**Motivating Your Work-Alone Employees**

Company XNT produces and retails large-size equipment that are installed on buildings. The installation time is rather lengthy, taking up to 8 months depending on the project size. For each project, a site manager is assigned to a construction location where he will work together with the installation workers and supervise the entire installation process.

In 2010, XNT started a big project located in Northern China. The estimated project installation time was three to four months. XNT had sent a site manager named Paul to the site in November of that year.

Although Paul was excited to have this opportunity, he couldn’t help feeling lonely on the job. The construction site was in a remote area that had no malls, restaurants, hotels or entertainment. He had to stay in a very small and poor motel in the village that was approximately 15 kilometers from the construction site. The motel did not offer breakfast, had poor internet and the availability of hot water was inconsistent. Every morning, Paul had to rent a motorbike to drive to the work site where he would stay until late at night. His lunch hour provided little relief as he was unaccustomed to the taste of the food.

As the days dragged on, Paul felt more and more tired and did not enjoy his work. Although he is proud that he has a postgraduate degree in mechanical engineering and found a decent job, the environment of his workplace was becoming unbearable. He remembered regretfully how the HR manager informed him that sometimes the travelling work could be very challenging and demanding.

To compound his worries, Paul’s wife called him nightly and confided about the difficulty of raising their son by herself in his absence. She worried that their son was becoming more disobedient in absence of his father. Eventually, her frustration spiraled to complain about Paul’s inability to help out with the family. Most of the time, Paul and his wife ended up quarrelling on the phone. This weighed heavily on Paul and he wondered whether his job was worth the trouble.

Paul’s annoyance with his work conditions and his wife’s complaints drove him to find an escape. Unfortunately, he started playing and became addicted to online gaming, so much so that he spent four to five hours a night playing games in his quest to escape from his worries.

As a routine check, a supervisor from XNT came to check the status of Paul’s project. Although Paul had an option of taking a break and going home for a few days, Paul was not ready to face the pressures from his wife. He also wanted to hurry to finish the installation so that he can go back home for good. It was almost Chinese Spring Festival and he wanted to start the New Year with a fresh beginning.

However, as expected, Paul did not concentrate on the work and spiraled into an addiction of online games. As Chinese Spring Festival approached, the pressure also increased. Paul felt anxious and the site management became a mess. Finally, unable to face his personal and professional worries, Paul submitted his resignation.

Stories of the resignation are similar in China – people are unable to withstand the work pressure, work environment, salary, welfare and family. Paul’s company is currently looking for solutions to make work deployments tolerable.

In this project, a major reason for employees resigning is the poor working environment and living conditions. One important question is therefore, how can the company better manage Paul’s expectations and assist his adjustment process to ensure a more effective project?

From the company’s perspective, it can be a waste of resources and talents to see well-trained employees resign in these cases. Hoping to avoid similar cases, the project manager has suggested the following improvements based on Paul’s case:

1. Improve the living condition on site for long term travel employees, and assist employees’ work-life balance;
2. Take care of the employees’ needs, especially the employees' needs related to long-term travel and needs to take care of family, children etc.
3. Encourage employees to take breaks for family/self-adjustment.
4. Improve the company training programs, enhancing employees’ ability to work in tough environments.
5. Improve the mental health assistance for long-term travel employees.

Do you think these actions may work? Why or why not?