

Exploring Manila Water Company, Inc.'s People Promise: Towards a Caring Culture

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The transition in leadership at Manila Water Company, Inc. (MWCI) from the Ayala Group to the Razon Group has posed challenges to employee engagement and perceptions of the organization's People Promise. This research investigates how employees view the company's commitment to material offerings, growth opportunities, community, and purpose amidst these changes.

Using a combination of quantitative (20-item survey) and qualitative (focus group discussions) methods, this study explores the impact of leadership changes on employee satisfaction and engagement, focusing on MWCI's "culture of care."

The study reveals that material offerings (compensation, wellness programs, and flexible work arrangements) and growth opportunities are central to employee satisfaction. However, employees desire stronger community connections and greater alignment with the company's mission. Despite positive perceptions, some gaps in resources and tools affect productivity. The study suggests addressing these issues to enhance long-term employee engagement.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Leadership Transition, Organizational Culture, Employee Satisfaction, Employer Value Proposition.

INTRODUCTION

As it manages a major leadership change from the Ayala Group to the Razon Group, the Manila Water Company, Inc. (MWCI) finds itself at a pivotal point. The organization has both opportunities and problems as a result of this change, especially in terms of corporate culture and employee engagement. A key component of MWCI's strategy is its People Promise, an effort to foster an environment of compassion and support for its employees, aptly named "Katubigs." In addition to evaluating employees' opinions of the People Promise during this pivotal time, this research

investigates particular situations in which workers have felt appreciated and cared for by the organization. Through quantitative and qualitative techniques such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, this study aims to offer guidance that will help MWCI fortify its organizational culture in the face of leadership transitions.

Background of the Action Research

With more than 6 million consumers in eastern Metro Manila, MWCI has been a major player in the Philippine water utility industry. A new dynamic in leadership philosophy and organizational values is brought about by the recent ownership

transfer from the Ayala Group, which is renowned for its dedication to employee welfare and corporate social responsibility, to the Razon Group. Understanding that operational success depends on having a motivated and engaged staff, MWCI introduced the People Promise to improve worker happiness and advance well-being. To establish a unified workplace culture, this effort places a strong emphasis on respect, acknowledgment, and responsiveness to employees' needs (Otter, 2020).

The effectiveness and continuity of the People Promise are called into question, nevertheless, by the shift in leadership. Employee experiences may differ depending on how these initiatives are implemented in various areas, which could have an effect on engagement and morale. It is crucial to evaluate Katubigs' perceptions and experiences of the People Promise as MWCI makes this transformation. To create a more resilient and engaged workforce, this study will investigate their lived experiences and how these perspectives might change in the wake of the new leadership.

Related Studies and Articles

Organizational culture has been a focal point in management and organizational behavior studies for decades. It shapes the environment in which employees operate, influencing their productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being (Schein, 2017). Recent research has highlighted the critical role of work culture in determining employee engagement, performance, and retention (Kotter & Heskett, 2019). This review synthesizes key findings from studies conducted between 2016 and 2019 focusing on the relationship between organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and key factors such as compensation, benefits, work-life balance, and opportunities for growth and development.

Organizational Culture and Employee Satisfaction

Organizational culture can be understood as a collection of shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape how employees interact within an organization. According to Janićijević et. al (2018), a positive organizational culture enhances employee satisfaction, which, in turn, contributes to better organizational outcomes such as productivity and employee retention. The relationship between work

culture and employee satisfaction is multifaceted, involving elements such as leadership style, communication practices, and employee involvement in decision-making processes.

Perception of Compensation and Benefits

One of the key aspects of work culture is how employees perceive their compensation and benefits, which directly impacts job satisfaction. Recent studies have found that compensation is a crucial determinant of employee satisfaction, with employees who perceive their compensation as fair and aligned with their contributions more likely to exhibit high levels of engagement (Haar, 2020). In line with this, a survey conducted by Hallowell (2021) found that 80% of employees expressed satisfaction with their overall compensation package, a sentiment echoed by this study. However, discrepancies were noted among long-tenured employees, who reported varying levels of dissatisfaction with compensation and benefits.

The relationship between compensation and perceived fairness has been further explored in studies by Denison & Mishra (2017) suggest that employees' perception of how well their salary compensates for their skills and experience significantly affects their satisfaction and retention.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance has been increasingly recognized as a critical component of organizational culture, especially in the context of employee well-being and satisfaction. Numerous studies in the last five years have highlighted the role of work-life balance policies in fostering a positive work culture. A study by Zahra et al. (2024) found that organizations that support flexible work arrangements, adequate time off, and family-friendly policies have higher employee satisfaction rates and lower turnover. However, work-life balance policies are a significant factor in employee satisfaction, their effectiveness depends on how well they are communicated, implemented, and perceived by employees, especially during transitions in leadership.

Training, Development, and Personal Growth

Another critical aspect of organizational culture is the support for employee growth and development.

Research by Goh and Goh (2021) underscores the importance of training and development programs in promoting job satisfaction and career advancement opportunities. This study will investigate how employees perceive the organization's adequate investment in their professional development. Will they find the company's offer of continuous training programs, foster a culture of growth and empowerment, leading to higher levels of employee engagement?

Moreover, the provision of opportunities for personal growth and career advancement is often linked to positive perceptions of organizational culture. According to O'Reilly and Chatman (2021), employees who feel supported in their personal and professional development are more likely to exhibit organizational commitment.

Social Events and Teamwork

The role of social events, team-building activities, and collaboration in shaping organizational culture is another important area of focus. Is fostering a sense of community outreach through social and team-building activities essential for enhancing employee morale and cohesion? The work of Driskell et al. (2018), found that while social events can improve employee relationships, their impact diminishes over time if not continuously adapted to the changing needs of the workforce.

The organization's efforts to promote teamwork and collaboration also play a significant role in work culture. A study by Armstrong and Taylor (2023) found that organizational cultures that encourage collaboration and open communication lead to higher employee satisfaction and performance.

Alignment with Organizational Mission and Values

Alignment between employees' personal values and the organization's mission is another essential component of a positive organizational culture. In their study, Kotter and Heskett (2019) highlighted that employees who identify with the organization's values and goals are more likely to be engaged and productive. This concept was used to support this study to check respondents' strong alignment with their personal values and the organization's mission.

Recognition and Feedback

Finally, the recognition of employee contributions plays a crucial role in fostering a positive work culture. A study by Wright and Kehoe (2012) found that employees who receive regular feedback and recognition for their work feel more valued and engaged in their roles. Denison (2020), argued that recognition of contributions is a key factor in employee satisfaction and retention.

This study highlights the critical elements that shape organizational culture and employee satisfaction. Organizational culture influences key factors such as compensation, work-life balance, training and development, teamwork, and alignment with organizational values. The organization's efforts to foster teamwork, communication, and recognition of employee contributions play a significant role in shaping the overall work culture. This action research should explore how these factors evolve over time, especially in times of leadership transitions and how organizations can adapt their cultures to meet the changing needs of their workforce.

Research Framework and Models

An essential theoretical foundation for this research is the ethics of care, especially in relation to the development of a caring corporate culture and the People Promise of Manila Water Company, Inc. (MWCI). This ethical viewpoint is especially pertinent to comprehending employee experiences in a work environment since it highlights the need for interpersonal relationships, empathy, and responsiveness to others' needs (Tenney, n.d.).

Fundamentally, the ethics of care place a high value on interpersonal connections and the interdependence of all members of a community (Johansson, 2021). In the framework of MWCI, assessing the caliber of management-staff relationships is necessary to comprehend how employees, or Katubigs, perceive care from the company. This paradigm promotes a more thorough investigation of how these connections affect worker engagement, satisfaction, and general morale, especially at a time of leadership change (Errida, 2021).

The ethics of care emphasize the value of empathy, or the ability to identify and attend to the needs and feelings of others (Shuster, 2023). Employees may feel anxious and unsure about their responsibilities and the organization's future following the Razons' takeover following the departure of the Ayala Group. By using this framework, it is possible to determine whether and how the People Promise meets these emotional demands in a way that gives Katubigs a sense of security and support.

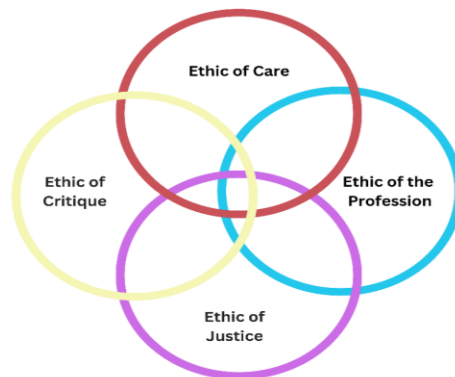
In line with the ethics of care principles, organizations have a moral obligation to look out for their employees (Ciulla, 2009). This approach highlights that showing compassion is an essential responsibility of companies rather than just a choice (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018). Examining MWCI's People Promise, this study will determine whether the company's efforts truly embody this ethical duty and how they materialize into actions that benefit workers.

A comprehensive perspective of well-being that takes into account social, emotional, and professional aspects is promoted by the ethics of care (Mortensen & Edmondson, 2023). Using this

paradigm, the study will look at how MWCI's programs deal with work-life balance, mental health support, and recognition, among other elements of employee life. Examining employee well-being from this angle enables a thorough assessment of the People Promise's efficacy.

A helpful corporate culture that emphasizes cooperation, mutual respect, and trust can be created by putting the ethics of caring into practice (Walk, 2023). Given the continuous transformations at MWCI, cultivating such a culture is essential for staff engagement and retention. The study will be guided by this framework as it looks for methods to improve the entire work environment by fortifying the caring culture. (Seo, et al., 2012)

By highlighting the significance of relationships, empathy, moral responsibility, holistic well-being, and supportive cultures, the ethics of care offers a strong theoretical foundation for this action research. The study intends to provide significant insights into how MWCI can strengthen its People Promise and better assist its employees during a crucial time of transition by firmly establishing the inquiry in this ethical framework.



Four Ethical from Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education: Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Complex Dilemmas by Shapiro, J.P & Stefkovich, J.A. (2011)

Additionally, an organized method for improving an organization's employer brand is provided by Universum's 9-Step Employer Brand Management (EBM) Model, which is especially pertinent to this investigation into Manila Water Company, Inc. (MWCI) and its People Promise. Leveraging this

strategy can assist MWCI in proactively managing its employer brand to draw in, engage, and retain talent during this crucial time as the company experiences major leadership changes with the move from the Ayala Group to the Razon Group.

The foundation of the EBM model is the idea that a strong employer brand is crucial to luring and keeping talent. The purpose of this study is to ascertain how MWCI's employees see the company's People Promise. By applying the EBM model, the research can evaluate how the company's initiatives are communicated and how they meet the care and support expectations of its employees. The model highlights how crucial it is to carry out in-depth research to comprehend employee opinions and experiences. This is in line with the study's goals of examining particular situations in which Katubigs felt taken care of and their opinions of the People Promise's efficacy. As suggested by the EBM model, using employee surveys and interviews enables data-driven insights that can guide organizational strategies.

Establishing the company as an employer of choice is a key component of effective employer brand management. The change in leadership at MWCI offers a chance to revitalize the organization's employer brand. The EBM model offers a framework for determining distinctive value propositions that appeal to both present and prospective workers, assisting the company in successfully communicating its dedication to a compassionate culture. Creating an engagement strategy that conveys the employer brand uniformly at all organizational levels is a crucial stage in the EBM model. This is particularly crucial during times of transition when employee morale may be impacted by uncertainty. The study can look at how MWCI engages staff members to create a feeling of

community and concern, as well as how it conveys its People Promise.

The EBM model emphasizes how important it is to gauge how successful employer branding campaigns are. As MWCI evaluates the effect of its People Promise on employee engagement and satisfaction, this component is essential. The study can offer practical insights into areas that require improvement or modification by incorporating metrics pertaining to employee views and experiences.

By encouraging firms to continuously improve their employer branding initiatives in response to feedback and evolving circumstances, the EBM model advocates for an iterative approach. This supports the study's objective of determining MWCI's People Promise's strong points and potential areas for development. MWCI can modify its tactics to better satisfy the changing demands of its employees by embracing a culture of continuous improvement.

The 9-Step Employer Brand Management (EBM) Model from Universum is very pertinent to this research since it offers a thorough framework for comprehending and improving MWCI's employer brand in the wake of the most recent leadership change. Through the use of this approach, the study may methodically evaluate employee perceptions, direct efficient communication, and support ongoing enhancements to the People Promise, all of which will eventually lead to a more contented and engaged workforce.



Universum's 9-Step Employer Brand Management (EBM)

METHODS

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to investigate Manila Water Company's culture of care. Its organizational culture, particularly its culture of care, is essential to its customer service, staff happiness, and operational effectiveness. The study utilized pen and paper survey composed of 20 questions to gather quantitative data reflecting care-related factors such as material offerings, career development and growth, connection and community, and meaning and purpose; four important pillars of the employer value proposition. To further understand the perceptions of Katubigs, focus-group discussion sessions were conducted, the qualitative approach will offer a thorough grasp of workers' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of the company's caring culture. This study aims to provide a thorough understanding of how Manila Water cultivates its culture of care, its effect on organizational outcomes, and areas for improvement.

Scope

This study explores the perception on people promise among Manila Water Company, Inc.'s employees in East Zone – Main and its six (6) Service Areas (Quezon City, Marikina, Pasig, Makati-Mandaluyong, Taguig-Pateros, Rizal).

Delimitations

It only included the active employees at the time of the conduct of the research; those who have separated due to resignation and retirement were excluded from the study. The study did not include other demographical details such as gender, hierarchy in the organization, category of employment, and global grade group. It can also be noted that only the age and years of service were included in the profiling of respondents.

This does not involve MWC employees that are based outside the East Zone concession area (Manila Water Corporate Center, Philippine Ventures and Asia Pacific).

Limitations

The researchers initially targeted 170 Katubigs as respondents of the study however, due to territory collection schedules and incidents that

happened during the distribution of the pen and paper questionnaires, only three out of the six Service Areas were able to submit their responses on the set deadline. A total of 102 respondents only.

Also, the researchers had no control over the conditions and approvals set by the leadership of the Corporate Human Resources Group, the approving body for the research data gathering request.

Data Collection Method

Upon the approval of research data gathering, the researchers distributed 170 questionnaires to Katubigs stationed at Manila Water Company, Inc. (MWCI) East Zone – Main, Quezon City Service Area, Pasig Service Area, Marikina Service Area, Taguig-Pateros Service Area, Makati-Mandaluyong Service Area, and Rizal Service Area from November 29 to December 02, 2024. Six (6) focus-group discussion sessions were also held onsite on December 02, 2024 at MWCI Calawis Conference Room.

DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data Results Discussion

This study has provided insights into the complex relationship between organizational culture and employee satisfaction. The findings underline the central role of culture in shaping employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance. Organizational culture, including compensation, benefits, work-life balance, personal growth opportunities, and alignment with organizational values, significantly influences how employees perceive their work environment and their level of satisfaction. This research affirms prior studies by Schein (2017) and Kotter & Heskett (2019), which emphasize the importance of organizational culture in determining employee outcomes. The current study mirrors these conclusions and highlights the nuances in employee satisfaction across various organizational factors.

The findings reveal that compensation and benefits are key determinants of employee satisfaction, aligning with previous research by Haar (2020) and Avery & McKay (2020). The high level of satisfaction (80%) with compensation packages suggests that the organization has been effective in

providing competitive material offerings. However, discrepancies among long-tenured employees indicate that satisfaction with compensation and benefits may decline over time, which aligns with findings by Hallowell (2021). The dissatisfaction among these employees could suggest that while compensation may initially meet expectations, it may not evolve in line with employee experience, underscoring the need for periodic adjustments and transparent communication regarding pay scales.

Work-life balance policies also play a pivotal role in shaping employee satisfaction, though the mixed responses (42.2% satisfied and 37.3% dissatisfied) suggest that the policies are not universally effective. This reflects a growing body of research (Zahra et al., 2024) that indicates the effectiveness of work-life balance initiatives depends heavily on how they are communicated and implemented, particularly during leadership transitions. The variation in employee responses to work-life balance could also point to the need for more flexible and customized policies to cater to diverse employee needs.

Training, development, and personal growth opportunities were other significant factors impacting employee satisfaction. The findings that 69.6% of respondents feel encouraged to pursue personal growth and that 55.9% are satisfied with the organization's investment in training reflect the positive impact of professional development on employee engagement. However, the dissatisfaction expressed by a small portion of respondents, particularly those with fewer years of service, highlights the need for more consistent and accessible development opportunities. This finding resonates with O'Reilly and Chatman (2021), who argue that fostering a culture of growth and empowerment is essential to sustaining employee engagement.

Social events, teamwork, and collaboration also emerged as essential elements of organizational culture. The data indicate that 61.8% of employees agree that the organization promotes collaboration, and 63.7% are satisfied with the company's social events and team-building activities. This aligns with research by Driskell et al. (2018) and Armstrong and Taylor (2023), which underscores the importance of

fostering a sense of community and teamwork. However, the diminishing impact of social events over time, as highlighted by Driskell et al. (2018), suggests that such initiatives need to evolve and remain relevant to the changing needs of the workforce.

Moreover, alignment with organizational mission and values was a significant predictor of employee satisfaction. With 72.5% of employees feeling aligned with the company's mission, this finding supports Kotter and Heskett's (2019) assertion that when employees share the organization's values, they are more engaged and productive. This strong alignment contributes to employees finding their work meaningful and impactful, with 68.6% agreeing that their work is significant. However, the small percentage of employees who feel disconnected from the organization's mission underscores the need for continuous efforts to communicate and reinforce the organizational purpose.

While the findings of this study provide valuable insights, several limitations must be considered. The study's cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw conclusions about causality or how these factors might evolve over time. Additionally, the sample size, while representative, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different organizational departments or employee demographics. Future research should explore longitudinal studies that track changes in employee perceptions and satisfaction over extended periods, particularly in the context of leadership transitions. Based on the findings, it is recommended that organizations focus on enhancing communication regarding compensation and benefits, ensuring that adjustments align with employees' changing needs over time. Additionally, work-life balance policies should be made more flexible and communicated clearly to ensure effectiveness. Investment in training and development should be expanded to provide consistent opportunities for career growth, and social events and team-building activities should be regularly adapted to maintain their relevance and impact. Finally, reinforcing alignment with organizational values and recognizing employee contributions will continue to strengthen the overall

organizational culture and improve employee satisfaction and engagement.

By fostering an organizational culture that values communication, flexibility, and continuous development, companies can enhance employee well-being, satisfaction and performance in an ever-evolving work environment.

Qualitative Data Results Discussion

During the focus group discussions, six (6) Katubig employees were asked the same set of questions (two questions each).

When asked about the specific instances that they felt cared for by their company, all six employees responded that they felt “cared for” by the company by means of material offerings. These were in the form of bonuses, work-life balance, wellness leaves, compensation and benefits packages, health maintenance organization (HMO) and life insurance, care package, and flexible work schedule.

For the second EVP pillar, the opportunities to develop and grow, three (3) employees mentioned that they felt cared for when the company, through its leaders, provide coaching support and career growth opportunities. Promotion, in the form of regularization, and training opportunities to broaden the knowledge and skills of Katubigs were also mentioned.

Lastly, there was only one (1) respondent who gave instances of the culture of care relevant to the third and fourth pillars of EVP - connection and community, and, meaning and purpose. It can also be noted to that this sole employee responded with the manifestations of care addressing all four pillars of the EVP.

The second question in the FGD sessions gave a slight variation on the Katubigs’ perception on the organization’s people promise.

Despite gathering a higher number of responses in the first question, *material offerings* got an interesting response from one of the respondents. It can be noted that this respondent flagged that despite the company’s ability to foster care among its

employees, there were instances when productivity tools, particularly software applications/programs, were not provided at all. Although this was not of a big concern, the employee mentioned that they could have allotted the time that they were pouring on manual labor on more strategic activities or could have increased their productivity rate:

Another remarkable insight derived from the quantitative data would be that three (3) out of the six (6) respondents that the company was able to fulfill their meaning and purpose in the company, compared to other themes (with only one or two respondents mentioning manifestations).

CONCLUSION

The quantitative part of the research has explored the intricate relationship between Manila Water Company, Inc.’s People Promise and its organizational culture, highlighting the significant role that culture plays in shaping employee satisfaction and engagement. The findings affirm the critical importance of factors such as compensation, work-life balance, personal growth opportunities, and alignment with organizational values in influencing employee perceptions and satisfaction. While the company has been effective in providing competitive compensation and fostering a strong sense of alignment with its mission, discrepancies among long-tenured employees and variations in satisfaction with work-life balance and training opportunities suggest areas for improvement.

This also emphasizes the need for continuous evolution of social events, team-building activities, and career development programs to meet the diverse needs of the workforce. The results underscore the importance of maintaining transparent communication, offering personalized support, and adapting organizational initiatives to enhance long-term employee satisfaction and retention. By fostering a culture of flexibility, growth, and open communication, Manila Water can further strengthen its People Promise, leading to improved employee well-being, satisfaction, and overall organizational performance.

Future research could further explore these factors over time, utilizing longitudinal data to better

understand the impact of leadership transitions and evolving workforce needs.

The qualitative results from the focus group talks offer insightful information about Manila Water Company's culture of care, especially as it is experienced by its Katubig group employees. Most respondents cited material offers as important ways the organization shows concern, including competitive pay, bonuses, wellness initiatives, and flexible work hours. Their impression of being appreciated and supported by the company is greatly influenced by these material advantages. A number of workers also underlined the value of professional development possibilities, such as training programs, career coaching, and promotions, which encourage long-term investment from the business and a sense of advancement.

Regarding the more general cultural pillars of purpose, community, and connection, opinions differed. Even though only one worker expressly brought up these points, their reaction demonstrated a stronger sense of alignment with the organization's objective through engagement initiatives, crisis assistance, and possibilities for professional

advancement. This suggests that although the majority of Manila Water's care culture is focused on providing professional and material assistance, there is still opportunity to foster a feeling of community and purpose among staff members.

However, despite the company's care initiatives, there was still one employee who honestly expressed his concern about the provision of productivity tools, particularly a software application. This hampered efficiency and identified a gap in providing employees the necessary enabling mechanisms in order to carry out their roles effectively.

All things considered, the qualitative data points to a strong foundation of financial stability, individual welfare, and career advancement in Manila Water's culture of care. Nonetheless, the business has a chance to increase its emphasis on developing closer bonds and a sense of purpose among its employees. Manila Water might improve employee engagement and happiness even more by resolving these issues, which would ultimately help the business succeed in the long run.

Author Note: Data collection among randomly selected employees or "Katubigs" of the Manila Water Company, Inc. was approved by the Head of the Human Resources Department. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Alma Soliman at Unit G-29 Makati Executive Tower 1, Dela Rosa St., Pio del Pilar, Makati City, Philippines 1230

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[7303118 Leadership and the Ethics of Care](#)

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