malasakit>



most tiresome or monotonous one, provided that workers are given opportunities for friendships and camaraderie.” Many believe that workplace relationship is something that grows naturally over time. On the contrary, like other personal relationships, those in the workplace are never instantly or instantaneously established, they develop gradually and progressively. Filipino virtues provide ways to cultivate and nurture workplace relationship. Since virtues involve practice, they can be developed and cultivated. Aristotle points out that there is a kind of loop between virtues and human behavior. Virtues shape and improve human behaviors in specific ways, but as human behaviors improve, these virtues are also enhanced and developed. We acquire virtues through practice and the more we practice them, the more we become the kind of person who exhibits these virtues. Once Filipino virtues are cultivated in the workplace, a corporate culture is built that reinforces these virtues.

Rather than through institutional or formal mechanisms, the most effective way for management to cultivate Filipino virtues among workers to improve interpersonal relationship is by showing the right example. In virtue theory, role modeling is important. “The motivational theory of role modeling asserts that an organization, company or society for that matter can achieve bigger and greater value if the leaders running it are exemplary individuals commendable enough to be imitated from among the subordinates.” (Agaton 2017, p. 64) Part of *Hiya* as passion is showing high regard and deference to one’s superior. Thus, business leaders in the Philippines enjoy great respect, influence, and adulation. Consciously or not, they are always leading by example. Out of *Hiya*, Filipinos follow a leader who is willing to walk the talk.

The first step is for management to learn the dynamics of Filipino virtues, and this is best done through personal interaction with Filipinos. As mentioned, Filipinos build relationships by passing through a stage of *Pakikiramdam* that takes time until a sense of trust and intimacy is established between parties. Communication must involve deep listening and mutual sharing while giving careful attention to non-verbal cues like eye contact, facial expression, hand gestures, body language, pauses, and voice intonation in order to avoid any potential source of friction. The goal is to explore similarities, connections, common interests, and shared understanding of each other (*Kapwa*) that will give access to each other’s *Loob*. Until the interaction approaches this level, resort to intermediary or go-between – a common acquaintance who is known and trusted by both parties is sometimes employed. Filipinos tend to complain less and are reluctant to say no or refuse (most of them would rather say they *will think about it*), expecting instead the interlocutor to be sensitive enough to intuitively grasp what they actually feel. This is also their way of expressing that they are flexible and are willing to compromise. Thus, communications should be open and continuous, but a deadline for making final decision must be set. Managers must be patient in encouraging Filipinos to express themselves and pay careful attention when they convey job dissatisfaction. Since most Filipinos are non-confrontational, they will just endure the problem or vent it out on social media or co-workers (Rungduin 2014). When they decide to take the active approach, it means that the problem has worsened.

Once positive bonding is established in the workplace through *Pakikiramdam*, it leads to *Pakikisama*, which exerts a strong influence in Philippine work culture that makes it personalist, consensual, and collectivist rather than impersonal, competitive, and individualist. Respect of worker’s autonomy should be counterbalanced with efforts to foster teambuilding and solidarity. Organizing workers into smaller units would foster better interaction and cooperation that would minimize anonymity. Working as a team encourages constant communication, collaboration,

interdependence, and mutual respect and understanding. Individual rewards are important in terms of promotion or salary increases, but managers must not forget the importance of promoting teamwork and linking rewards with group/department/overall company performance as well. Studies indicate that generally, human resource practices adopted in collectivist cultures in Asian countries such as stock ownership plans, flexible job boundaries, lower overall pay dispersion, internal recruiting, assignment of targets to departments rather than individuals, scheduling of general assembly meetings, seniority system<sup>19</sup> and consideration of *soft skills* in employee evaluation and promotion work well with managing Filipino workforce.

Stakeholders throughout the organization are guided to a large extent by the “tone at the top.” Managers have a very influential role in shaping the firm’s culture. There are several ways by which managers can incorporate Filipino virtues in the corporate culture. *Bayanihan* can be promoted through corporate outreach programs and community involvement.<sup>20</sup> Rather than just setting up disaster funds, it is better for the company to harness *Bayanihan* in the company by organizing relief operations to help members of community who are victimized by natural calamities that are quite often in the Philippines being a tropical country. This will also manifest that the company has the virtue of *Malasakit*, and further enhance this virtue to its employees. Because of *Hiya*, “Filipino is extremely sensitive to any kind of personal affront such as being criticized publicly, shouted at, berated, derided, humiliated, or any form of adverse confrontation.” (Mulzac 2007, p. 84) Once embarrassed, they will be reluctant to express their mind, ask relevant questions, or participate in group discussions. Employee evaluation should be constructive and given in a personal, discreet, and informal manner rather than direct and confrontational. Darwin and Teresita Rungduin observe that (2013, p. 29) when an offensive behavior is done against them, most Filipino workers take it at the emotional level rather than assert and assess their selves objectively. Management needs to emphasize that even in healthy families, conflicts occur. If something unfair happens to them at work, the company has a formal, transparent, and procedural grievance mechanism that employees can resort to in order to resolve the issue and prevent it from escalating.

Supporting one’s family is the major reason why many people work, not just Filipinos. If money is the number one extrinsic motivator, this is only because Filipinos use their salaries to provide for the maintenance and education of their children and extended family. Filipinos prefer to spend on their families before themselves (Ilagan 2014). Many Filipino workers are married and have children, single lifestyle or childless marriage are not culturally valued. Family motivation also enhances energy when intrinsic motivation for work is low. In addition, family provides strong support system to many workers that help them cope with and endure emotional problems and tensions that they experience in the workplace.

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<sup>19</sup> The practice of seniority is important for many Filipinos, not only because they tend to stay in the same firm for many years but also because as discussed above seniority is well respected in the family, i.e. it is part of Family Orientation virtue.

<sup>20</sup> Studies indicate that service to the community and company’s prosocial impacts are significant sources of meaningful work (Michaelson, et al. 2014). Businesses can emphasize their corporate social responsibility as a way of serving *Kapwa*. However, since *Bayanihan* relies on free labor and time, it cannot be extended indefinitely or for a long period of time. It often works well for those projects that can be completed in a limited span of time.

The first way to implement the virtue of Family Orientation is through work-life balance. Work-life balance is defined as “any relationships between dimensions of the person’s work life and the person’s personal life.” (Edralin 2012, p. 202) It is “the satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict.” There are several possible ways that work-life balance can influence meaningful work. (1) Spillover phenomenon where problems at home affect work performance. (2) Relationships at work extend outside the workplace and become personal relationships too. (3) Non-compartmentalization in our search for meaning, i.e. the pursuit of meaningful work is part of the general pursuit of a meaningful life. Work-life balance is a growing concern today especially that in most families both husband and wife have careers. It becomes very challenging to simultaneously fulfill their work responsibilities as well as their responsibilities at home, which include not only taking care of their children but also of their elderly dependents. Family problems may have negative spillover in the workplace in terms of tardiness or absenteeism, not being fully functional or being in a bad mood. Some workers quit their job or find jobs near their home to spend more time with their families. For Filipinos, company loyalty is only second to family.

The fear that putting family first is harmful to organizational productivity is unfounded. On the contrary, work-family conflict lowers job satisfaction and increases turnover intentions. Family support is needed in order for Filipino workers to cope when conflict between work and family demands arises. The challenge for management is to see to it that personal and corporate goals, interpersonal and professional relationship, are closely aligned rather than in conflict. This will motivate workers to work harder. Direct involvement of managers in personal problems of their employees may not always be advisable, but they can offer compensation package that addresses their family-related needs, in addition to decent salaries. In their study Kim and Ryu (2017) find that Filipinos prefer compensatory time-off, childcare policy, health care, life insurance, paid sick leave, and job security.<sup>21</sup> The last is very important for Filipinos because they value belongingness. In addition, they tend to exhibit employment loyalty as part of *Utang na Loob*. However, many workers who support large families live from one paycheck to another. For Filipinos, providing for siblings and aging parents is not a burden but an opportunity to practice *Utang na Loob* too. The mere thought of losing their jobs can cause them anxiety. We can also add in the list housing benefits, family medical leave (maternity leave is legislated in the Philippines), educational benefits for children, and flexible work schedule. Filipinos like to work overtime because it is a significant source of extra income. But it is also important to many Filipinos to get time-off/reduced hours during traditional festivities such as Christmas and Catholic holy week observance in order to celebrate them with their families. Excessive time demands from employees that will require them to work on weekends should be eliminated or minimized.

The second way to implement family orientation is to develop a family culture in the company. Indeed, many Filipinos consider the business organization they work with as their second family (Angeles, et al. 2015). Their social environment affects their perception of their work environment (Rungduin 2014, p. 90). Similar to a family, the firm is perceived as a social union rather than a nexus of legal contracts. Filipinos love to be treated like family members by their co-workers and management. They also expect to find social and emotional support in the workplace just like the emotional support they have from their families, especially during difficult times. Like the parent-image in the family, business leaders are supposed to be nurturing and firm,

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<sup>21</sup> See also Angeles, et al. (2015).

able to show *Pakikisama* and *Malasakit* and at the same time, capable of disciplining members who are stubbornly self-centered and uncooperative. Management must welcome their employees when they share family concerns (positive and negative) at work. While they are not expected to solve personal problems of their employees, the mere act of listening, coupled with comforting words and expression of empathy is already an example of *Malasakit* of managers that Filipino employees will deeply appreciate. Family culture may imply a paternalistic style of management, but it does not necessarily mean micromanagement or tight control in the Philippine setting (Selmer & Corrina 2001, p. 138). Out of *Pakikisama* Filipino workers can take initiative. *Utang na Loob* motivates them to honor their obligations while *Malasakit* discourages unproductive behavior in the office.

There are other ways management can develop family culture in the firm. As *Pakikisama*, Filipinos like to talk and share and they rarely eat alone. “Potluck” is very popular in a Filipino office where employees bring delicacies from home to be feasted in common. Shared spaces where workers can interact in the day should be maximized. While participative management is encouraged, Filipinos show preference “to participate in institution-related tasks that are not part of their regular workload” so that they can spend more time with their colleagues (Rungduin 2014, p. 94). This can be done through company celebrations, employee recognition ceremonies, sports fest, civic activities, and annual retreats. It is good to involve family members in these activities to strengthen the ties among the families of workers. *Bayanihan* can also be enhanced by encouraging voluntarism in organizing these events. In addition, managers are usually invited to be godparents in baptism and confirmation, or as wedding sponsors (especially when co-workers are married to each other), making work relationships become part of employees’ kinship system through the *compadrazgo* practice.<sup>22</sup> Overtime, an authentic family culture is created that is ever expansive and inclusive as it extends outside the workplace. The result is that just like the family, the company becomes an integral unit of the community it serves.

Thus, a business organization from a Philippine perspective is a social union rather than a mere instrument. It is not simply a venue for working and earning money, but a place where workers know each other, grow together as persons, and develop their potentials. “If individuals in an organization view it purely instrumentally, these individuals are predisposed to behave in ways that harm organizational integrity.” (Bowie 1999, p. 106) On the other hand, seeing a firm as a social union generates personal commitment and dedication that provide stability and integrity to the organization.<sup>23</sup> It helps a firm develop a value-oriented, rather than a compliance culture. By encouraging cooperative and trustful behaviors rather than opportunistic and pragmatic, it can also give a firm a competitive advantage.

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<sup>22</sup> Much has been written about the pros and cons in hiring family relations, but to engage in this discussion is to go beyond the scope and limitations of this study. What is important to prevent the negative operational issues associated with having multiple members of one family working in the same firm is for management to put in place sensible precautionary policies to avoid nepotism, conflict of interest, and discrimination.

<sup>23</sup> It is noted that even among Filipino immigrant workers in other parts of the world such as North America and Australia, most of them stay in one company for a long time.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In summary, Filipino virtues have both strengths and weaknesses.<sup>24</sup> Managers can use these virtues to motivate Filipino workers in executing company principles, vision, and mission and in the process, provide them with meaningful employment and harness their potentials. At the same time, they should avoid their pitfalls by paying attention to their excesses. The challenge is for managers to acquire the practical wisdom needed to find the right balance, and according to Aristotle, this comes through theoretical learning and personal reflection coupled with hands-on experience. They must not lose sight of the concept of *Kapwa* and direct these virtues toward their telos, which is the well-being of the company and the unity of everyone's *Loob*. Outside this context, unless they are *Kapwa-Loob* oriented, they lose their essence as virtues and may even turn into vices. Seen broadly, management cannot dictate on how Filipino workers intend their work, but it can provide them with many opportunities that will facilitate an alignment between their occupations, the ethical virtues they cherish, and their notion of the good life. Managers can design a workplace and create a corporate culture that will reinforce Filipino virtues in order to promote meaningful work through meaningful relationships.

What we accomplish in this essay is to develop a Filipino virtue-ethics framework that defines what is meaningful work, explains why it is important, and contains some examples of concrete measures that management can utilize to promote meaningful work. This research is definitely not exhaustive. Empirical studies are needed across industries that measure the presence of these virtues in Philippine companies so that the paradigm we develop can be fully operationalized. More research should be done as well by practitioners in the field and academics regarding how each Filipino virtue that we discussed complements business growth in a measurable way.

By integrating Filipino virtues in conceptualizing meaningful work, I believe that a theoretical advancement is made toward a pluralistic and multicultural understanding of the concept, especially through the lens of virtue-ethics. While the context of our discussion is Filipino, these virtues pick out some important elements of human experience in general that resonate with ethical beliefs of other cultures, especially those in the East. Although they take on a distinctive set of Filipino meanings and motivations, they reflect relationship enhancing virtues that are found in non-Western cultures. Studies done in Buddhist, Hindu, and Confucian virtues demonstrate that like Filipino virtues, they are also relational and non-dual, i.e. expressing both cognitive and affective dimensions (Vu & Burton 2021; Tablan 2019; Tablan 2017; Fernando & Moore 2015; Luo 2007). By emphasizing human relationships and relationality of human excellences, these non-Western virtue theories are a powerful and enriching complement to Aristotelian virtue framework that has tendencies to be too elitist, rationalist, Western-centric, and anthropocentric (Whitehill 2000, p.1).

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<sup>24</sup> As an ethical theory, virtue ethics has limitations. It fails to establish universal rules or principles such as basic sense of fairness or human rights. *Kapwa* implies recognition of the humanity and dignity of all persons. It suggests openness without revealing the quantity or the nature of that to which it is open, and has the potential for a universal application. A deontological interpretation of the ethics of *Kapwa* is both possible and promising.

A few studies on meaningful work from a Western/American context suggest that promoting meaningful work is also related to creating meaningful relationships in the workplace. Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) in their research work on hospital cleaners' perspectives on work conclude that "The interpersonal dynamics that unfold between people at work create powerful contexts in which work meanings are composed." (p. 129) Likewise, Bailey and Madden (2016 p. 13) observe that "There is a widespread agreement that people find their work meaningful in an interactional context in two ways, firstly, when they are in contact with others who benefit from their work, and, secondly, in an environment of supportive interpersonal relationships." There are evidence-based studies that indicate how harmonious interpersonal relationship in the workplace, perception that one's job benefits some greater good, and work-life balance are positively connected with meaningful work (Tommasi, et al. 2020; Yeoman, et al. 2019; Fouche 2017; Fourie & Deacon 2015; Michaelson, et al. 2014; Munn 2013; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009). Yet still, few studies have specifically examined interpersonal and relationship virtues, which are called *soft skills*, as sources of meaningful work, especially in non-Western societies. While virtues involve more than skills, Western virtue ethicists tend to focus on complexity, creativity (including opportunities for autonomy), and intellectuality of required skills (*hard skills*) in determining what is meaningful work (Yeoman, et al. 2019; Clark 2017; Veltman 2016; Moore 2005; Beadle & Knight 2012; Simon 1997). The virtues that are articulated in this study are uniquely Filipino in many ways, nonetheless their integration into the general framework of virtue ethics is essential so that, together with other non-Western virtue theories, virtue ethics can evolve as a global business ethics.

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