

Organisational support for employees suffering with mental health issues: how Human Resource departments can work in conjunction with both employees and management to resolve this ongoing issue.

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Abstract

This study will examine the ongoing concern associated with mental health in the workplace, particularly within the IT sector, and will identify how various human resource (HR) teams can work in conjunction to make a positive impact on the day-to-day lives of employees who are suffering with mental illnesses. Addressing the issue of mental health is significantly important in the current COVID-19 era, where individuals across the globe have been deprived of many social freedoms which used to contribute towards attaining a healthy work life balance. For some the home is now the workplace, a tension filled office, and they have less relief from employment related issues. In addition there is the anxiety associated with being infected or of a loved one contracting the virus. Modern-day organisations employ a number of strategies geared at providing workplaces which are considered to be “psychologically safe” by their employees, and these strategies help to ensure that employees feel affiliated with the company’s brand so that they can bring their best selves to work. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilised in the form of semi-structured interviews and online surveys to garner an accurate, real-time representation of the initiatives organisations within the technology sector are adopting to address the current mental health crisis. The research will also attempt to bridge the gap between what employers should be doing and what employers are actually doing to facilitate the mental health discussion. Findings from this research highlight that a substantial number of organisations do not invest appropriately in providing training for their employees on how to recognise and manage individuals with mental illnesses. The outcome of the research also indicates that despite the alleged awareness of the importance of mental health in this contemporary society, organisations still possess certain levels of unconscious biases with regards to hiring individuals who suffer with their mental health.

Declaration

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Personal Learning Reflection

Mental health is an issue which has impacted us all at one stage in our lives. It is something that we all attempt to develop a better understanding of everyday due to the challenges it can pose on our personal and our professional lives. In this COVID-19 era, millions of people globally have lost their lives not only to the coronavirus, but also to suicide. Having daily pleasures taken away from us such as meeting a colleague for a coffee, going for a walk with a friend, or visiting a family member has inevitably had a detrimental impact on our mental wellbeing. It is imperative that organisations are cognisant of this and that they take the correct course of action to assist employees and to ensure that they feel equipped with the adequate resources to combat the ongoing issue. The research which I have conducted throughout the completion of this dissertation has assisted me in developing an in-depth understanding of the importance of truly understanding how to manage your own wellbeing, but also the wellbeing of others. Each individual has their own struggles, therefore it is now more important than ever that we all live with compassion, be it in the workplace or in our day-to-day lives.

Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to focus on the ongoing concern of mental health in the workplace and to examine the factors organisations must consider before implementing Human Resource (HR) practices and procedures to make a positive impact on employee wellbeing. HR functions such as recruitment and selection, learning and development, people analytics and performance management will all be reviewed in the context of the current global IT sector, as well as how each of these core functions can impact employee experience, and more importantly, employee wellbeing. The paper will also discuss a very significant question which all organisations should consider: are organisations doing enough to support employees who suffer with mental health issues, and if not, how can HR departments work in conjunction to combat this recurring problem? Although the issue of mental health in organisations is frequently addressed in organisations mission and vision statements, there is a significant absence of techniques which organisations can utilise to combat this ongoing dilemma. The topic of mental health in the workplace was chosen primarily due to its timeliness: the COVID-19 pandemic has inevitably had a significant impact on not just employees but on individuals

across the globe. According to research conducted by the Office for National Statistics, approximately 1 in 5 (21%) of adults suffered from a mental illness at the beginning of 2021, which is more than double the amount which was identified prior to the pandemic. Therefore, the primary purpose of the study is to identify how organisations can combat the prevalent issue of mental health in the workplace, particularly within the IT sector.

Human resources are the most valuable assets of a mental health service (Funk, 2005, p. 17) and HR personnel should possess the relevant skills and competencies to provide adequate support to employees suffering with mental health disorders. In 2015, it was reported that more than two-thirds of employers in the United States provide wellness programs to assist with promoting wellbeing in the workplace (Kohll, 2017). Multinational corporations in the tech industry such as Google encourage employees to participate in events such as “Wellness Thursdays”, which are focused on activities deemed to have a positive effect on employee wellbeing such as yoga, pilates and a variety of outdoor activities. Indeed also highlights the importance it places on mental health by providing employees with a day off every month to rest and recover (#YOUDay). However, the purpose of this research is to identify how organisations can improve what they currently offer to employees who are suffering with mental illnesses. A number of factors which have been identified as negative influencers on employee wellbeing will be discussed in detail throughout this study. Examples of such factors include labour intensification, long working hours, organisational culture and the issue of employees having to sit at their desks for long periods of time throughout their working day. Although a multitude of studies have highlighted that individuals of a higher socioeconomic status generally avail of more desirable working conditions (Siegrist & Marmot, 2004; Tausig, 2013), more recent studies have demonstrated that individuals who possess more profitable occupations may be exposed to more demanding workplace demands (Damaske, Zawadzki & Smyth, 2016; Koltai & Schieman, 2015). This is extremely important to consider within the context of this study, as although employees who work within the IT sector are perceived as successful in their careers, they are also exposed to long-working hours, rigorous to-do lists and excessive screen time. In the modern workplace, it has been identified that an extremely large number of employees spend over 50% of their working day seated (Pronk, 2021). Excessive time sitting at a desk not only has a negative impact on an individual’s physical health, but it can also yield detrimental impacts on one’s mental health.

The structure of this dissertation will commence with a literature review which will acknowledge the concept of mental health as well as a number of key HR functions which have an enormous impact on whether or not employees feel supported in their place of work. The literature review will also address a number of disparities in certain articles which must be addressed in order to establish an understanding of certain strategies which organisations within the tech industry should introduce to assist employees who suffer with mental illnesses. Advancements in the ICT sector

have had an indisputable impact not only on organisations, but on the world at large. Developments in technology have transformed the world immensely over the last 50 years, and such developments have led to extensive organisational change (Kew and Stredwick, 2016, p. 343). According to Builes (2015), technology has made a significant contribution towards organisational development throughout the last few decades, and it is crucial that organisations are cognisant of its impact. Research has shown that ICT has assisted with the development of more efficient, leaner organisational processes in developed countries and that it has also contributed towards the growth of developing countries (Builes, 2015, p. 87). According to the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) Ireland, the ICT industry employs more than 37,000 people and accumulates approximately €35 billion in annual exports (IDA, 2021). The global full-time employment in the technology sector was estimated to amount to approximately 55.3 million in 2020 (Statista, 2021). The primary players within the ICT sector are Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google and Microsoft, and these organisations have had an enormous impact on the world and on how smaller businesses manage their day-to-day operations. Companies within the technology sector are recognised globally for their efforts towards assisting employees who suffer with mental illnesses, however it is fundamental to be cognisant of the fact that such companies have also been exposed for “overworking” their employees. The concept of burnout will be alluded to throughout this study, as well as initiatives organisations can roll out to prevent this issue from occurring.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following is a review of the literature regarding different approaches organisations can use to assist employees with mental health issues. All of the literature reviewed pertains to a specific HR function, and each article assists with developing a holistic view of the research question.

2.1 The Concept of Mental Health

Mental health can be defined as a state of prosperity in which an individual is aware of his or her capabilities, can endure the stresses of day to day life, can work efficiently and fruitfully and is capable of making a positive impact on his or her community (World Health Organisation, 2004, p. 12). It is crucial to note that although this definition has positive connotations, it also assumes that feelings of optimism and the ability of an individual to operate in a positive manner are major influences for mental health. Waterman (1993) argues that it is completely normal for individuals that are considered “mentally stable” to experience feelings of sadness, anger and overall unhappiness, and states that this is what constitutes a fulfilled life.

Waterman also attempts to distinguish between two of the primary concepts of happiness, eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment. Eudaimonia is an ethical philosophy which challenges an individual to live in conformity with the daimon or their true identity (Norton, 1976). Contrarily, hedonic enjoyment is a state of well being attained by experiences of pleasure and gratification. Waterman also emphasises the value of self-realisation, and states that individuals should be able to identify whether or not their social institutions (for example, their place of work or their children's school) encourage or impede their journey to self-realisation (Waterman, 2004, p. 690).

Mental health disorders have been identified as one of the primary sources of absenteeism in the workplace and workplace disability in the majority of developed countries (Bevan and McGee, 2009, p. 546). Therefore, in order to improve productivity amongst employees and to boost morale, it is critical that organisations place an emphasis on developing an understanding of how to assist employees with mental illnesses. A mental disorder or illness can be characterised as a broad spectrum of mental health conditions which have a negative impact on an individual's mood, cognitive patterns and behaviour (Mayo Clinic, 2019). Mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, addiction, eating disorders and post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) will be discussed throughout this study, as well as their link towards workplace environments and managerial support systems. Although a multitude of organisations provide services to their employees to promote mental wellbeing on a personal level (for example, Employee Assistance Programs or EAPs), many organisations have inadequate support systems which attempt to improve the overall workplace environment. Bevan and McGee identify the importance of organisations focusing on environmental shifts which can promote positive wellbeing, including the provision of healthy food and drinks in workplace canteens, providing onsite gyms and posters which highlight the health benefits of simply taking the stairs instead of the lift (2009, p. 547). Such initiatives will be reviewed in more detail throughout this study, as well as their implications for the overall workplace.

2.2 Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment and selection refers to the process of attracting and retaining individuals who can provide significant value to an organisation (CIPD, 2021). This section will focus on the negative connotations associated with mental illnesses and how these connotations can impact the recruitment and selection process. A stigma can be characterised as a negative social behaviour towards an attribute of an individual that could be viewed as a mental, physical or social deficiency (VandenBos, 2015). A study conducted in 2019 highlights the perceived impact that negative stigmatizing behaviours towards mental illnesses can have on employee discrimination (Selezneva and Batho, 2019, p. 4). In the study, 162 participants were asked to

determine how likely they would be to recruit a job candidate who suffers from a mental illness. Results from the study demonstrated that the participants were noticeably less likely to recruit a candidate with a diagnosis of a mental illness such as depression. The outcome of this study also highlights that the stigmatisation of mental illnesses in the workplace is not limited to uneducated populations. In another study conducted by Koser et al., in which human resource professionals were provided with the option to recruit an applicant with either a physical disability or an applicant with a mental disability, 87.7% selected the candidate with the physical disability (1999, p. 217). This indicates that individuals with a physical disability are exposed to less discrimination in the workplace than individuals with a mental disorder such as depression (Mendel et al., 2015).

Although the authors are effective in their approach of establishing the number of issues employees with mental illnesses are exposed to in modern organisations, the article does not sufficiently address why employees stigmatise individuals with mental disorders. For example, are they apprehensive about hiring candidates with depression due to a concern that the new hire will experience burnout quite rapidly in the workplace? Burnout can be defined as a psychological disorder which is generally provoked by chronic interpersonal stress factors in a place of work (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Moreover, are hiring managers and recruiters concerned about recruiting employees with mental illnesses such as anxiety into sales roles because they may panic when they have to call a client or a customer? It is critical that recruitment professionals are educated about the reasons behind the stigmatisation towards mental illnesses in order to adequately support candidates and employees suffering from conditions such as depression and anxiety. It is also imperative that interviewers support interviewees suffering with anxiety and other mental illnesses. According to a recent survey conducted by JDP, approximately 93% of candidates have suffered from anxiety during an interview process (2020). In order to support candidates with interviewee anxiety, organisations could consult with Candidate Accommodations teams that focus on facilitating comfortable interview settings for candidates that suffer with mental illnesses. Organisations within the IT sector such as Google provide such a service to its candidates to ensure that candidates have a positive experience whilst interviewing for roles at the company. Google's Candidate Accommodations team provides candidates with the option to avail of an ASL interpreter (Google, 2021) and they also allow candidates to be accompanied by a service dog should they feel that this is required.

A study conducted by 'Time to Change' (an anti-stigma campaign) in 2015 revealed a 7% increase since 2009 in employee's willingness to work alongside someone with a mental illness (p. 5). Although this is an improvement, it is evident that employers still have a long way to go in terms of educating employees around reducing the stigma associated with having a mental illness. The survey also found that 7% of adults in the United Kingdom feel that people suffering with a mental illness should

not have the same rights to a job as individuals who do not suffer with their mental health (2015, p. 4). Since the inception of the Equality Act 2010, employers are not permitted to ask candidates questions about their health and wellbeing during recruitment processes (CIPD, 2018), and it is also no longer mandatory for employees to acknowledge whether or not they suffer from a mental illness. However, there are still a myriad of approaches organisations can take to ensure that candidates have access to the same job opportunities if they suffer from a mental illness. For example, recruiters can highlight the company's commitment to providing equal opportunities during the hiring process, such as in the job posting. Hiring teams can also place strong emphasis on the value the organisation places on advocating for wellbeing and can demonstrate that the company will support employees who suffer with a mental illness without discrimination. The Equality Act also highlights the importance of distinguishing between compulsory requirements and desirable requirements for job vacancies so that organisations can make adjustments should they be required (2018, p. 12). For example, job advertisements should disclose that 'there may be high levels of pressure during work-related events' rather than 'the successful candidate must be able to work efficiently in stressful work environments' as the latter insinuates that the employer is unable to manage work-related stress effectively. According to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) no less than one in four of us will experience issues with our mental health at a particular time in our lives (2016, p. 8). This statistic, combined with the annual expense for employers from absenteeism and presenteeism, may lead to hiring managers and recruiters feeling reluctant to employ new staff members. Squire Patton Bloggs (2017) outline a number of factors employers should consider prior to commencing any recruitment process. The importance of excluding unnecessary qualifications or requirements which may unethically exclude candidates with a mental illness is highlighted. The necessity of collecting accurate information throughout the selection process is also emphasised, stating that an organisation may be subjected to claims of discrimination from the candidate should they eliminate them from the process unjustifiably.

2.3 Learning and Development

Learning and Development (L&D) is a HR function which provides employees with the expertise, competencies and experience to accomplish individual as well as organisational objectives (CIPD, 2020). It is fundamental that an organisation establishes an appropriate HR policy for mental health in order to provide employees with a logical framework for development within the organisation. Funk (2005) emphasises the importance of providing continuous education, training and supervision to employees to ensure that they are provided with excellent care to help them excel in their professional lives and their personal lives. It is crucial that mental health programs are provided to employees at all levels to garner an understanding of how to assist their colleagues who could potentially be suffering with a mental

illness (Sikafi, 2019, p. 5). A survey conducted by the BCC and Aviva illustrates that only 18 percent of business leaders in the UK have implemented training programs for leadership teams so that they are equipped with the necessary skills to support employees (Marshall, 2018). Leadership teams should be able to lead by example with regards to educating employees on such issues, not only to manage issues such as a decline in productivity or an increase in absenteeism, but also to assist employees on a personal level. Sikafi (2019) also underlines that providing mental health-related training to employees is an effective way of creating a positive shift in workplace culture. Although both articles effectively highlight the number of benefits associated with providing learning and development opportunities to employees which focus on mental health, they do not provide specific examples of training programs which may be beneficial for employees. Google prides itself on providing a “psychologically safe” environment to its employees, and it provides training sessions regularly such as Precise Language training which focuses on how employees should manage their relationships and their dialogue with their colleagues, and also on the impact of microaggressions. Stress Management training sessions are also organised regularly by the Learning and Development team which focus on how employees can prevent burnout in their place of work, as well as in their personal lives.

There are a number of factors which L&D teams must consider before implementing new training programs focused on wellbeing. Each employee comes from a different background and has endured different life experiences, therefore it is imperative that L&D staff are cognisant of this whilst developing such initiatives. Eating disorders can be defined as an unhealthy attitude towards the consumption of food (Health Service Executive, 2018). There are a number of eating disorders however the most well-recognised of these are anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge eating disorder and other specified feeding or eating disorders (Healthline, 2017). Although developing training programs which focus on wellbeing and healthy eating is fundamental to ensure that employees can maintain a healthy work life balance and to educate employees on how to live more fulfilled lives inside and outside of work, it is crucial that L&D teams are conscious of the factors which may cause a negative reaction or a “trauma trigger”. A trauma trigger can be defined as an external circumstance or experience which can initiate negative emotional or psychological symptoms (MentalHelp, 2013). Although a number of internal factors such as low self esteem and genetics may yield to the development of an eating disorder, there are also a multitude of external factors which may trigger such issues as well. External factors or ‘triggers’ which may cause negative psychological responses include diet culture, unrealistic expectations of beauty and bullying. Although organisations have limited scope with regards to the avoidance of factors which may trigger eating disorders amongst employees, there are a number of initiatives that can be implemented. Leadership teams should invest in developing inclusive workplaces which foster productivity and wellbeing amongst employees (The National Eating Disorders Association, 2018). It is important to highlight that it may not be the employee who is

suffering from an eating disorder and that it may be one of their loved ones who is suffering. To ensure that employees are supported through such a formidable process, organisations should introduce flexible working patterns to ensure that employees can develop a sense of balance in their lives. This will allow them to take care of their loved one and also to maintain a healthy lifestyle and maintain productivity in the workplace.

L&D teams should educate employees on services which the company can provide to support them should they or their families be experiencing an eating disorder. EAPs are employment-based services which provide support to employees with psychosocial issues which may have a negative impact on their mental wellbeing (Health Service Executive, 2020). If employees wish to avail of this service, they can discuss this confidentially with their line manager and their manager can create an employee referral through the Health Service Executive (HSE). LinkedIn provides employees as well as their families with up to 8 free counselling sessions to ensure that employees feel supported, regardless of the magnitude of the issue (LinkedIn Careers, 2021). It is crucial that L&D teams advise employees on how to avail of such services so that employees have a support system should they or their family member(s) experience a mental health disorder.

2.4 People Analytics

People analytics, otherwise recognised as HR analytics or workforce analytics, is the examination of employee data in an attempt to resolve organisational issues (CIPD, 2020). This section will place emphasis on the initiatives which people analysts or HR analysts in the IT sector are currently introducing to make a positive impact on employee wellbeing. Mental illness is estimated to globally constitute for 32.4% of years lived with a disability (Vigo, 2016, p. 172), and was estimated to account for US\$1 trillion dollars in lost productivity in 2017 (WHO, 2019). Organisations must be cognisant that this cost does not only pertain to employee absenteeism due to mental health conditions, but also to the negative impact on employee morale for employees who remain in the organisation. Presenteeism can be defined as a loss of productivity amongst employees caused by physical and mental health issues (Gerich, 2019). It has been identified that presenteeism has contributed a larger economic cost than absenteeism and employer health expenses (Ammendolia et al, 2016, p. 1190). There are a multitude of factors which can impact employee wellbeing, including high job demand, a perceived imbalance between effort and reward, temporary employment status and low job control (Harvey et al, 2017, p. 302).

“Stress can be defined as the degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as a result of pressures that are unmanageable” (Mental Health Foundation,

2020). It is important to highlight that stress can provide a multitude of benefits to the human body, such as boosting the immune system and increasing motivation (Stringer, 2016, p. 8), however an individual cannot avail of these benefits if their levels of stress are not under control. If stress levels remain uncontrolled over long periods of time the tension in our bodies can result in developing severe health issues such as anxiety disorder, memory loss and depression. Therefore, HR professionals must place emphasis on constructing a number of initiatives which focus on encouraging employee wellbeing and therefore reducing workplace stress. A study conducted by the Radicati Group in 2015 illustrates that 19% of corporate emails received by employees are considered to be spam, however the remaining emails are considered to be justifiable requests. These alarming statistics point to the current issue of employees feeling constantly connected to their place of work due to the feeling of always being needed. Sherry Turkle, Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, proposes that technology has taken control of our day-to-day lives and states that this can be inextricably linked to the increases in anxiety worldwide (2011, p. 242). Thus, it is crucial that organisations consider the negative impact which long hours of screen time can have on an individual's wellbeing. Apple, a U.S. technology giant, encourages its employees to meditate for 30 minutes each day and the organisation provides meditation and yoga classes to its employees onsite. Steve Jobs, former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Apple promoted meditation in the workplace as he considered it to be a competitive advantage and also because he believed that it helps to keep employees engaged and creative (James, 2015). Other organisations such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Google also encourage staff to take time out of their day for mindfulness activities.

Mindfulness can be described as the process of self-regulating an individual's awareness regarding real-time experiences with an open, non-restrictive and accepting mindset (Bishop et al, 2004). Research has identified that mindfulness has a positive impact on the wellbeing of individuals, and organisational scholars have speculated that the practice encourages desirable behaviours from individuals (Good et al, 2005). A number of organisations within the IT sector such as Facebook and LinkedIn are investing heavily in activities such as mindfulness workshops due to the belief that employees will develop a more positive approach to work and that they will become more focused if they participate in such activities. Research conducted by Yu and Zellmeier-Bruhn (2018) indicates that promoting the practice of mindfulness amongst organisational teams can substantially reduce workplace conflict. Conflict can be characterised as perceived incompatibilities or speculations by an individual that they possess conflicting viewpoints to another individual (Jehn, 1995). It is crucial to note that it is difficult to identify whether the practice of mindfulness actually reduces conflict in a broad sense or if it simply assists individuals with managing conflict in a more sophisticated manner. However, it is important that organisations educate their employees on the importance of the practice as conflict has been demonstrated to contribute towards job satisfaction and

it also has a negative impact on employee productivity (De Dreu and Weingart, 2002). Studies have highlighted that employees who regularly engage in activities focusing on mindfulness approach difficult situations more objectively and that they are less inclined to over-analyse such situations (Monroe et al, 2013). Moreover, findings from contemporary research focused on working professionals has indicated that assisting employees with developing resilience and practising mindfulness can aid with preventing burnout and psychological anguish (Hilton et al, 2019).

Employee turnover can be defined as the number of employees who leave an organisation over a specific period of time which can be expressed as a percentage of an organisation's total number of employees (CIPD, 2020). Employee turnover can have a negative effect not only on an organisation's performance, but also on the employer brand, which can make it more challenging for organisations to attract and retain strong talent. Therefore, it is fundamental that management teams and HR professionals have a good understanding of the primary reasons why employees decide to leave the organisation. A resource and talent planning survey conducted by the CIPD in 2020 highlighted that the industries with the highest levels of employee turnover are the retail industry, the hospitality industry and the telemarketing industry. However, understanding why employees decide to leave an organisation should remain a priority for HR professionals and management teams working within the IT sector, as it is an industry which also experiences a high percentage of employee turnover. For example, the technology industry experienced an extremely high level of turnover in 2017 with a 13.2% average (LinkedIn, 2018). It can be difficult for organisations to develop insights into the actual reasons as to why an employee wants to leave due to the theory that individuals may be apprehensive about truly voicing their negative viewpoints about their manager, co-worker or the organisation (CIPD, 2020). Therefore, employees may be more inclined to provide more generalised reasons for their departure in their exit interviews. For example, employees may state that they have received an offer from another organisation which is more aligned with their career goals, rather than stating they have a personal issue with their line manager.

It is essential that HR professionals are cognisant of the inevitable connection between employee wellbeing and turnover. A study was conducted by Gallup (2018) which consisted of a random sample of 30,628 U.S. employees receiving surveys via email with questions focused on engagement. The results of the survey indicated that 53% of employees in the U.S. would describe themselves as "not engaged" with their role or their organisation, and 13% of employees were "actively disengaged". There are a number of reasons as to why an employee may feel disengaged with their role or their organisation, and it is important that HR professionals develop a sound knowledge of those reasons to positively manage employee attrition. Firstly, if an employee perceives that their organisation has a lack of career development opportunities, they may become disengaged with their role and may also experience burnout (Peakon, 2021). According to a report conducted by David MacLeod and

Nita Clarke (2009) for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, engaged employees are 87% less inclined to leave an organisation than a disengaged employee. This highlights the importance HR professionals and leadership teams should place in providing initiatives which enhance employee engagement.

Employee engagement can be defined as the degree to which an employee feels committed and affiliated to an organisation (SHRM, 2021). It has become a pivotal driver of organisational success, and organisations which have highly engaged employees generally benefit from customer loyalty, retained staff and high stakeholder value. Schaufeli et al have described employee engagement as a 'positive, fulfilling, work related-state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption' (2002, p. 74). According to Macleod and Clarke (2009) engagement, which can be described as going to the heart of the relationship between the employer and the employee, can fundamentally alter the mindsets of employees who associate Mondays as being a particularly low part of the week. Although employee engagement was identified as the primary focus of HR professionals in Ireland in a 2018 survey (CIPD, 2018), a number of organisations in today's competitive marketplace do not invest sufficiently in strategies which can promote employee engagement, which can result in employee dissatisfaction. Job design refers to the practice of determining job roles and what specific tasks are associated with a job, as well as how the job relates to other departments and a company's framework (CIPD, 2020). The primary objective of job design is to improve work processes as well as productivity, however it is crucial that organisations and HR professionals are cognisant of employee attitudes and behaviours towards their roles to avoid employee dissatisfaction. Walker and Guest (1952, p. 120-122) conducted a study amongst employees in an automotive plant, and the results indicated a strong affiliation between employee absenteeism and repetitive tasks. In other words, individuals with roles which involve completing monotonous tasks with little autonomy on a daily basis were more inclined to take time off work than their colleagues who had more challenging, autonomous roles.

It is important that organisations are able to successfully identify the primary reasons as to why employees feel dissatisfied or disengaged in their work. It is also crucial that an organisation is able to distinguish between employee engagement and employee satisfaction. Herzberg developed the dual-factor theory, which is also known as the motivator-hygiene theory (French & al. 2011, 167-168) to identify the difference between factors which prevent employee dissatisfaction ('hygiene factors') and factors which cause employee satisfaction ('motivator factors'). Examples of hygiene factors are pay, physical working conditions and job security (see Appendix A). It is critical to note that such factors do not yield long-term employee satisfaction in an organisation, however they are essential factors which must be incorporated within an organisation to prevent dissatisfaction. Contrarily, motivational factors (or "satisfiers") have a direct impact on employee satisfaction, and can be introduced by organisations to enhance employee engagement. Examples of motivational factors

include personal development, recognition and career advancement (see Appendix A). HR professionals should be cognisant of the link between employee wellbeing and employee engagement. Studies conducted by Schaufeli et al (2002) highlighted a negative correlation between employee engagement and burnout, and research conducted by Iverson et al (1998) has identified a strong link between emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and depression.

Stringer (2016) also provides a number of tables which organisations can use to improve the overall state of wellbeing in the workplace, and ranks each strategy in terms of the level of difficulty required to introduce each policy. With regards to reducing stress levels, Stringer advises that HR personnel allow employees to have more autonomy over their working hours as well as allowing them to bring their pets to work. He also advises that HR employees should encourage employees to use their vacation time (see Appendix B). It is HR's responsibility to develop workplace cultures which support employees who are experiencing mental illnesses. A survey conducted by Mental Health American (MHA) in 2017 indicated that 63% of respondents disclosed that their mental health has been negatively impacted by workplace stress (Hellebuyck et al, p. 8). HR professionals should be aware that if workplace stress permeates into an employee's personal life it may result in employees resorting to unhealthy activities such as binge drinking. Work-related stress may also lead to employees feeling secluded in their place of work due to the cultivation of a hostile or adversarial environment. Hellebuyck et al's survey highlighted that 37% of participants suffered from feelings of isolation and loneliness due to an unsupportive working environment (2017, p. 8). It is critical that HR analysts or People Consultants work directly with leadership teams to establish realistic work expectations and positive working relationships across all of the different functions in an organisation to contribute towards the reduction of sentiments of isolation and stress amongst employees. Job redesign can be defined as the rearrangement of tasks, duties and responsibilities to make a role more propitious and inspiring for employees (Achieng et al, 2014, p. 115). Restructuring an employee's role to encourage greater levels of autonomy and individual decision-making allows employees to feel a greater sense of fulfilment and empowerment. It can also contribute towards the reduction of stress and burnout, as employees feel empowered to take control of their work day (CIPD, 2020).

Virtual therapy sessions and other healthcare facilities could be introduced by organisations. Online therapy services are becoming increasingly prevalent in today's COVID-19 era, where the majority of employees no longer have access to onsite therapists and other health care facilities provided by their organisation. Goali Saedi Bocci, a clinical psychologist based in Portland, regards online mental health services as confidential, accessible and comfortable for all parties involved (2019). Although the benefits associated with providing remote mental health facilities to employees are considered, it is not abundantly clear how organisations can

successfully introduce such features. For example, will employees have to apply for appointments with therapists? Will the therapists be core employees or outsourced?

The status of employment contracts should also be reviewed. A survey conducted by Waaijer et al (2017) focused on 1133 respondents who achieved a PhD from one of five universities in the Netherlands between 2008 and 2013. The results of the survey indicated that PhDs that are recruited under temporary contracts of employment are less satisfied with their conditions of employment, particularly if they have no possibility of becoming a permanent member of staff (p. 332). Employees that are hired under temporary contracts of employment may be constantly plagued by the worry and anxiety of finding a new job after their contract comes to a natural cessation. Although there are a multitude of benefits which can be achieved by organisations through the introduction of temporary contracts, such as being able to accommodate for fluctuations in the economic environment (Bertrand-Clodt et al, 2012), organisations should also consider the negative impacts temporary contracts have on employee wellbeing and also on the employer brand. Multinational technology corporations such as Google and Facebook are both universally recognised for hiring large volumes of temporary employees. In order to combat the ongoing issue of mental health in the workplace, organisations should strive to provide more opportunities for temporary employees to obtain more secure working conditions. For example, Google could provide shadow sessions or rotation programs where temporary employees can have trial periods in different roles which may be of interest to them. Leadership teams could also focus on increasing the number of headcount per team during recruitment surges to provide more opportunities for contingent workers to apply for permanent positions.

2.5 Performance Management

Performance management can be defined as the process of maximising value and encouraging employees to positively contribute to an organisation's objectives (CIPD, 2020). HR professionals should work with line management to enforce performance management systems which are inclusive to all employees regardless of their specific learning styles. Performance reviews, or performance appraisals, are an example of a number of performance management techniques that aim to ensure that an employees' performance contributes to business objectives (CIPD, 2019), however it is important that organisations consider the wellbeing of employees whilst managing these processes. Kirsh et al (2018) identify a multitude of approaches supervisors can implement to contribute towards the success of employees with mental health issues. These methods include creating an inclusive workplace culture, evenly distributing job duties to prevent burnout and providing team development activities to employees (p. 548). Kirsh et al also conducted interviews

with eleven supervisors to develop an understanding of how management teams can work collaboratively to identify when an employee is suffering from mental health issues. The results of the interviews indicate the most common signs experienced by management that indicate that an employee is suffering with a mental illness, such as irritability, absenteeism, loss of appetite and social detachment (Kirsh et al, 2018, p. 550). Inger and Gunnarsson conducted a study in 2018 which involved interviewing 12 employers who had experience managing employees with mental health issues. The results of the study allude to the loss of productivity caused by mental health issues, which mainly reveal themselves in the form of absenteeism and presenteeism (2018, p. 2). The lack of awareness amongst managers regarding how to manage employees with mental health problems in the workplace has also resulted in unnecessary increases in absenteeism and large productivity declines (Klachefsky, 2013, p. 34).

Initiating conversations about mental health in the workplace can be quite challenging, as employees may feel a sense of judgement due to the large number of people that consider suffering with mental illnesses as a personal failure. It is important to be cognisant of different demographics such as age when discussing the topic of mental health. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), 62% of Millennials (i.e. individuals born between 1981 and 1996) feel comfortable to disclose their struggles with mental health in their place of work (2019). On the contrary, only 32% of Baby Boomers (i.e. individuals born between 1946 and 1964) are open to broaching the subject of mental health in the workplace. Organisations such as EY and Johnson & Johnson (J&J) have implemented a multitude of mental health initiatives for their employees. J&J has introduced a Stress Management/Resilience Program which focuses on healthy eating programs, stress management tactics and fitness promotions to ensure that employees can bring their best selves to work (APA, 2005). EY provides training programs to management to assist them with identifying the early stages of a mental illness so that they can support their employees before the mental illness escalates. As previously discussed, employees suffering with a mental illness tend to display signs such as a decline in productivity or a loss of interest in their day to day tasks. Management teams should take this into consideration before putting employees on programs such as Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs), as these can have negative implications on employee wellbeing and can make them feel as though they are not good enough. Through the provision of clear objectives, feedback and support to employees, managers can contribute towards cultivating positive working environments which champion well-being and resilience (CIPD, 2020).

It is also crucial that organisations are cognisant of the link between mental health and addiction. Approximately 70% of individuals in the United States take at least one prescription drug and 50% use at least two (Mayo Clinic, 2013). It has also been reported that roughly 14 million US citizens have been linked to alcohol abuse or are alcoholics (MedicineNet, 2019). Therefore, management must be able to identify the

early stages of such conditions so that they can manage and support employees accordingly. For example, management could look at modifying an employee's working hours or they could provide employees with paid time off (PTO) to attend support groups and counsellors should they suspect signs of alcohol abuse (de Leon, 2019). Providing employees with tasks which make them feel a sense of purpose along with the provision of realistic deadlines for the completion of tasks will assist with reducing work-related stress which can develop into poor mental health (CIPD, 2020). Management should also educate employees on how to access mental-health services funded by employers such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) so that employees feel supported and appreciated.

Chapter Three: Research Question

From the literature presented, it is evident that mental health in the workplace is becoming an increasingly critical issue for organisations to address. The overall objective of this research is to identify how human resource teams can work in conjunction with employees and management to improve how organisations support employees suffering with mental illnesses. The evaluation and the results of the research endeavours to build on existing studies related to wellbeing in the workplace and will aim to address any gaps in the findings of previous researchers to develop new insights into the research question. Finally, recommendations will be provided to assist organisations with supporting employees who suffer with mental illnesses. A number of sub-objectives have been considered in order to successfully attain the purpose of this study:

Objective One: What are the most prominent methods utilised by HR professionals to address the ongoing issue of mental health in the workplace? It was observed from the literature reviewed for the purpose of this study that a large number of organisations have utilised a number of strategies to assist employees with mental illnesses. Such strategies include Employee Wellness Days, Employee Assistance Plans (EAPs), Candidate Accommodations programs and training programs which educate management on how to support employees with their wellbeing. However the objective of this research is to identify whether or not such strategies are effective, and also to develop insights into other initiatives which should be introduced.

Objective Two: Are employees and candidates comfortable discussing the topic of mental health with colleagues and management? Findings from the literature highlighted that employees and candidates feel reluctant to disclose whether or not they are suffering with a mental illness due to the stigma associated with having a mental illness. The researcher endeavours to identify why a stigma still exists on the topic of mental health and how organisations can address this stigma by encouraging employees to be open about their individual experiences with mental illnesses.

Objective Three: Is there a correlation between workplace burnout and demanding working conditions? The literature review established that there is a correlation between emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and depression. The methodology section aims to highlight how organisations can support employees who may be experiencing burnout and it will also examine a number of strategies which organisations within the IT sector are utilising to combat this issue.

Objective Four: What strategies do employees in cross-functional HR teams believe should be incorporated to improve wellbeing in their organisations? Through semi-structured interviews as well as qualitative surveys, the researcher endeavours to develop a thorough understanding of what initiatives HR professionals believe will be effective at reducing the rates of mental illness within the organisation.

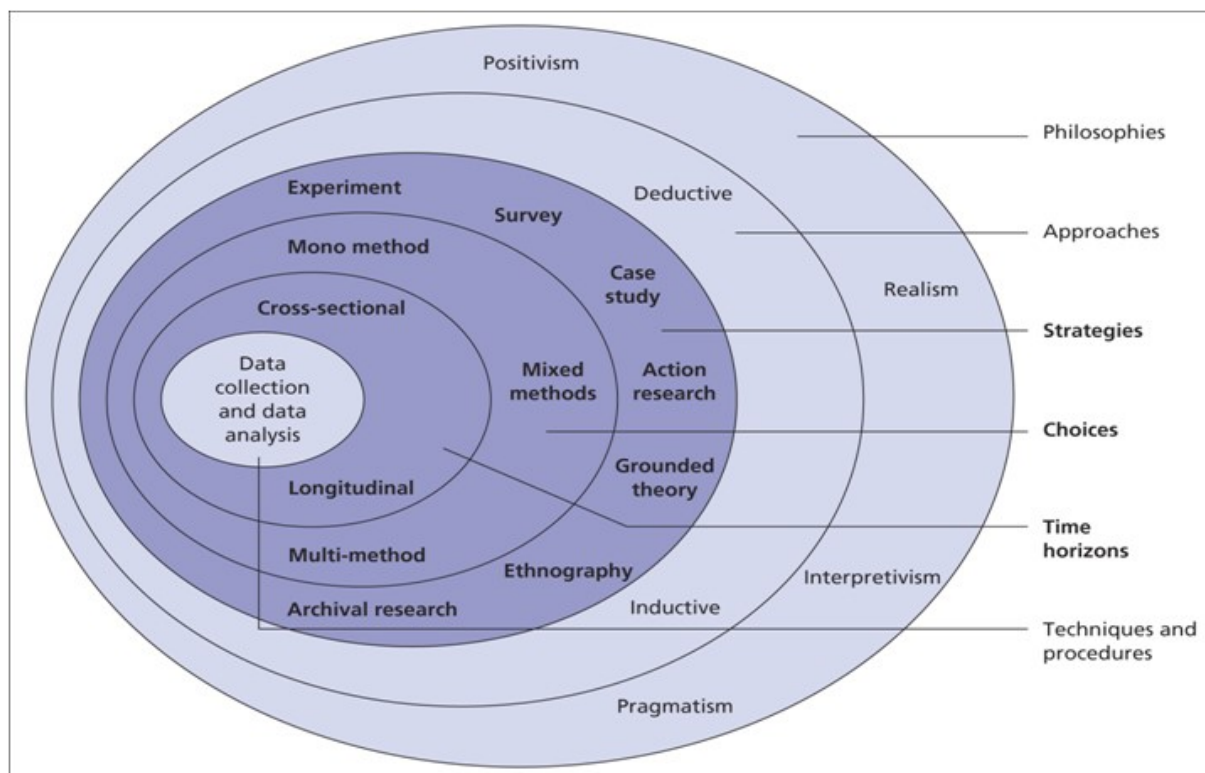
Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Overview

In this chapter a number of various research methods available to the researcher will be examined. The chapter will also determine which research methods were selected and it will justify why such methods were chosen in the context of the research question at hand, which is to assess how HR professionals can work in conjunction with employees and management to resolve the ongoing issue of mental health in the workplace. The primary qualitative research methods employed by the researcher were semi-structured

interviews and surveys. A total of five interviews were conducted with employees who work for various organisations in the IT sector and each of the interviewees work in different departments under the umbrella of HR. A qualitative survey was distributed to a number of working professionals in my LinkedIn network. It was imperative that each participant currently works or has worked within the IT sector in order to ensure that all of the information collected would be relevant for the study. Potential alternative methods will also be discussed in detail, as well as the reasons as to why these particular methods were not utilised to methods were not employed during the research process.

4.2 Research Process



4.2.1 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders et al (2009) research philosophy is an overarching term which describes the development of knowledge and the essence of that knowledge. To assist with the process of deciding which research philosophy was the most appropriate for the research question at hand, the research onion which was developed by Saunders et al (2007) was utilised (please see image above). In order for an objective to be obtained, the appropriate course of

action must be taken. Saunders et al's approach highlights the importance of this, by identifying that a researcher must complete one step correctly prior to proceeding to the other. The three main research philosophies which will be discussed are epistemology, ontology and axiology.

Epistemology

According to Burrell and Morgan (2016) epistemology refers to presumptions about knowledge, what establishes great knowledge and the contrast between belief and knowledge.

Positivism

Positivism is a philosophical system which identifies that knowledge must be measurable and observable in order to be considered valid (Saunders et al, 2019, p. 134).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a philosophical system which considers an individual's perceptions of the world and attempts to understand such perceptions through observations and interviews.

Ontology

According to Saunders et al (2019) ontology can be defined as assumptions about the concept of existence.

Objectivism

Objectivism can be defined as the belief that social entities have an existence which is independent of social actors (Bryman, 2015).

Subjectivism

Subjectivism incorporates the theory that social entities are continuously being impacted by social actors (Saunders et al, 2019, p. 137). This doctrine is fundamental when conducting research on mental health and wellbeing, as concepts such as happiness and gratification are subjective; i.e. each individual has a distinctive view on what such concepts mean. MacLeod and Conway (2005) reinforce this ideology in their theory of Subjective Well Being,

stating that if an individual believes that they are mentally well, then their actual wellbeing may be positively impacted.

Deductive Theory

The concept of the deductive theory is beginning with an overarching theory and applying that theory to a specific case (Sekeran and Bougie, 2010). The deductive theory can therefore be identified as a positivist strategy which employs qualitative research methods.

Inductive Theory

Contrarily, the inductive theory outlines that a conclusion is established through the observation of specific phenomena (Sekeran and Bougie, 2010). This approach can be classified as an interpretivist strategy which implements a qualitative approach.

Quantitative Methods and Qualitative Methods

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research can be defined as data collection approaches (such as questionnaires) or data analysis practices (such as graphs or statistics) which generate or manipulate numerical data (Saunders et al, 2007, p. 145).

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a research approach which generally emphasises words in lieu of quantification in the compilation and analysis of data. As a research method, it is considered to be inductivist, constructivist and interpretivist (Bryman, 2008, p. 366). Qualitative research is commonly identified as a direct variation to quantitative research as it examines behaviours, attitudes and experiences through methods such as interviews (Dawson, 2009, p. 14). The researcher focused primarily on qualitative research methods as this form of research attempts to understand individual perceptions on the research topic. Babey (2019) identifies that researchers utilise qualitative methods to thoroughly assess individual viewpoints rather than delving into statistical approaches. Qualitative research methods will assist the researcher in developing an understanding of the current state of mental health in the IT sector as well as aiding in identifying further insights into how the current state of mental health can be improved.

Interviews

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews (SSIs) as they allowed the researcher to garner a sound knowledge of the independent viewpoints of each participant (Newcomer et al, 2015, p. 494). The interviewees were chosen utilising a process of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling can also be defined as a form of *judgmental* or *expert* sampling and is an example of non probability sampling (Lavrakas, 2008). Purposive sampling is extremely effective as it allows the researcher to select interviewees that are particularly knowledgeable or experienced regarding a specific research topic (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). SSIs were conducted with a total of five HR professionals from various HR teams to ensure that a holistic view of the current state of wellbeing in the workplace was developed. Interviews were conducted with a Talent Acquisition specialist, a Learning and Development specialist, a HR Operations specialist and a Wellness specialist. The mean age of participants which were involved in the study was 28.5 years old, ranging from 25 to 32 years old.

According to Adams (2015, p. 492) SSIs can also be referred to as “qualitative interviews” due to the technique involving interviewers asking a high volume of open-ended questions. The primary objective of an interview is to get into the research cohort's mind and to view the issue from their perspective (Patton, 1990). There are a number of considerations which must be reviewed prior to conducting SSIs. SSIs can be extremely practical for researchers to learn about the independent viewpoints of each participant, as the participants are essentially left to their own devices to answer the questions in an autonomous fashion (Newcomer et al, 2015). They are also exceptionally effective at delving into undiscovered issues and creating breakthroughs in a specific field. However, despite the multitude of benefits a researcher can avail of through the use of semi-structured interviewing, it is important to be cognisant of the potential drawbacks of the technique. Firstly, SSIs can consume a high volume of the researcher's time, due to the amount of preparation required to prepare and conduct the interviews. They are particularly difficult to prepare for during a global pandemic, as potential issues such as poor internet connectivity and participant engagement must also be considered. In order to achieve the best results from a SSI, interviewers must probe participants effectively and they must ask the appropriate follow-up questions (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). If an interviewer fails to actively listen and does not prepare effectively prior to conducting the interview, they are at risk of not maximising their productivity and may not gather sufficient information about their topic of interest. Finally, factors such as the body language and other non-verbal cues are difficult to identify when interviews are not conducted face to face, therefore considerable emphasis was placed on studying the reactions of each interviewee to truly understand their responses.

Surveys

This method of research was selected as the purpose of this study was to examine the cause and effect relationships between a number of variables associated with mental health in the workplace, particularly in the context of the IT sector. A survey which focused on mental health in the IT sector was generated online using Google Forms. Prior to distributing the survey link to all of the relevant participants, an initial survey was piloted amongst 5 different participants. This was to identify potential areas for improvement and also to gauge whether the survey efficiently tackles the subject at hand. The results of the pilot study indicated that the initial survey required additional multiple choice questions to ensure that the results of the survey were accurate. They also indicated that some questions were not relevant for all participants (for example, not all participants have been working from home since the beginning of the pandemic, therefore questions focused on mental health whilst working remotely required a neutral option for participants). Upon completion of the pilot study and the modification of the initial survey, a link to the survey was then distributed to working professionals in my LinkedIn network who work in the global IT sector. A total of 62 responses were accumulated. Participants from a range of various departments in different organisations within the IT sector were selected to ensure a holistic approach to data analysis. To ensure all participants were honest in their responses, they were advised that their information would remain confidential and anonymous. Access to the survey was available for six weeks to provide participants with adequate time frames for completion. Existing surveys focused on mental wellbeing in the workplace and how HR professionals support employees with mental illnesses were also analysed and incorporated into the survey to ensure that all areas of mental health were addressed appropriately. Surveys are categorised as a deductivist approach to research as they consider existing theories and aim to build on them to develop a holistic approach.

It is important for researchers to be conscious of the benefits and drawbacks associated with utilising Web-based surveys as a research method. Firstly, web-based surveys are highly inclusive, due to having access to a global audience which is consistently evolving alongside the World Wide Web (WWW) (Wyatt, 2000, p. 428). They are also extremely cost-effective and less time consuming than a variety of alternative research methods. Conducting surveys online eliminates the requirement for paper resources and data entry inaccuracies can be prevented through the use of automated data checking (Schmidt, 1997, p. 274). There are also a number of potential drawbacks associated with using Web-based surveys as a research method. Firstly, respondents may overlook or skip certain questions, either because they intend to answer a certain question at the end due to requiring time to think about the question at hand, or because they may feel apprehensive about answering the question due to it being of a personal nature. In order to avoid such issues, researchers should build trust prior to conducting a survey, and all participants should be advised that their personal information will remain confidential. Another potential drawback which researchers should be aware of is the issue of

participants responding multiple times to a survey, which can manipulate the overall result. The results of a survey conducted by Byte (1996) which focused on the various types of operating systems downloaded on desktop machines are a good example of this issue. When Byte employees reviewed the results of the survey in depth and analysed the server log, they identified that a large volume of respondents had answered the survey on a number of occasions. To prevent this issue from occurring, researchers can issue participants with one-time passwords (Schleyer and Forrest, 2000, p. 417), however this process requires IT expertise and may be time consuming for the researcher.

4.2.2 Research Design

The aim of this study was to identify the measures organisations are currently taking to assist employees with mental health issues, and also to establish where such organisations could do more to address the overarching issue. A combination of interpretivist and subjectivist approaches were utilised, as each individual has different perceptions on the concept of mental health and its importance in an organisation.

4.3 Setting and participants

For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually via Google Hangouts in order to comply with COVID-19 legislations. Interviews were conducted with four employees and each were from different HR departments, including a Learning and Development specialist, a Talent Acquisition specialist, a People Operations or HR generalist and a Senior Wellness specialist. All participants currently work within the IT sector in Ireland, and have had exposure to a variety of issues in the workplace associated with mental health. Qualitative research methods are effective in developing insights particularly in the area of mental health as the researcher is exposed to additional information such as body language, tone of voice and eye contact. A survey was also conducted to develop further insights into this field and to target a wider sample of participants.

4.4 Instrument

To maximise the results of the interviews and to explore common themes, a number of similar questions were posed to each interviewee. A variety of unique questions were also posed to each interviewee in order to tailor the questions towards the roles of each participant and also to develop new insights into the research question at hand. In regards to the survey, a combination of questions from previous surveys which focused on mental wellbeing in the workplace as well as new questions which focused on the same topic were utilised in order to ensure that the study would be executed efficiently. This allowed the researcher to address potential gaps and inconsistencies in previous research and to develop new insights into the topic at hand. The survey commenced with an opening statement which highlighted the primary objectives of the study and also advised respondents to follow up with the researcher should they wish to discover the outcome of the study.

4.5 Measuring the factors which impact organisational wellbeing

4.5.1 Section 1: General Information

The beginning of the survey contained clear and concise questions which were focused on gathering personal information from the respondents. Such questions included their consent to engage with the research questions and also general, straight forward questions which focused on developing a sound knowledge on the participants current work situation (what level they are at within their organisation and what business area they work in).

4.5.2 Section 2: Organisational support towards mental health

Participants were tasked with answering a number of questions focused on their organisation's initiatives which were introduced to support employees experiencing issues with their mental health. Each question contained linear scales ranging from 1-5 (1 representing 'Strongly Agree' and 5 representing 'Strongly Disagree') and participants had the responsibility to rate their experiences with each initiative. This section also focused on probing each participant on their relationship with their line manager and to identify whether or not they would feel comfortable discussing the topic of mental health with their manager.

4.5.3 Section 3: Initiatives which will improve the overall mental health situation

In this section participants were presented with various multiple choice questions which encouraged them to disclose what strategies they feel their organisations should implement to support employees who suffer with a mental illness. Multiple choice questions were employed to ensure that all participants' personal situations were considered and to establish a more personalised approach. It was imperative to the researcher that the COVID-19 pandemic was addressed effectively within the survey, as it has inevitably had a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of employees across the globe. However, it was crucial that these questions were asked in a sensitive manner in order to be considerate of the participants who had been negatively impacted by the pandemic (for example, if certain participants had lost jobs due to the pandemic or, worse again, had lost a family member or friend due to the pandemic). The topic of anxiety was also addressed within the survey due to the impact it has had on employees across the globe in the last decade.

4.6 Data Analysis

According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013) qualitative data analysis refers to the process of “breaking data into meaningful parts”. The primary methods of qualitative data analysis employed by the researcher were content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis. Content data analysis can be described as a systematic and objective method of characterising and dissecting data (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). To accurately interpret the results of the data presented in the interviews, the researcher invested a significant amount of time reading and identifying significant nuances within the participants' answers. Whilst analysing data it is crucial to establish key themes and underlying sentiments in order to develop a thorough understanding of the research topic at hand. Thematic data analysis can be described as the process of evaluating, analysing, organising and describing themes identified within a set of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As all of the interviewees worked within the same industry and were all relatively close in age, a number of common themes and sentiments were gathered from their responses. However, in order to develop new insights and

to delve deeper into the concept of mental health, it is fundamental that the researcher is able to identify the key differences between each interview. For example, although each interviewer gave the impression that they were passionate about the concept of organisations providing support to their employees, one of the interviewees emphasised that their organisation lacks sufficient support systems for employees suffering with mental illnesses. This particular interviewee mentioned that although their organisation's HR team sends out regular wellness emails with tips and tricks on how employees can invest in their wellbeing, they feel as though their organisation needs to invest in the provision of training to senior management all the way down through to individual contributors. On the contrary, the other three interviewees were extremely content with the systems their organisations have in place to support employees who suffer with mental illnesses. One of the interviewees mentioned that their organisation has a Behavioural Health Team which specialises in researching the topic of mental health and developing insights into the phenomenon to support all staff members. It is crucial to note that one of the interviewees highlighted the importance of individual line managers providing direct support to their employees. The interviewee mentioned that a culture of wellbeing does not always permeate through to all levels of employees in a large organisation as each manager has their own interpretation of mental health and how it should be managed effectively.

Google Forms provided instant statistical interpretations of the results of the survey in Pie Chart form, which allowed the researcher to analyse the results in an efficient, methodological manner. These visual representations will be presented to the reader in Chapter to interpret the data efficiently. The researcher also constructed a Google Sheet to input the results of the data in order to compare them to the results of previous studies.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

“The term ‘ethics’ usually refers to the moral principle and guiding conduct, which are held by a group or even a profession” (Wellington, 2015). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of mental health, it was imperative that all interviewees were made aware of the intentions of the researcher prior to conducting the interviews. The interviewees were also informed that they would remain anonymous throughout the research process and were reassured that

the information they provided would remain confidential. Finally, participants were advised that this was a voluntary process and that they could withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so. Through the development of trust amongst participants, it was anticipated that interviewees would respond to the interview questions in an open and honest manner.

4.8 Limitations

Although the research was conducted amongst HR professionals who have a sound knowledge of mental health in the workplace and how organisations are attempting to support employees suffering with mental illnesses, the results formed from the interviews would be partially broad or generalised in nature. This is due to the fact that every individual has their own unique perception of mental health and how the issue should be combatted.

It is also crucial to note that all of the interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals have been fundamentally stripped from a number of things that used to bring them joy in their day-to-day lives, such as going for a coffee with a friend at work or going to the gym. Therefore, participants may have been inclined to have had more of a negative view towards how their organisations address the ongoing mental health phenomenon. However, participants were advised to answer as objectively as possible to ensure the accuracy and validity of data collected.

4.9 Conclusions of Methodology

In conclusion, by utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the researcher was able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic of mental health in the workplace. The research methods also provided the researcher with crucial insights into the initiatives which organisations within the IT sector are currently focusing on to address the ongoing issue, as well as what organisations need to place more emphasis on.

Chapter Five: Results

5.1 Overview

This chapter will identify the main findings of each research method employed by the researcher through the use of graphs and other visual representations. The presentation of data through visual diagrams allows the reader to easily understand the results and also to identify the link between the research question and the results of the study. As two separate forms of qualitative research methods were utilised, it was important to present the results of each method in a clear, concise manner but also to accurately portray the main findings of each method in order to highlight the effectiveness of each.

5.2.1 Survey

Section A: General Information

The purpose of this section was to gather general information about the research participants in order to identify the key trends and links between different demographics and the mental health phenomenon. The respondents participant rate was 68.8% female and 31.3% male (see Diagram A). In relation to age, 79.2% of survey respondents fell under the 18-30 age bracket, 16.7% fell under the 31-40 age bracket and 2.1% fell under the 41-50 bracket (see Diagram B). 85.2% of respondents currently work in an organisation which has 500 or more employees, an interesting insight as a large number of tech organisations are startups and do not all employ such high numbers of staff.

Diagram A

What gender do you identify as?

62 responses

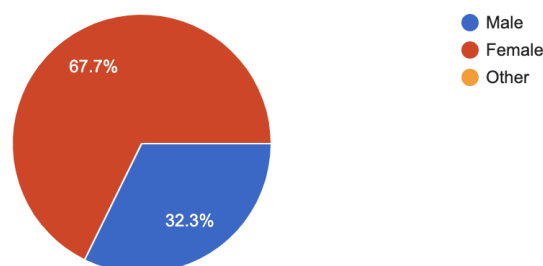
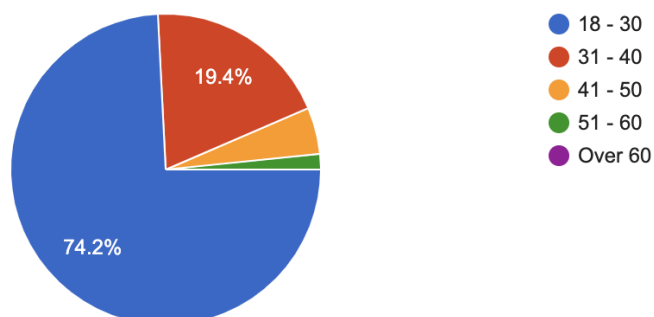


Diagram B

What age group do you fall under?

62 responses



Section B: Organisational support towards mental health

The objective of section two of the survey was to focus on each respondent's organisation and the initiatives each organisation has in place to support employees who experience difficulties with their mental health. Respondents were presented with a linear scale for each question (1 pertaining to 'Strongly Agree' and 5 pertaining to 'Strongly Disagree'). The majority of respondents (29.6%) chose option 2 when asked about the extent to which their organisations focus on supporting employees with mental illnesses. On the contrary, 48.1% of respondents disclosed that their mental health has been negatively affected since they have started working remotely i.e. since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Diagram C). However it is fundamental to note that 55.6% of respondents are satisfied with the strategies their organisations have put in place to support their wellbeing throughout the pandemic (see Diagram D). When survey participants were asked whether they feel their management teams are equipped with the correct tools and knowledge to support employees with mental illnesses, 24.1% of respondents selected 'Strongly Disagree'. This result reinforces a number of the findings of the semi-structured interviews which alluded to the concept that there was not sufficient levels of support towards wellbeing from senior management.

Diagram C

My mental health has deteriorated whilst working remotely

62 responses

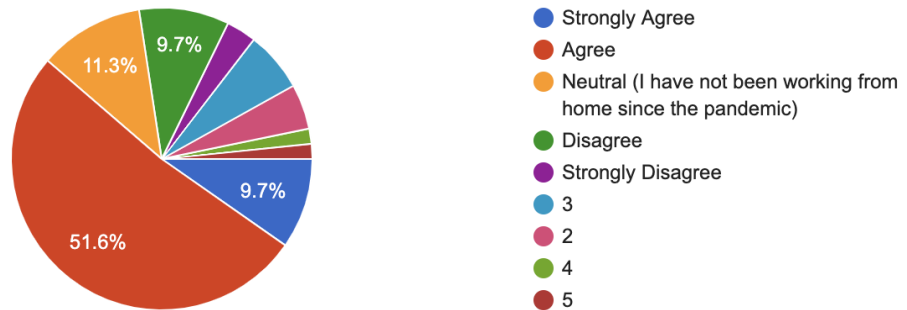
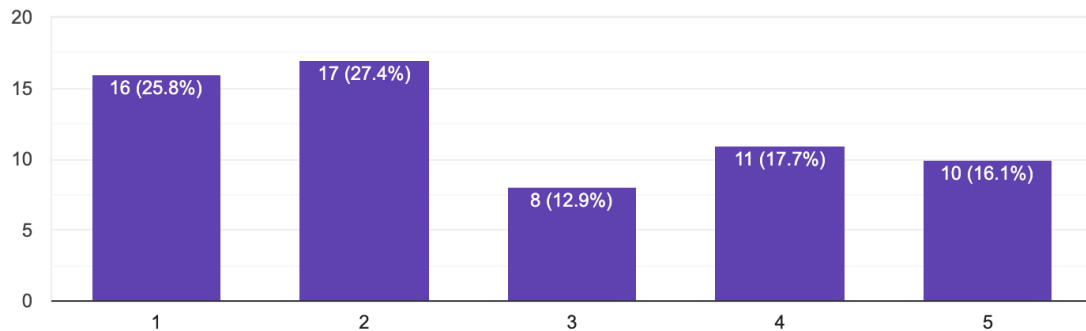


Diagram D

Since the arise of the COVID-19 pandemic, my organisation has provided employees with the appropriate resources to ensure that our mental health does not deteriorate



62 responses



Section C: Individual perceptions of how organisations can support their employees

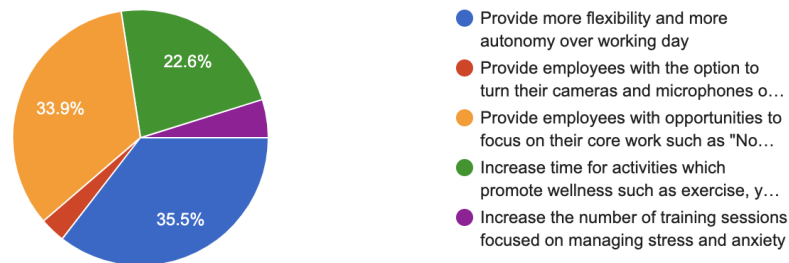
The final section of the survey used an individualistic approach by asking participants how they feel their organisations can improve the initiatives which they currently provide to assist with employee wellbeing. This section focused heavily on the concept of remote working due to the large percentage of employees (particularly in the IT sector) who work from home since the

beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. 57.4% of respondents disclosed that their organisations could assist with wellbeing by providing employees with increased levels of autonomy and flexibility over their day-to-day tasks (see Diagram E). This result can be linked to the study conducted by Walker and Guest (1952, p. 120-122) which is discussed in the literature review, which identified that employees are more inclined to take time off work should they feel as though they have a lack of autonomy over their work day.

Diagram E

If you were suffering with an anxiety disorder, how do you think your organisation could support you?

62 responses



5.2.2 Interviews

Virtual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR professionals from a number of different organisations within the IT sector. The researcher employed a thematic analysis to identify themes from the interviews and to develop new insights into the topic at hand. The interview transcripts were thoroughly analysed and verbatim sections which were most relevant to the research question at hand were collated and placed into the appendices section of this dissertation (Appendix D).

5.2.2. [i] Interview 1

The first interview was carried out with a Learning and Development professional from a multinational e-commerce company. The results of this

interview indicated that this organisation still has a long way to go in terms of the services it provides to its employees to support them with their wellbeing. The organisation has an open door policy and provides an EAP to its employees, however it does not invest in equipping employees with the knowledge on resources which are available to them should they experience difficulties. This is quite concerning, particularly due to the fact that a large percentage of the employees working for this organisation work in Customer Service departments and are exposed to difficult calls on a regular basis.

5.2.2. [ii] Interview 2

The second interview was conducted with a Talent Acquisition specialist from a multinational technology company which provides internet related services on a global scale. This interview focused primarily on how this organisation embeds mental health and wellbeing into candidate experience during the interview process, and it also honed in on what the company provides to its existing employees to support them with their mental health. The results from this interview highlighted that this organisation provides a more “hands on” approach to wellbeing across all departments. It was evident from the respondents answers that their organisation is extremely passionate about supporting its employees who may be suffering with a mental illness, and also that the organisation is constantly adapting its strategies to ensure that it remains a top player in the IT industry in terms of mental health. The interviewee highlighted that this is not only imperative for attracting strong candidates, but also for retaining strong performers. However, the responses from this interview also indicated that the organisation still has a long way to go in improving what it offers to employees to facilitate the discussion of mental health. A stigma still exists, and this can only be combated by providing regular training sessions and workshops which equip employees with the skills and knowledge to support not only themselves but also those around them.

5.2.2. [iii] Interview 3

This interview was conducted with a Senior Wellness Specialist of a US multinational which provides a website which centres its activities on providing employment opportunities to working professionals globally. A number of topics

were discussed in detail during this interview, such as work life balance, exercise, mindfulness as well as the stigma associated with mental health in the workplace. The interviewee emphasised the importance their organisation places on establishing and regularly improving the initiatives it has introduced which are centred around employee wellbeing, and stated that the company's culture and values are not just substanceless phrases, but are factors which are ingrained into everything the organisation does. The organisation focuses on providing wellness initiatives which are centred around six "tenets" of wellness: thoughts, conscious breathing, nutrition, rest, hydration and movement. The company's wellness strategy aims to educate employees on a series of preventative measures which can help employees avoid spiralling into spells of depression or anxiety. The organisation's Benefits team provides support systems for employees after a traumatic event occurs in order to provide them with the tools to effectively manage the issue at hand. In 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wellness team facilitated a 'Care to Share' program which involved conducting a series of interviews with senior members of the company's leadership team which were focused on the overarching concept of wellbeing. The interviews were candid and unfiltered to help make their stories more relatable to all employees and the video recordings of the interviews were shown to all employees during an All Hands event.

The interviewee also stated that the organisation provides a number of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to its employees. ERGs are groups or societies formed by employees who have similar interests, mutual passions or similar backgrounds (MIT, 2021). The employees of the interviewee's organisation have formed a number of ERGs, and one of the primary groups provides a framework for employees to help them comprehend the concept of mental health and to help them support their loved ones. The ERG also encourages employees to speak openly and honestly about their own struggles. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on employees within the IT sector was discussed. The interviewee declared that although the pandemic has inevitably had devastating effects on individuals globally, their organisation's employees have actually invested more time in participating in activities which have a positive impact on their mental health. They stated that this is primarily due to the fact that employees have more

access to a variety of online classes and resources and can attend these from the comfort of their own homes. Examples of such virtual classes include meditation, yoga, high-intensity training (HIIT), dance classes and many more. The organisation provides such a variety of classes due to the leadership team's belief that each individual has a different entry point to commence their wellness journey. As the company operates on a global scale, staff have the opportunity to join these classes at any time throughout the day with the assistance of virtual trainers based in EMEA (Europe, The Middle East and Africa), APAC (Asia Pacific) and LATAM (Latin America). When asked how they think their organisation could improve the support system it currently has to assist employees with mental illnesses, the interviewee focused on the importance of understanding the language or tone individuals use whilst speaking about mental health. They were passionate about the avoidance of referring to a mental illness as a disability, stating that this type of language is reductive and that it can have a negative impact on the current stigma associated with mental health. The interviewee expressed that mental health should be incorporated into employee OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to ensure that employees are aware that their managers are there to support them.

5.2.2. [iv] Interview 4

The final interview for this study was carried out with a People Operations Specialist (or HR specialist) of a multinational social media company. This interview honed in on the strategies this organisation currently has in place to support its current employees and also on how the interviewee believes the issue of mental health should be approached from a HR perspective. The interviewee was evidently passionate about the services that their organisation provides to employees and believes that the organisation's leadership teams have worked extremely hard to cultivate a psychologically safe space for employees to ensure that they feel supported. The social media company has created a behavioural health team which is dedicated to developing new, proactive approaches to improve access to high-quality, measurement-based mental health care. Similar to the 'Care to Share' program mentioned in the results of the previous interview with the Senior Wellness Specialist of the US online platform, this organisation's leadership teams also regularly share their own mental health struggles to help eliminate the stigma associated with

discussing mental health in the workplace. The organisation also hosts a myriad of wellbeing events throughout the year to highlight that it prioritises the wellbeing of its employees and also to ensure that important resources are shared.

The interviewee also emphasised the significance of line managers providing support to employees. Although the organisation has implemented a multitude of strategies focused on enhancing employee wellbeing throughout the years, the respondent believes that this culture is not always consistent and that in order to ensure that all employees feel supported, line managers need to be involved in this conversation and should be provided with the relevant tools to do so. The interviewee also mentioned that employees who are suffering with a mental illness should always be referred to mental health professionals so that they can be diagnosed accordingly. The company provides employees with 12 free mental health therapy classes annually, round-the-clock chat phone support which offers free face-to-face or virtual therapy options as well as a peer support network where employees can speak with colleagues who are suffering from similar mental illnesses. Finally, the multinational tech giant sends out annual Employee Voice Surveys (EVS) so that senior leadership teams can gauge the current state of wellbeing across cross functional teams and also to develop insights into how the company can improve. In order to develop what the organisation currently offers in terms of improving employee wellbeing, the interviewee believes that it should incorporate a more granular approach to analysing the findings of the EVS to ensure that all line managers are held accountable for the wellbeing of their specific teams. The interviewee also stated that the organisation should empower HR personnel to contact teams who perform poorly in the area of mental health to provide them with an opportunity to discuss their issues confidentially and in turn share important employee resources and take the necessary actions to improve employee wellbeing.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Overview

The primary objective of this research was to explore the concept of mental health in the workplace and to assess how HR professionals can collaborate to support employees who are suffering with mental illnesses. The results of the research methods used highlighted that although organisations have improved how they approach the topic of mental health, there is still a lot of progress which needs to be made to ensure that they are addressing the issue appropriately.

This chapter will assess the shortcomings which were highlighted in the research and will provide critical insights which can be analysed to improve the facilities organisations provide to support employees who suffer with a mental illness.

6.2 Recruitment and Selection

As literature suggested, a stigma still exists in the field of recruitment and selection with regards to individuals who suffer from a mental illness (Selezneva and Batho., 2019; Koser et al., 1999). The results of the interview with the Talent Acquisition Specialist from an internet related services organisation in the IT sector reinforce this concept, as the interviewee stated that although individuals are becoming increasingly more open to discussing mental health issues, a stigma still exists when it comes to the topic. However, it is crucial to note that the interviewers who work within this organisation attend regular training sessions which educate them on mental health and wellbeing and also how they can assist candidates should they display signals of a mental illness at interview stage. Referring back to the results of the survey conducted by JDP (2020) which indicated that 93% of candidates have experienced anxiety during an interview process, the fact that interviewers within the IT sector are attending L&D sessions to provide them with the adequate skills and knowledge to support candidates who suffer with a mental illness is quite encouraging. The interviewee also revealed that their organisation has a Candidate Accommodations team which ensures that

candidates who suffer with mental illnesses are provided with the same opportunities to succeed in their interviews. Although the Equality Act (2010) insists that employers should not ask candidates questions about their mental health during recruitment processes, the interviewee outlined that interviewers within their organisation are always open to discussing the services the organisation provides to support employees who may be suffering with a mental illness and also to discuss the work the organisation does with charities which support similar initiatives.

6.3 Learning and Development

As cited in the literature review, organisations must provide their employees with the relevant training and education so that they can support themselves and those around them during times of crisis (Funk., 2005; Sikafi., 2019). The results of the interview conducted with a Learning and Development Specialist from a multinational e-commerce company indicated that employees within this organisation receive little to no training on the topic of mental health in the workplace. The interviewee also stated that the company sends out a weekly wellness email and that employees who work in certain departments (e.g. in Customer Services) recently completed a training session which provided them with the skills to manage difficult calls. However, it is telling that employees who work within other departments do not receive training on this topic as they may not be cognisant of how to manage their wellbeing during difficult times. The results of the interview indicated that although the respondent's organisation has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the organisation does not provide employees with the relevant resources to assist them with utilising this service and understanding how it may be beneficial to them. The organisation also has a number of relaxation rooms where employees can focus on mindfulness. Referring back to the research conducted by Yu and Zellmeier-Bruhn (2018) which indicated that organisations which promote the practice of mindfulness contribute towards creating a "happier" workforce with reduced levels of stress and conflict. Finally, research conducted by Hilton et al, 2019 highlighted that practising mindfulness in the workplace can assist employees with developing resilience and that it can also contribute towards the prevention of burnout and psychological anguish. However, it is fundamental that this organisation provides regular training to employees to ensure that they feel supported in their place of work.

6.4 People Consultancy / HR Analytics

As discussed, workplace stress has an enormous impact on employee wellbeing (Hellebuyck et al., 2017; CIPD., 2020) and it is crucial that HR personnel are cognisant of the primary causes of workplace stress in order to assist employees who may be suffering. The results of the interview with the People Operations Specialist from a multinational social media corporation indicated that the interviewee's organisation places significant value on supporting employees who may be suffering with a mental illness. The organisation sends out an annual survey which asks employees to rate the organisation's approach to employee wellbeing. The organisation also provides employees with 12 mental health counselling sessions per year and 24/7 chat phone support services to ensure that employees feel supported. It is evident from the findings of this interview that although the interviewee believes that their organisation is succeeding in supporting their employees who are suffering with mental illnesses, the organisation still has a lot of work to do to ensure that employees at all levels of the organisation are provided with the tools to enhance their wellbeing. The interviewee stated that their organisation needs to take a more individualistic approach to employee wellbeing due to the idea that not all managers have the knowledge to assist employees who may be suffering with a mental illness. This statement can be linked back to the research led by the BCC and Aviva which highlighted that only 18% of corporations in the UK have provided management teams with training programs focused on helping them to develop their skills in the field of supporting employees with mental illnesses. Leadership teams should be educated on how to provide psychologically safe environments for their employees to improve employee wellbeing and also to support them in times of need.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine how cross functional HR teams can collaborate to develop more effective mental health support programs. Independent variables such as workplace stressors, levels of support systems, biases towards mental illnesses and training programs were examined to assess the dependent variable; mental health in the workplace. It is evident

from the results of the survey and from the results of the interviews that organisations within the IT sector have invested substantially in developing initiatives which focus on supporting employees who suffer with mental illnesses. Large organisations, in other words, organisations which employ 250 employees or more (OECD, 2021) generally offer the highest number of initiatives which are geared towards employee wellbeing. Such initiatives include the provision of virtual doctors or therapists, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), company-wide days off and onsite gyms and wellness centres. Small or medium organisations (i.e. organisations which employ less than 250 employees) within the IT sector are more inclined to provide employees with a small proportion of the list of benefits provided by larger organisations, such as company-wide days off. However they do not offer a number of initiatives which a high volume of employees perceive as fundamental for their wellbeing, such as flexible working arrangements and virtual therapists.

In order to effectively address the ongoing issue of mental health in the workplace, organisations must adopt a strategic approach in order to anticipate trends and to be able to address employee issues on a case by case basis. 25% of the interviewees admitted that their organisations provided little to no training sessions which focus on employee wellbeing, and they also revealed that they are aware that a large volume of their colleagues do not feel supported in their organisations. Previous research indicated the importance of providing education and training to employees and management on how to assist colleagues, friends or family who suffer with a mental illness. The research also highlighted the negative implications which a lack of investment in such training sessions can have on employees. An interviewee who is currently working in a large multinational organisation with over 500 employees expressed that although their organisation invests heavily in initiatives which have been proven to be successful with regards to supporting employees with mental illnesses, there are a number of employees in the organisations who may not feel comfortable disclosing that they are suffering with a mental illness due to having a poor relationship with their line manager.

Chapter Eight: Recommendations

This chapter will provide recommendations to organisations and HR teams regarding how to effectively facilitate the discussion of workplace mental health and will outline a number of suggestions focusing on supporting employees who struggle with a mental illness. Each recommendation will consider the time constraints and the costs associated with implementing each process.

[i] The introduction of open-plan office structures

Research conducted in social psychology has indicated that architecture and the physical structure of a building can have an enormous impact on organisational performance variables such as communication and social interaction (Oldham and Brass, 1979). A number of high-profile organisations have introduced an open-plan infrastructure to their offices due to the theory that factors such as increased exposure to natural lighting may have a positive impact on employee wellbeing. Bach (1965) believes that an open-plan office structure can promote positive working relationships amongst employees due to the elimination of interior walls. This may in turn have a positive impact on employee wellbeing due to employees feeling less isolated as they would be surrounded by colleagues from various teams and departments. Research undertaken by Festinger, Schacter and Back (1950) of an apartment facility indicated that inhabitants were most likely to develop relationships with each other when the physical structure of the apartments was less confined. Therefore, if employees feel physically close to each other issues such as isolation and loneliness may be addressed, thus having a positive impact on employee wellbeing.

While there are a number of potential opportunities which can be obtained by an organisation through the provision of an open-plan office space, it is important that HR teams are conscious of potential drawbacks. Firstly, employees may be exposed to a higher number of distractions in an open-plan office environment (WeWork, 2017). Moreover, an employee's concentration may be negatively affected due to being able to constantly hear what their colleague is saying or doing. Sentiments of stress and anxiety may also be elevated amongst employees due to a perceived lack of privacy as well as employees feeling overwhelmed due to the expectation that they should always

appear busy. A study conducted by Bernstein and Turban (2018) highlighted that employees who work in an open plan office may have difficulty concentrating and their productivity may deteriorate due to a perceived lack of privacy. Research conducted by Loughton (2017) underlines that workplace factors such as perceived noise and perceived psychological discomfort can have a negative impact on employee performance. As employees within the IT sector are encouraged to work closely with their colleagues and to collaborate on various projects, it is imperative that organisations provide them with office spaces which allow them to participate in such activities. However, it is also important that organisations can provide employees with areas which they can go to to conduct private meetings or calls and to simply allow them to work in a space which allows them to be their most productive. Employees who work in large multinationals within the IT sector such as Google and Facebook have the option to work from private phone booths in the Dublin office. They also have the option to work in isolation in private rooms which resemble libraries in appearance.

[ii] Provision of employee benefits and allowances

Employee benefits can be an effective strategy which can assist with the attraction and retention of employees (CIPD, 2020). They can also make a positive impact on employee well-being and can motivate employees towards the achievement of goals and objectives. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, merely 14% of Irish employees worked remotely to some capacity (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2020). However, in order to comply with government guidelines which were introduced to protect employees from contracting the virus, organisations have had to drastically evolve. According to the Central Statistics Office or CSO (2020), approximately 34% of Irish employees are currently working remotely. Therefore, it is crucial that employers are providing their employees with the appropriate tools to not only work efficiently but also to promote wellbeing. LinkedIn, a U.S. multinational organisation which focuses on employment-related services provides its employees with an annual allowance called “PerkUp” (McQueen, 2016). This scheme allows employees to spend €1,200 on products or services which are important to them. Organisations should encourage employees to purchase products and services which promote positive wellbeing, such as gym

equipment, massages, light therapy lamps and plants. Investing in such products and services would have a positive impact on workplace morale as well as employee wellbeing, not only because these products have been identified as positive influences on mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, but also because employees would feel appreciated and supported.

It is fundamental that management and HR professionals are cognisant of the costs and potential problems associated with the provision of office supply allowances to employees. Firstly, the financial costs which an organisation must incur should it provide its employees with such benefits or allowances should be considered. For example, LinkedIn employs approximately 15,900 employees across 33 countries (LinkedIn, 2021). Therefore if each employee chose to engage in the PerkUp scheme, the organisation could potentially be looking at an overall annual cost of approximately €19 million. There is also a risk that employees may potentially misuse the benefits and allowances provided to them by their organisation. For example, if an employee uses their allowance to purchase gym equipment for their home, there is a perceived risk that the employee may take longer, more frequent breaks and this may have a negative impact on their productivity.

[iii] Providing employees with personal days off

As discussed at the beginning of this study, a number of organisations such as Indeed allow employees to take one personal day off a month (excluded from existing annual leave entitlements) to invest in activities which they are interested in. According to Indeed's Senior Vice-President Paul Wolfe (2020), the policy was introduced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as leadership had observed that employees were taking less time off since March 2020. The initiative was rolled out initially as a trial, however due to the positive feedback received from employees regarding the initiative, the leadership team decided to roll it out as a permanent feature. Indeed also provides an unlimited vacation policy to its employees so that they can establish boundaries between work and their personal lives, and also so that they can invest in their wellbeing (Indeed, 2020).

It is critical to note that although the introduction of an unlimited vacation policy and other policies which encourage employees to take a personal day off can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing, there are also a variety of factors which an organisation should consider before implementing such strategies. Firstly, it is fundamental that organisations introduce a number of regulations and guidelines to ensure that employees do not abuse such policies. Carinsurance.net, an online portal which provides car insurance advice to consumers, has advised its management team to establish boundaries with employees to prevent employees from neglecting this benefit (Sammer, 2020). The organisation's founder, Tony Arevalo, has stated that if an employee were to take over 40 days annual leave he would ask management to have a discussion with them to ensure that they were not abusing this perk. It is also crucial to note that employees may be inclined to take less time off should their organisation introduce an unlimited vacation policy. A study conducted by Namely (2018), a HRM platform, indicated that employees who worked for organisations with an unlimited vacation policy ended up taking less days off than employees who worked for organisations with traditional paid time off (PTO) policies. Staff members with unlimited time off ended up taking 13 days off, whereas staff members with limited time off ended up taking 15 days off. If employees are not taking sufficient time off work, this may have a negative impact on their mental wellbeing and issues such as burnout and stress may develop (Lobell, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial that management collaborate with HR teams to work on initiatives which encourage employees to take time off so that employees can unwind from their day-to-day workplace responsibilities.

It is also imperative that organisations place more of an emphasis on encouraging employees to invest in attaining a better work life balance. In 2016 the former president of France, François Hollande, introduced a reform to the French labour law which took effect on the 1st of January 2017 (Eurofound, 2017). This law placed an obligation on employers to stop encroaching on the personal lives of their employees with work calls or emails outside of an employee's core working hours (EurWork, 2019). The right of an employee to disconnect is codified in law, however the method behind achieving this is left up to each individual organisation. HR personnel and leadership teams should work together to cultivate more effective boundaries for employees so that they

can create a distinction between their work lives and their personal lives. This would assist employees with managing their stress levels and it would also help to eliminate an employee's perceived need to work overtime in order to feel noticed or recognised by their organisation.

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Chapter Ten: Appendices

Appendix A: Frederick Herzberg's Two Factor Theory



Appendix B: The Healthy Workplace

Strategies organisations can implement to improve wellbeing (Stringer, 2016).

HEALTHY WORKPLACE STRATEGIES	POLICY OR BUSINESS PROCESS	TECHNOLOGY, FURNITURE, OR FACILITY	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY (1=EASY, 3=DIFFICULT)
INCREASE MOVEMENT			
Use "point of decision" prompts to encourage stair use	X		1
Encourage employees to stand up	X	X	1
Double up workspace for exercise or stretching	X	X	1
Encourage and enable employees to walk	X	X	1–2
Make stairs more attractive to use		X	2
Carve out space for bikes or showers		X	2
Locate your office space by public transportation or amenities		X	3
Provide a place for employees to work out		X	3
IMPROVE NUTRITION			
Provide a place for employees to eat their lunch	X	X	1–2
Provide healthy, portioned meals or snacks for employees	X		2
Make healthy choices the default setting	X	X	2
Leverage healthy catering and vending options	X		2
Provide places for employees to grow their own food	X	X	3

HEALTHY WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

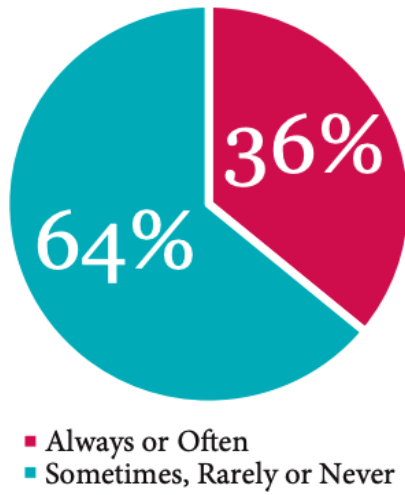
	POLICY OR BUSINESS PROCESS	TECHNOLOGY, FURNITURE, OR FACILITY	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY (1=EASY, 3=DIFFICULT)
REDUCE STRESS			
Provide choice as to when employees can work	X		1
Encourage employees to take their vacation	X		1
Allow employees to bring their pets to work	X		1
Allow employees to bring their children to work	X	X	1
Allow employees to choose how they work	X		1-2
Develop a stress management program	X		2
Encourage employees to focus on one task at a time	X		2
Get rid of email (or change how you use it)	X	X	2
Provide choice for where employees can work	X	X	2
Design places for psychological restoration	X	X	2-3
IMPROVE SLEEP			
Encourage employees to go outside, especially early in the day	X		1
Encourage employees to exercise during the day	X	X	1
Set devices to change light levels over the course of the workday	X	X	1
Cut out caffeine service by late afternoon	X		1

HEALTHY WORKPLACE STRATEGIES	POLICY OR BUSINESS PROCESS	TECHNOLOGY, FURNITURE, OR FACILITY	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY (1=EASY, 3=DIFFICULT)
Set the example and/or set a policy for employees to unplug	X		1
Give employees time to sleep through tough work problems	X		1
Encourage employees to use hotels that better cater to their sleep and health on the road	X		1
Accommodate your workforce by a window		X	2
Install circadian lighting		X	2
Provide napping or wellness rooms		X	3
IMPROVE SLEEP FOR SHIFT WORKERS			
Keep the workplace well lit with bright lights to promote alertness		X	1
Encourage employees to be active during breaks	X		1
Do not assign tedious or boring tasks at the end of shifts	X		1
Do not schedule workers for a number of night shifts in a row	X		2
Avoid scheduling frequently rotating shifts	X		2
Provide night shift workers with amber glasses when leaving work in early daylight		X	1
Create a work environment where employees work together to help them stay alert		X	3
CREATE A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT			
Keep the workplace tidy	X		1

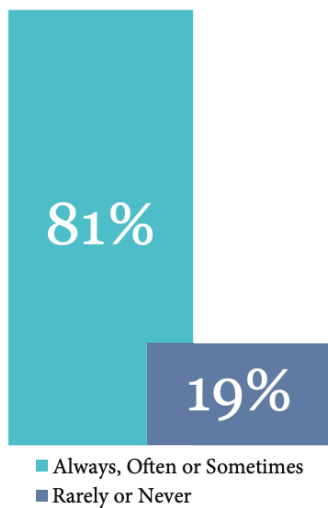
Appendix C: The negative impact of mental health in the workplace

Results of surveys conducted by Mental Health America (2017)

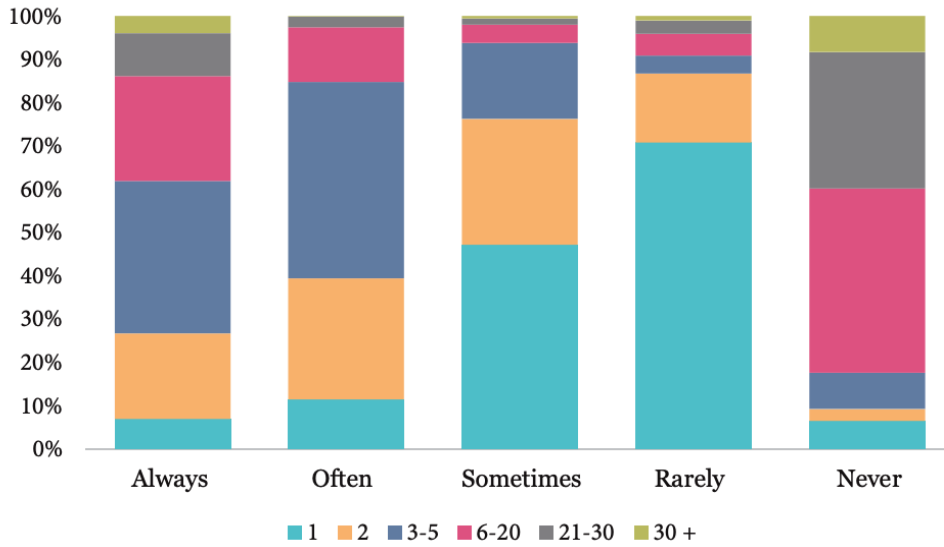
**IF THINGS GET HARD,
MY SUPERVISOR WILL
SUPPORT ME**



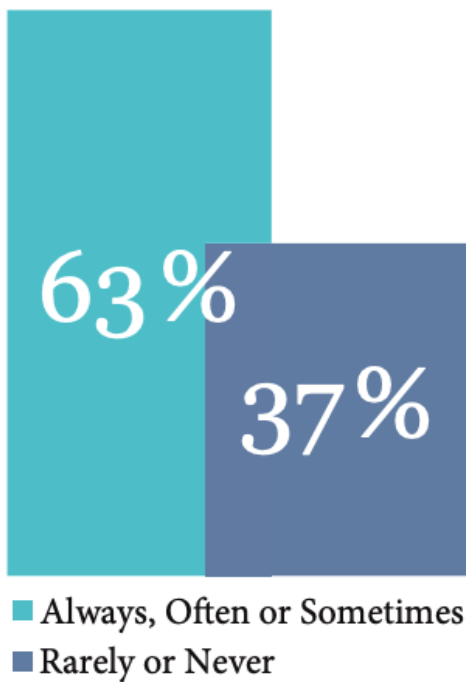
**THE STRESS FROM MY JOB AFFECTS
MY RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY
FRIENDS OR FAMILY**



DAYS MISSED A MONTH DUE TO WORKPLACE STRESS

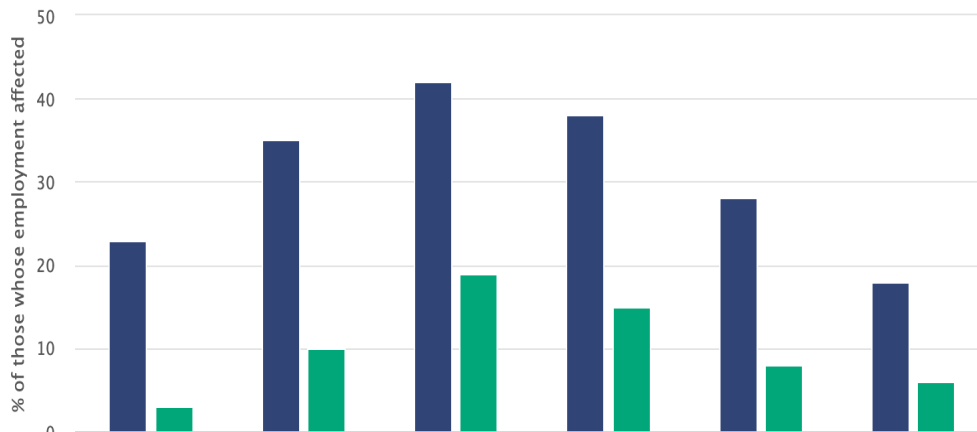


THE FRUSTRATION OR STRESS FROM MY JOB CAUSES ME TO ENGAGE IN UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS SUCH AS DRINKING OR CRYING REGULARLY



Appendix C: Percentage of persons age 15 years and over by effect of COVID-19 on remote working (April 2020)

Fig 3 Effect of COVID-19 on remote working by age, April 2020



Appendix D: Interviews

Interview 1: Learning and Development Specialist - Multinational e-commerce organisation

Q1. As an experienced L&D professional, do you think that your organisation provides sufficient levels of training to employees with regards to supporting their colleagues who are suffering with mental illnesses? If so, what types of training are provided?

To be honest, no. We are currently not providing many training sessions which are focused on mental health or wellbeing. However, our employees in the Customer Service department recently completed a training which aimed to assist them with managing difficult calls and cases. Unfortunately there have been a number of situations in the past where customers contact our customer services representatives saying that they are on the brink of committing suicide and obviously this is an extremely difficult call to manage. The training session was organised by our L&D team and was led by members of our leadership team who have completed courses on how to de-escalate calls and how to support our members when they

display signs of distress. We also have a weekly wellness email but no actual training is being done based solely on mental health and the services we can provide to our employees if they are going through a difficult time.

Q2. What do you think could be improved? For example, would you increase the frequency of which these training sessions take place? Would you improve the content of these training sessions so that they are more inclusive and more engaging?

I believe that all of our employees should receive regular training on the topic of mental health. I am currently trying to introduce an initiative focused on our talent and how we can make them feel more supported, not only in their roles, but in their personal lives as well. As our company is one of the main players in the e-commerce industry, our largest team is our Customer Experience (CEX) team which is focused on maximising our members' potential on our platform. It is crucial that we support all of our employees, however our CEX employees are exposed to a multitude of extremely difficult calls and cases on a daily basis, therefore it is fundamental that we host training sessions focused on mental health more regularly.

Q3. Do you think that employees feel as though they would be able to help their colleague(s) if they were suffering with a mental illness? Do you think that employees feel supported in their place of work?

I think this is difficult to assess as I believe that an individual's personal circumstances and life experiences can also impact their ability to support themselves and those around them. I do know from our Employee Experience surveys which are sent out on a quarterly basis that a large number of our employees do not feel supported in their roles. As mentioned, many of our employees work in our call centres and are exposed to difficult situations regularly, and a large number of them feel as though their managers do not support them which is alarming. I believe that this is mainly due to the fact that our leadership teams are not equipped with the sufficient resources to manage cases like this. We do provide an EAP service, however I think it is also important that managers help their employees feel supported in the workplace. We also have a number of relaxation rooms and games rooms in our offices where employees can take time to relax and zone out of their core jobs, however I do think that more is required from the organisation to ensure that our employees feel supported in their place of work should they be experiencing any issues.

Q4. Do you think that employees would feel confident to ask for additional training sessions on mental health awareness and support?

I think this depends on the individual employee. I believe that the company would listen to their employees if they did come forward with any suggestions but I think it can somewhat depend on the staff members' own confidence with regards to asking what they need. We generally have an open door policy to encourage employees to

ask for assistance if they need it, however I do think that this needs to be promoted more by our team leaders to ensure that all employees are aware of the support systems which we have available for them.

Interview 2: Talent Acquisition Specialist - Internet related services

Q1. As an experienced recruiter, do you think that Google currently provides an inclusive interviewing/recruitment and selection process?

I believe that my organisation plays an active role in providing an inclusive recruitment process to candidates across the globe. Our candidate accommodations team works with recruitment teams to ensure that candidates with disabilities (whether physical or mental) are given equal opportunities to succeed in their interviews. My organisation prides itself in challenging the status quo and constantly strives to build diverse and inclusive teams. In order to constantly develop new products and services for billions of consumers globally, we require a workforce that represents diversity and inclusion in a holistic manner.

Q2. Do you think that Google does its best to help support candidates and employees with mental illnesses?

My organisation provides a myriad of initiatives to support candidates and employees who may be suffering with a mental illness. The COVID-19 pandemic obviously provided us with a lot of challenges with this, and we had to adapt our processes to ensure that our values would still be embedded into our recruitment processes. For example, candidates are given at least 15 minutes break time in between interviews so that they can unwind and have time to grab a coffee or get fresh air prior to their next interview taking place. Virtual meet and greets are conducted prior to interviews taking place. These are informal chats with the candidate's recruiter or hiring manager which are geared towards helping a candidate feel at ease prior to their interviews. Our interviewers must complete a number of training sessions and evaluations prior to interviewing candidates (such as 'Inclusive recruiting' programs, 'Emotional Intelligence' programs and other sessions which provide interviewers with the skills to conduct interviews in a professional, inclusive manner). Therefore, by the time they start interviewing they are equipped with the skills to put candidates at ease and to support candidates should they display signs of anxiety.

Q3. What do you think could be improved? I.e. is there anything you would do differently to help candidates feel more supported? E.g. for candidates with anxiety or depression, what facilities / support would you put in place if you had the opportunity?

At our organisation, candidate experience always comes first. I believe it is so important to keep this top of mind at all times to ensure a positive candidate experience. We always ask candidates what time they would prefer to interview as some candidates may feel more depressed or anxious at certain times during the day. We also discuss the facilities our organisation has in place to support employees so that candidates know that they would feel at home should they be successful (onsite gym, therapists, doctors, massage parlours, game rooms, open desk policies etc). This not only helps to cultivate a positive image of the company, but it also assures candidates that their wellbeing will be prioritised should they be successful in the recruitment process. I do believe however that a stigma still exists when it comes to the topic of mental health, it is almost avoided. I have noticed in recent years, however, that candidates are becoming more open about discussing mental health and a lot of them ask questions about the initiatives our company offers to support employees and also third parties such as charities. It is imperative that interviewers and recruiters keep wellbeing top of mind at all times as it is becoming increasingly important to candidates across the globe. This is not only important for talent attraction, but also for talent retention.

Q4. If a candidate openly admitted to suffering with a mental illness in an interview, do you think there would be a certain degree of bias amongst interviewers / hiring committees?

I believe that this is dependent on the particular interviewer and also the particular circumstance. There is still a stigma associated with mental health and it is a work in progress. However I do think that the majority of our interviewers would be extremely compassionate and empathetic towards candidates should they disclose details about their personal struggles. Our interviewers attend regular training sessions which focus on mental health and wellbeing and are aware of the prevalence of mental illnesses globally. Unfortunately a certain degree of bias still exists, I believe, with regards to this topic regardless of the number of training sessions we provide to employees.

Interview 3: Senior Wellness Specialist

Q1. Work life balance is becoming increasingly more important to employees annually, and a high volume of employees will not accept an offer for a role if they do not feel that they can maintain a healthy balance between work and their personal lives. How do you think organisations should encourage employees to maintain this balance?

At our organisation, the culture we have created which encompasses work-life balance has come from the top down. Our culture and values are not things that we just preach about, they're not forced, they are a part of us. We host regular wellness initiatives which are based on our six wellness tenets: thoughts, conscious breathing, nutrition, rest, hydration and movement. We are conscious that not all tenets or "entry points" work for everyone, so we always try to get an understanding of what works for an individual prior to advising them on where to start. For example, one person may not enjoy mindful meditation, but they may enjoy running or going to the gym. Our wellness program focuses on approaching work life balance and mental health from a wellness perspective and we always look at preventative measures to prevent employees from getting to a crisis (whereas our Benefits team supports employees after a problem occurs with initiatives such as Employee Assistance Programs etc). In 2019 prior to the pandemic we organised a 'Care to Share' program. This program tasked our wellness team to conduct interviews with members of the organisation's leadership teams on the topic of mental health. The interviews were conducted through a raw, unfiltered lens to truly understand their stories and to make their struggles more relatable to all employees. The videos of the interviews were then shown to all employees at our All Hands event.

Q2. What do you think your organisation could improve in terms of what they offer to employees for wellness?

Wellness is a complex concept which is ever-evolving, therefore it requires constant reinvention and adaptation. There is always work to be done and areas which need to be improved. However, I do believe that my organisation is one of the leaders in the IT sector when it comes to supporting employees with mental illnesses and providing wellness initiatives. A lot of organisations simply focus on wellbeing as an overall construct, whereas we are passionate about digging deeper into this construct and understanding how we can support our employees' mental wellbeing in an efficient, compassionate manner. I do feel that the language which is used when discussing mental illnesses should be considered. I don't like the idea of a mental illness being considered as a disability. I think this type of language is reductive and can negatively contribute to the stigma associated with mental health. We have a number of employee resources including go/links which provide managers and employees with information on how to recognise if someone is suffering with a mental illness, and also how to take care of oneself whilst taking care of someone who is suffering. One thing I think could be improved is how teams discuss the topic

of mental health. Perhaps it could be implemented into employee OKRs (Objectives and key results) to ensure that managers are taking a proactive approach to mental health. I believe that this would help ensure that employees feel supported and also to encourage them to be open and honest about how they are feeling.

Q3. Exercise has been proven to improve an individual's mental health drastically, however a lot of employees will say that they don't have the time to exercise or that they don't have the energy on week days to exercise due to highly demanding work schedules. How would you advise employees to incorporate exercise and/or wellness activities into their daily routines?

I believe employees have found it easier to make time for exercise since the inception of full-time remote working. My organisation offers a multitude of virtual classes, such as meditation, yoga, high-intensity interval training (HIIT), dance classes and many more. Employees have the option to dial into these classes first thing in the morning or at the end of the working day, as these classes are led by trainers based in Australia, APAC and Europe. The company's demographic is quite young and this demographic tends to be quite knowledgeable with regards to wellbeing and the importance of being active. Therefore, the wellness team doesn't necessarily need to push employees as much as they are already passionate about being healthy. Referring back to what I said about entry points, I do believe that everyone is different and it is crucial to find what works for you personally to start your wellness journey.

Q4. Research has shown that a large number of individuals feel apprehensive about talking about their mental health in fear of stigma. How do you think your company tackles this stigma? What initiatives do you think are most effective at helping employees with this issue?

I believe that our initiatives such as the 'Care to Share' campaign and our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) provide a framework for our employees to speak openly and honestly about how they are feeling. These tools provide employees with the knowledge to be able to manage their own mental illness as well as the ability to help those around them who may also be suffering. As mentioned, wellness is a journey, and we are constantly evolving to ensure that our employees feel supported and can bring their best selves to work.

Interview 4: People Operations / HR Generalist

Q1. As a HR Specialist, do you feel that employees feel supported and confident to speak about mental illnesses at work?

Yes, I feel that my organisation has put a lot of work and emphasis on positive mental health in the workplace and has worked hard to successfully create a safe space for employees to feel empowered to talk about mental health and trust they

will get the information and support they need. In order to create this safe space, my organisation has dedicated an entire team, the behavioral health team, which is focused on creating novel, proactive approaches to improve access to high-quality, measurement-based mental health care. Other measures the company takes to support employees include; employees at Leadership level often sharing personal mental health stories in an attempt to lead by example and eradicate the stigma around mental health in the workplace. We also run several well being initiatives throughout the year to ensure mental health of employees is constantly treated as a priority and resources are being shared.

Q2. How do you think HR professionals can support employees suffering with such illnesses? Some people believe that taking time off is the best solution for helping employees who are suffering from burnout, whereas others believe that attending onsite doctors or therapists is the best solution.

As mental health is not a 'one size fits all' solution, it is always important to refer to the employee on how they would prefer to be supported. While the company can offer support and resources, it is always important to refer employees to mental health professionals for the correct diagnosis and treatment. My organisation then provides employees with several support resources including; 12 mental health counselling sessions per year to employees, carried out onsite by a VHI professional, 24/7 chat phone support which offers free in-person or virtual counseling options, free text therapy option available globally for those who prefer text based communication, a peer support network where you can find a listener if you just want someone to talk to. HR would then advise the employee to speak with their manager regarding their workload and working hours and come to an agreement on how best to proceed to support the employee.

Q3. Do you think that employees feel as though they would be able to help their colleague(s) if they were suffering with a mental illness? Do you think that employees feel supported in their place of work?

I feel employees would know where to direct a colleague if they were suffering from mental illness as my organisation works to ensure resources for mental health are shared widely and frequently throughout the company. I feel employees do feel supported by the efforts of the wider company regarding mental health, however, working for such a large company, often this culture of caring does not trickle all the way down and relies on the management of individual teams to ensure the success of employees mental health in the workplace.

Q4. How do you think your organisation could improve it's support system for employees / candidates suffering from mental illnesses?

My organisation currently sends an annual survey to employees where they are asked to rate certain aspects of the company & team, wellbeing being one of these areas, and then aggregates and shares the results company wide. I believe we should take a more granular approach to the results of this survey and hold

managers accountable for the rating of the wellbeing of their individual teams. I also believe based on these findings that the company should have HR reach out directly to poorly performing teams in the mental health space and offer them a safe space to disclose issues and in turn share relevant resources and take appropriate actions.

Appendix E: Link to survey

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1olib4EFSUDqDKCuLF_vDran_mZnMiulULkCWUKpMBDs/viewform?edit_requested=true