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NORTH AMERICA



EMPOWERING WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

2021 OFFICIAL E-BOOK



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Foreword

We are delighted to present our fourth e-book, which contains a write-up of every single session from This Can Happen 2021.

The challenges we faced in 2020 continued into 2021 and our content team and editorial advisory boards worked tirelessly to put together an agenda that reflected a changing workplace environment. Their hard work ensured that our speakers discussed subjects that provided delegates with workable solutions and fantastic insights, as well as inspiration to take back to the workplace.

So, please enjoy reading through the e-book and share it with anyone that you think will find it useful.

Finally, we are looking forward to returning to a physical event next year. This Can Happen 2022 will take place on 16th June and we look forward to seeing you there.



ZOE SINCLAIR

Co-Founder
This Can Happen

THIS CAN HAPPEN TEAM

Zoe Sinclair
Jonny Benjamin
Archie Sinclair
Shenyana Lim
Caroline Carr
Rebecca Heath

Co-Founder
Co-Founder
Director
Event Producer
Sales & Marketing Director
Marketing & Client Services Executive
Insight & Strategy Director
Awards Manager
Content Manager

Henriette Lang
Kate Holgate
Jessica Soe
Shireen Redman
Claire Barrett
Toby Huntington
Ben Thrush
Gee Ibrahim
Mark Mackenzie

Client Services Manager
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Advisory Editorial Boards

It has been a pleasure to work with an amazing group of people to deliver all of the content for this year's conference. We worked with three editorial boards, which each provided inside knowledge of their region to give our delegates real insights into the mental health picture around the globe.

The goal was to showcase speakers and panellists who would inspire delegates and empower them to go back to their organisations armed with new ideas, helping them support colleagues through their mental health challenges. We would like to thank all the members of the editorial boards for their hard work.

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Equity & Inclusion Officer
EMEA & APAC
Northern Trust



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BBC & ITV



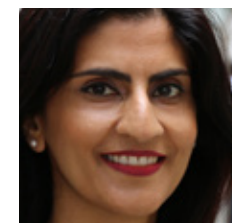
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Global Head of Reward
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Chartered Psychologist
University of London
& The School of Life



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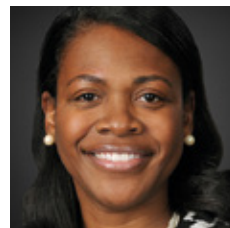
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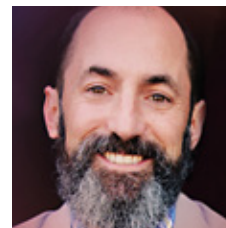
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Occupational Health
Physician
GSK



JESSI GOLD
Assistant Professor and
Director of Wellness,
Engagement and Outreach -
Department of Psychiatry
Washington University



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Americas
Northern Trust



BENJAMIN MILLER
Chief Strategy Officer
Well Being Trust



**STEPHANIE
PALACIOS**
Organisational Mental
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Our Exhibitors



Thank you to all our Speakers





BEHIND THE SCENES



WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY

So powerful and empowering to see people being able to share their own personal challenges. So much respect due.

DELEGATE

There was so much great content and discussion and it gave us so much to think about as part of developing our wellbeing strategy. It was the best online conference I've attended, and the thoughtful scheduling of talks and breaks was great.

ANDY McALEESE

Head of Longevity, Europe
Pacific Life Re | Europe

I was able to see the session on Swapcard. It's come out very well. The production values are excellent. Great job Sara. You were an excellent moderator!

PUNEET NARANG
Speaker

In hindsight, I should have booked some days off for this conference because the content has really blown me away. Looking forward to watching these when they get uploaded onto YouTube later.

DELEGATE

I have been dipping in and out of the conference and I will do the same tomorrow – really good to hear what other organisations in the UK and Europe are doing to progress mental health awareness in their organisations and I have made some new contacts through the app. I must say the app is brilliant! I love the interactive nature of it and it is very easy to manoeuvre between sessions and offline conversations. Well done!

DELEGATE

Every session I attended in today's THIS CAN HAPPEN mental health conference has been bang on the money! Learnt a lot from the parenting and disability panel, something I can take back into my workplace to support my fellow colleagues.

DELEGATE

I joined this session because I disagreed with the synopsis statement that stress is always bad. I realise now that I thrive on pressure, and pressure helps me remain focused and achieve great things at work, but stress is different and not a positive motivator for me. Hopefully now I can work on spotting the difference and avoiding the stress. Thank you for challenging my thinking and changing my mind.

ZARA SHELDRAKE
Youth Board Member
Beyond

In my experience, having authentic, honest conversations about the mental health impacts of lockdown and revealing my own vulnerability helped build better working relationships with colleagues and external customers. Perhaps we need to be more human and stop hiding behind the professional facade as much as we do!

DELEGATE

Starting the Mental Health Journey in Asia

Leaders from three organisations that have blazed a trail for mental wellness discuss the challenges of tackling issues in the region



FACILITATOR:
WENG HONG YONG
Executive Director
City Mental Health
Alliance, Singapore

PANEL

MELLENER ANNE COELHO
India Head – Diversity,
Equity Inclusion and
Mental Wellbeing
Northern Trust

SHAUN EE
People Director
Asia Pacific Breweries,
Singapore

The opening session for Asia examined how businesses can take the first steps on their mental health journey. Three leading companies from the region shared what they have learnt.

Weng Hong Yong explained how he had pivoted from a career in finance to the mental wellness space. He recalled periods of anxiety during his finance career, manifesting as physical symptoms and leading him to avoid social activities. He was able to return to a mentally healthy state by leaning on his religious faith and the help of a coach-counsellor.

These experiences taught Weng Hong that while he knew he wasn't OK, it wasn't easy to seek help. He said one good thing that has come out of the pandemic is more leaders recognising the importance of supporting staff mental wellness. Businesses starting this journey, he said, must realise meaningful action entails more than occasional lunchtime yoga sessions. Efforts need to be channelled into creating a psychologically safe space and a mentally healthy environment, and signposting support. These, he said, were

Mental health is not about tokenism. It's a culture that we need to build

the three pillars through which the City Mental Health Alliance Singapore works with businesses to embed a sustainable and measurable mental health strategy.

Mellener Anne Coelho shared how she was diagnosed with anxiety in 2018 and went through a year of therapy. The process, she said, made her a kinder, more compassionate and better human being. She recalled how Northern Trust had broached the topic of mental health via an art competition. In Asia, she pointed out, most employees are Millennials or Gen Z, and are more open to talking about mental health than previous generations.

Northern Trust wanted to engage the demographics of its workforce, so it partnered with the Mithra Trust to launch the "Sky is the Limit" campaign. "Sky" is a fictional character in the form of a cloud, who runs a mind gym. Every week Sky is joined by four animal characters to discuss different aspects of mental health. Penguin, Slothy, Doggo and Owlie became immensely popular and encouraged staff to share their own mental health stories.

Weng Hong then brought in Shaun Ee, who said the pandemic has meant our mental health matters more than ever. Shaun lost



Weng Hong said it was vital to create psychologically safe spaces



his father in January and found himself in a dark place for three months afterwards. He used work as a refuge from his grief, but then realised this was a way to avoid addressing it. This made him see there was a real opportunity for mental health to take centre stage in the workplace.

Restoring the balance

During Asia Pacific Breweries' town hall, somebody wrote: "You're tired. We're tired. What are we going to do about it?" The management focused their response on improving work-life balance and offering flexible working. Friday afternoons were declared meeting-free, and weekend emails and lunch meetings were scrapped. Employees were also permitted to skip meetings where they felt they were not needed, to work remotely two days a week, and to start an hour earlier or later.

Asia Pacific Breweries organised sessions where leaders listened to employees, and learnt that these changes had a real impact on the workforce. "Mental health is not about tokenism," Shaun added. "It's a culture that we need to build."

Weng Hong asked whether stigma was a barrier to mental health efforts in the region. Mellener replied that Asia's collectivist culture means people revere group norms, hierarchies and family. This could lead people to feel they were letting down the group if they talked about their mental health issues. This makes it even more important for organisations to create awareness, she said. She said personal storytelling engages a part of the brain that leads to deeper emotional engagement, as well as signalling that we're all in this together, making it a powerful tool for dealing with stigma.

In conclusion Mellener said leaders needed to consider mental health a key business priority. Shaun added that it's about understanding why you're addressing mental health, then fostering social moments and promoting a sense of belonging. The work you do must show you care and acknowledge how your people really feel. ■

Mellener and Shaun agreed there is now a real opportunity for mental health to take centre stage in the workplace

Personal storytelling engages a part of the brain that leads to deeper emotional engagement

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Asia's collectivist culture can lead people to keep quiet about their mental health issues for fear of letting down the group. This makes it even more important for organisations to foster a culture of openness.
- 2 Asia has a young workforce that is much more open to talking about mental health than previous generations. Finding methods with which to engage this demographic is key to building an effective mental health strategy.
- 3 Small changes to established working practices can have a big positive impact on employees' mental health, which can lead in turn to improved performance for the company.



We won't stop until everyone has the tools they need to live their best possible lives.

Are your team equipped?

The mental health of our workforces is being challenged like never before. For many of us, our ways of working have changed, and we're facing new pressures to protect the mental health of our staff, not only their physical health.

By educating your colleagues in some of the basics of managing their own mental health, together, we can not only address some of the biggest risks and misconceptions about mental health in the workplace, but create a wellbeing culture that inspires great work wherever it may happen.

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DAY 1 - 16.11.21

No more 996: Recognising and Overcoming Burnout in Asia

The rise of 996 culture – working from 9am to 9pm, six days a week – in Asian economies is increasingly leading to burnout among employees

Saranya Mahendran opened her discussion with Puneet Narang by asking him to define burnout. Puneet highlighted the difference between experiencing moments of stress in our working lives, which is normal, and chronic stress that results in disengagement, cynicism and negative feelings towards work.

While emphasising that burnout is a global phenomenon, Puneet said in a recent study he had seen, covering 69 cities in 53 countries, seven of the top 10 cities for employees reporting burnout were in Asia, with Tokyo in top spot. He attributed this in part to 996, saying: "This 996 work culture, which has become prevalent in some countries in Asia, is one big reason for burnout."

Puneet made the point that managers have an important role in detecting and managing burnout among staff. "Is a manager supporting their employee enough, is a manager reading their employee's early signs of burnout?" he asked. Saranya said that at Stories of Asia, which has an unlimited leave for staff policy, having trust between managers and employees can help employees to manage their own workload, adding that she found this approach liberating.

Moving on to the impact of Covid-19 on employee burnout in Asia, Puneet said the move to remote working has removed the separation between our work and our personal lives, and work has encroached into our personal space. At the same time, lockdowns and restrictions on travel have prevented employees from taking vacations, he added. Diageo is encouraging people that it's critical to take breaks, unwind and recharge.

Saranya then brought in two audience questions for Puneet. Firstly, he asked

how Puneet deals with burnout personally. Secondly, he asked how, from a manager's perspective, you can balance the wellbeing of your staff with the need to meet business objectives.

Managing stress in the Zoom age

Puneet said that since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic he has been working remotely, joining meeting after meeting on Zoom, and has experienced stress many times. Recognising this, he said, he looked at courses on promoting mental health, which inspired him to create a framework he calls Gems – standing for gratefulness, exercise, meditation and savouring – to help him manage his stress and protect his mental and physical health.

Responding to the second question, Puneet said that early in the pandemic Diageo had realised that "if you don't have a healthy workforce, the work will suffer" and he emphasised the important role managers can play in detecting signs of burnout among employees, particularly when remote working means they are not meeting face-to-face.

Should an employee be showing signs of struggling, he said managers have →



FACILITATOR:
SARANYA MAHENDRAN
Content Manager
Stories of Asia

PANEL

PUNEET NARANG
Managing Director,
Indonesia
Diageo

This 996 work culture, which has become prevalent in some countries in Asia, is one big reason for burnout

Beyond

The impact of the pandemic on the mental health of an entire generation cannot be understated or underestimated.

Help to provide schools, desperate for mental health support, the funds to bring in the right services.

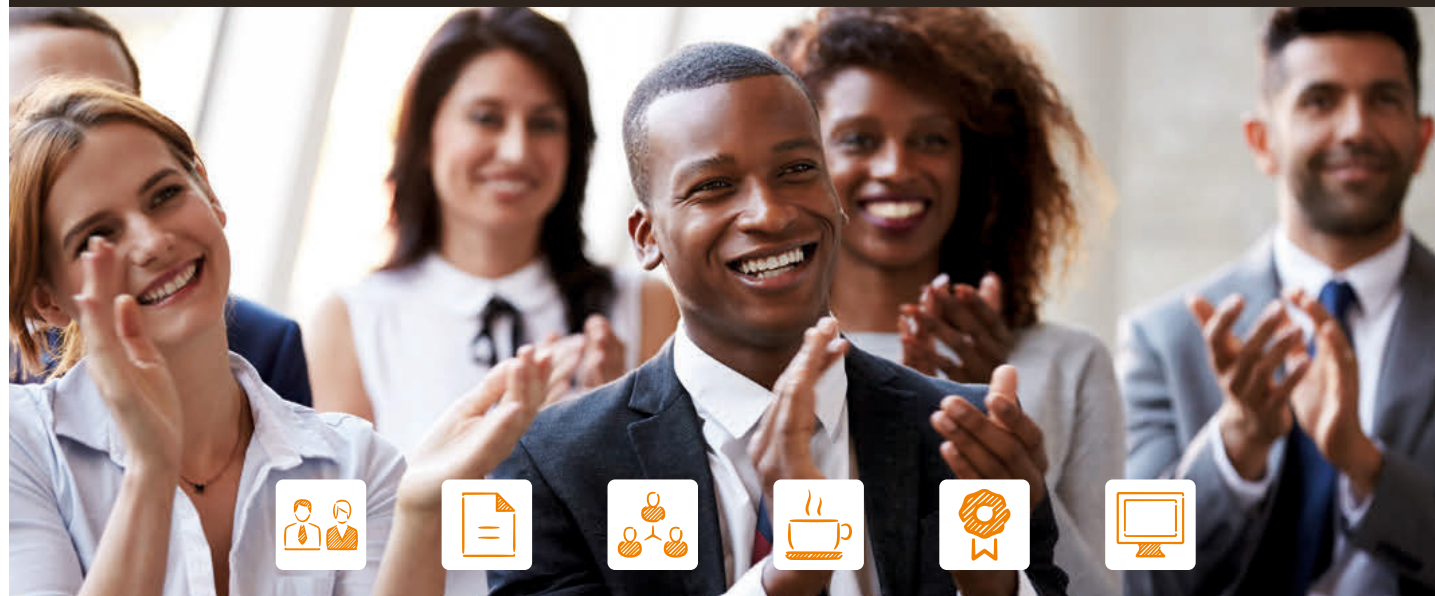
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DAY 1 - 16.11.21



a range of options, from reprioritising objectives to redistributing workload among other team members. "One very important factor that employees look for is that a manager offers authentic appreciation of the work people are doing", Puneet added.

Setting the boundaries

In addition to setting up a confidential helpline for employees to discuss any problems they are having, Puneet said Diageo encouraged employees to start putting boundaries around their work, with the company also introducing guidelines such as avoiding scheduling meetings later than 5pm and policies such as Zoom-free Wednesday afternoons. Other initiatives included Diageo hiring a wellness consultant, which led the company to try to show staff they are valued through small gestures like free coffee or lunch packs at meetings, Puneet said.

On balancing employee wellbeing with business demands, Puneet explained how Diageo has begun a project on "radical

liberation". The initiative seeks to simplify work, partly by stripping out mundane and repetitive tasks or trying to automate them. "Work expands to the time you have, so in many organisations the work culture becomes a 996," he said, but it is important that we don't confuse productivity or performance with long working hours. Tackling this mindset effectively will require a proper discussion at leadership level, he said.

Saranya followed on from this, saying that maybe some countries equate longer working hours with success because they do not have other ways to show employees their work is valued. This is the reason that managers showing appreciation to their employees for the work they do can make such a big a difference, she said. Employees have a role to play here but it's up to employers and their HR departments to pave the way by setting this positive mindset for everyone, she added. ■

Saranya (left) and Puneet agreed that if employees feel valued they are less likely to burn out

Work expands to the time you have, so in many organisations the work culture becomes a 996

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 The 996 culture comes from the top of an organisation – and that is where the solution should come from too. Businesses need to show employees their work is appreciated and it has value beyond the amount of time they spend doing it.

2 Managers have a vital role to play in identifying signs of burnout in employees. Puneet calls them "the first gatekeepers" and says engaged managers, particularly in a remote working environment, will often be the first ones to recognise when members of their team are struggling.

3 Employees can also protect their wellbeing by taking time off work (even if travel restrictions mean it is a staycation) and setting boundaries. They should also recognise the added stresses that the remote working environment has created, then act to address these.

THIS CAN HAPPEN 2021

In conversation With Dr Ellie Cannon Analysing Mental Health at Work

The discussion analysed how the landscape of mental health in the workplace has evolved over recent years and how the pandemic will affect its evolution



FACILITATOR:
ZOE SINCLAIR,
Co-Founder,
This Can Happen

PANEL

DR ELLIE CANNON
Doctor, Author &
Broadcaster

Dr Ellie Cannon joined Zoe Sinclair for the opening UK session, to reflect on mental health development in the workplace over the past few years and how it has been impacted by the pandemic. "The pandemic absolutely changed the landscape," said Ellie. "We all work so differently." For many, our workplaces became our homes, so measures designed to support mental health at work might need rethinking.

She spoke of our collective trauma from bereavement and illness, but also the collective grief for all we have lost over the last couple of years. We've lost protective factors including socialising, exercising, holidays and breaks, she said. Even workplace routines – the walk to the bus stop, the chat in reception, the drive home listening to a podcast – had been buffers against stresses and strains. "Actually, going to work is very protective," she reasoned. "Work is good for us." And its loss weakened our resilience.

So can the workplace become a protective place again, wondered Zoe. Ellie believed so – even little things, like encouraging home-workers to get away from their desks and replicate the walk to work they would have had when working in an office, are helpful, she said. She acknowledged,

At work we still don't really delve into alcohol and drug addiction, which we all find quite dirty and tainted

though, that it was much tougher now for workplaces to look after the mental wellbeing of staff – not least because of the trend towards flexible working.

One area where workplaces could make a difference, suggested Zoe, was in broadening the mental health discussion. Ellie agreed that while we have become more comfortable talking about anxiety, depression and even conditions like OCD, other aspects remain off-limits. Schizophrenia is still largely taboo at work, she said, self-harm is rarely discussed, while only the "acceptable" faces of addiction, such as gambling, are ever acknowledged. "We don't really delve into alcohol and drug addiction, which we all find quite dirty and tainted," she observed. She warned, though, that it's important to be aware of the way people of different cultures and beliefs view mental health and to adapt the conversations accordingly.

The pandemic generation

What about those young people just entering the workforce? Ellie believed the conversation around mental health would come much more easily for this generation, but she urged workplaces to be alert to possible repercussions from the pandemic. "They certainly have the language and dialogue and are possibly more aware of how to access help," she said. "But they also have a much higher degree of pressure." These young workers missed out on the rite of passage of graduation or leaving school; they had abnormal experiences of university or apprenticeships; they were kept apart from their friends and denied the possibility of travelling. They have gone through a lot in their formative years, she added.

Asked whether she thought mental health was being overused in the workplace as an excuse for time off, Ellie was doubtful.



She did, however, believe it was best practice for an employee to show evidence of consulting a health professional and a willingness to address the issue, whether with therapy, medication or a change of lifestyle. "We can overly label ourselves as having mental health issues," she added, "and this does a disservice to those with real mental illness." She argued that some reactions were normal and didn't need to be medicalised. That didn't mean, however, that those who were understandably depressed after trauma or bereavement did not deserve time away from work.

There had been much talk of the pandemic's toll on our mental health, but had the GP seen prescriptions rise, Zoe asked. Yes, Ellie confirmed, pointing to a change in the demographic of those seeking mental health help. Forty-something men, for instance, who she'd rarely seen in the practice, were suffering from uncertainties around work.



Ellie (right) told Zoe how young workers had the language to talk about mental health, but also faced greater pressure

She admitted that anti-depressant prescriptions were sometimes a sticking plaster in the face of huge waiting list for therapy and mental health services. And she saw an opportunity for workplaces to introduce the option of remote counselling or therapy – for individuals and groups – which had worked well during the pandemic due to ease of access. But the doctor – who went public with the fact that she took anti-depressants for anxiety – was keen to highlight that the medication was broadly, and often successfully, prescribed for depression, anxiety, ACD, eating disorders and even chronic pain.

She saw no reason why employers needed to know when an employee was taking anti-depressants, any more than if they were taking blood pressure pills, but recognised there was still a way to go to dispel old-fashioned attitudes, which associated them with addiction and "zombified" states. ■

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 The pandemic made us lose some of the protective factors that work had previously provided. Work routines, like walking to the bus stop or chatting to a friend in reception, used to act as significant buffers against stresses and strains. Their loss has weakened our resilience.

2 Workplaces need to broaden the mental health conversation to include "taboo" topics. We've become more comfortable talking about anxiety, depression and OCD, for instance, but aspects like schizophrenia, self-harm and drug and alcohol addiction remain off-limits.

3 There's been a change in the demographic of those seeking mental health help, since the pandemic started. With huge waiting lists for therapy, workplaces have an opportunity to offer staff remote counselling or therapy, either one-to-one or in groups.

Living and Working With Diagnosed Mental Illness

This session looked at the experiences of a range of people living with mental health issues, and how their conditions provided both obstacles and opportunities



FACILITATOR:
DANIEL FRYER
Mental Health and Wellbeing Consultant
How To Be

PANEL

OLIVER HOPKINSON
Managing Director
Bind

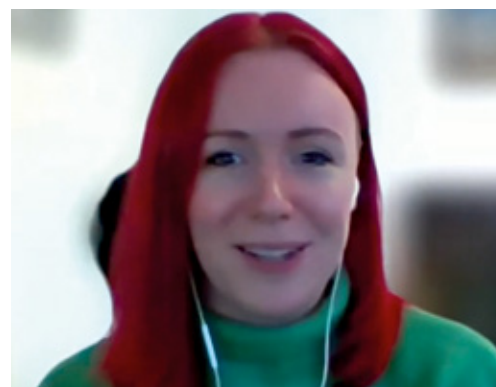
XANDER HOUGH
Global People Director & Leadership Coach
Nexus Frontier Technology

REBECCA PIGGOTT
HR Advisor
BCS Consulting

SAMANTHA TREASURE-VALENTINE
Acuvue Account Manager
Johnson & Johnson

"Yeah, I've got quite the comic book collection of diagnoses," quipped Rebecca Piggott. Diagnosed with depression and anxiety at the age of 13, she went on a journey to reach a diagnosis of bipolar and borderline personality disorder just 18 months ago. She's unsure whether her mental health conditions make her take on too much at work or whether it's more a case of stresses in her personal life bleeding into the workplace. "You don't leave mental health at the door; it's all one life, it's all your own experience," she explained. "Sometimes I take on lots of projects, get them all done and am proud of what I've achieved. Sometimes I want to do lots of DIY and redecorate my entire house in a day, which is not conducive to good work."

Rebecca became the company's Mental Health Lead because of her willingness to talk and answer questions about her own condition and a great culture where people want to help and support each other. But she's reluctant to become their mental health poster girl; she doesn't want others to think that her experience is THE experience. "It's nice being the person that everyone know they can come to, but what I don't want it to mean that I can't go through my own struggles," she said. "It's an ongoing journey."



Samantha Treasure-Valentine, who was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder at the age of 19, regards her condition as a "superpower". Despite BPD's "really bad write-up", she draws the positives, such as the unrivalled levels of empathy and compassion it induces. At the height of the pandemic, for instance, she drew on that power when she knew many colleagues would be going through a "rubbish time" and may have felt unable to explain how they were feeling. She bravely shared her own story with them to encourage others to come forward.

Sam added that being aware of her boundaries and triggers – and being able to express them to others – was the foundation for all her healthy professional and personal relationships. And that doesn't just have to be for people with mental illness, she pointed out.

For Oliver Hopkinson, mental health has shaped the way he runs his business. Now 35, he experimented with party drugs in his teens until, one night, the cognitive maps in his brain got muddled, leading to depression, anxiety and bipolar. He is still on this journey of development and recovery, he said, and although it's been a challenge, it's made him a better person. He runs a company with no set working



Sam (left) said expressing boundaries was vital for healthy relationships. Oliver said his journey has made him a better person



Rebecca (centre) and Xander (right) both told Daniel support from those around them is vital to developing a healthy mindset

hours or holiday allowances. Work fits in around people's lives, not vice versa, allowing them to shine. "We are all living different lives; we know ourselves when we can be most productive," he reasoned. A monthly "Bindfulness" budget, meanwhile, offers each employee £100 to invest in themselves. The Managing Director prides himself on leading with openness and vulnerability, allowing staff in turn to show their vulnerabilities and to expect the support of the company. Vulnerable, but certainly not fragile or broken, Oliver constantly pushes himself beyond his comfort zone. "I've been on anti-depressants for 15 years and I am still the optimal version of myself," he concluded.

A journey of self-discovery

For Xander Hough, CBT-based therapy helped him understand the triggers that led him to the alcohol and street drugs that exacerbated his underlying depression. Only when he began to recognise the damaging, deeply held beliefs he had about himself, could he begin to heal. "These were about never being good enough,

never being lovable," he said, linking those beliefs to being gay and how people reacted when he came out. He became a workaholic. Driven to do well, work silly hours, take on too much and constantly please others, he was never able to enjoy or celebrate his successes. He believed the drive to please others by going the extra mile was not uncommon in the LGBTQ+ community, where rejection could often engender feelings of worthlessness, and self-censorship piles on layers of stress. "I don't think people understand those inner psychological drivers," said the Leadership Coach, who is keen to spread awareness.

And he wishes he'd learnt the importance of finding your tribe sooner, having spent too long in friendship groups and jobs where they "were never going to get it" rather than find those who "will like what I'm about, who won't want to change me and who will want to get the best out of me". ■

We are all living different lives, we know ourselves when we can be most productive

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Being conscious of our boundaries and triggers, and being able to talk about them to others, can be a healthy foundation for successful relationships at work or in our private lives. This is true whether or not we are suffering from mental ill health.
- 2 If we want people to shine, work needs to fit around their lives – not vice versa. Giving staff more control over their working hours and holidays could translate into improved productivity as well as a happier workforce.
- 3 Some people are driven to be workaholics because of feelings of worthlessness resulting from rejection at some point in their life. We need to be more aware of these psychological drivers that can lead to poor mental health.

Growing Pains: How Employers Can Understand Mental Health in Young People

Young people face specific mental health challenges, which have been amplified over the past 18 months. This session looked at how employers can help



FACILITATOR:
JONNY BENJAMIN
Founder
Beyond

PANEL

ANTONIO FERREIRA
Student
University of Essex

LAURA ROBINSON-BARNARD
Senior HR Manager
for Trainees
Allen & Overy

EMILY SIMMONDS
Assistant Producer
This Morning, ITV

HANNAH SAAD
Head of Early Talent
Recruitment
Accenture

Why is youth mental health so important now and how can employers support a young workforce? That's the question Jonny Benjamin, founder of a youth mental health charity, put to his panel.

Emily Simmonds was diagnosed with anorexia as a teenager, which affected both her school and work life. From an early age it's so important to realise that you have to talk about your emotions and feelings, she said, because if you struggle from mental ill health, it can affect so many areas of your life.

Antonio Ferreira described how his mental health suffered as a teenager as a result of the unhealthy pressure he brought on himself at school, which led to unhealthy expectations from others. "I turned it into this boulder on my back that was putting me closer to the ground," said the student and mental health activist. That pressure made him paranoid, confrontational and prone to "catastrophic thinking".

He remembered thinking that if he didn't get 10 GCSEs it would be all over for him. With the transition to college, the boulder became too big to carry. He attempted to take his own life and was hospitalised for two years. He took that time to find his way and is now at university and volunteers for

I want to see equal opportunity to struggle in the workplace

mental health charities. His first question to any employer is about how they look after the mental health of their employees and whether that support is really equal, in terms of background and culture. "I want to see equal opportunity to struggle in the workplace," he stressed.

Say something

Emily stressed the importance to her mental health recovery of an approachable boss who checked in with her regularly and with whom she had open conversations from the start. "Saying nothing is worse; saying anything is better and might give you that out to say, yes, I am struggling actually," she said.

Hannah Saad spoke of Accenture as a company that recognised the potential toll of starting a first professional job and the need to provide appropriate support. "People can be coming from an academic environment and trying to understand the organisation and build networks, all the while trying to present themselves in the most positive way because they feel they're being judged on your performance", she said. A good induction programme, buddy system and regular contact points were all steps in the right direction. Employee assistance programmes, with free



Jonny asked whether home working had knocked wellbeing



counselling and onward care, were also crucial tools.

Laura Robinson-Barnard, who looks after a large number of trainee solicitors at a law firm, agreed it was essential to take care of this group's mental health – and not just because it was the right thing to do. "Our trainees of today are our partners of tomorrow. From a business perspective, it makes sense to have a sustainable pipeline of people who are happy and who are looked after from a mental health and wellbeing perspective." Laura spoke of the key role of a trainee-led mental health group that fed its ideas to the senior leadership team.

Jonny wondered whether wellbeing had been knocked by home working, with many young people spending the pandemic away from home and trying to work in shared accommodation. Zoom fatigue aside, Hannah said we had to keep up those opportunities to connect – particularly informal ones. She called for regular opportunities for young people to share their feelings – maybe in forums or via surveys – and training for line managers

and buddies to better understand what to look for and where to seek help.

All agreed there was a danger of screen fatigue and that regular breaks were essential to wellbeing. They also recognised the dangers of not switching off. Hannah felt that managers should avoid setting unfair expectations by emailing late at night, while Laura called for more thoughtful delegation from managers to avoid bottlenecks and unrealistic deadlines.

As for eradicating stigma around mental health, Antonio remembered being advised by his father to keep his mental health issues to himself at job interviews. But he soon realised the benefits of disclosure. "It is that stigma that creates barriers for honesty, support, conversations, understanding," he said. He added that it was only when people become aware of something that it becomes action and action turns into change. ■

(Left to right) Emily, Hannah, Laura and Antonio discussed young people's challenges



Our trainees of today are our partners of tomorrow. It makes sense to have a pipeline of people who are looked after

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Open conversations and approachable managers play a big part in mental health maintenance or recovery for young people. It's better for managers to say anything, rather than nothing, as it might give the young person that opportunity they need to reach out for support.
- 2 A good induction programme, buddy system and regular contact points can help guide young joiners, who may be entering the workforce straight from the academic world. Some may feel lost and bewildered, and these anchor points can relieve the pressure.
- 3 Not disclosing mental illness at work creates barriers for honesty, support, conversations and understanding. It's only when people become aware of something that it can become an action that, in turn, can lead to change.

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that support wellbeing feel
motivated to do their best.



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DAY 1 - 16.11.21

Starting the Mental Health Journey in the UK

Various businesses discussed how they got started on their mental health
journeys and began supporting employees with their wellbeing



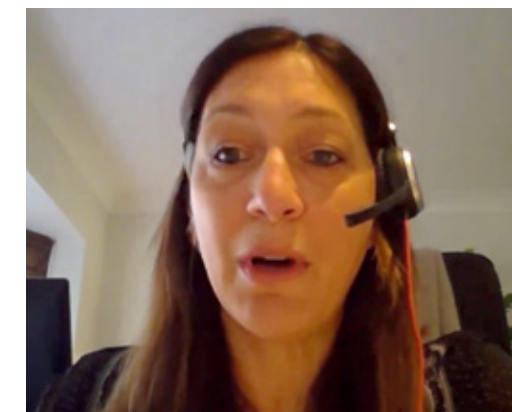
Amanda said Gymshark dived straight in

How and why do organisations begin their mental health journeys? Katie Legg sought insight from four speakers from four entirely different companies in this enlightening session.

For Kizzy Agustin, the pandemic was the trigger. "It started our journey, it started our conversations, it started our initiatives to ensure we were putting mental health and good wellbeing at the forefront of our minds," she explained. Covid accelerated talks about home working and IT systems, lockdowns underscored their importance and now the approach has been normalised, despite the challenges.

Now Russell Cooke Solicitors has an agile working programme where they simply expect staff to work in accordance with how they work effectively, which is intended to take some of the pressure off, she explained. She added that the firm had also embraced the commercial aspect of good wellbeing, recognising that losing employees through mental health and stress was something that could catastrophically affect the performance of the business.

The pandemic got people on board with the new approach. Everybody was listening,



Cathryn wanted to bring empathy to her firm

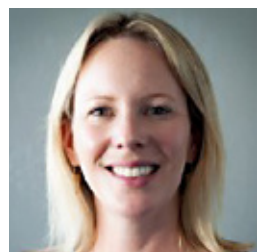
she explained, because people were going through their own struggles. They wanted to be part of this, and to join the leadership on their journey.

Action first, strategy later

Amanda Webb said that mental health was a massive focus for Gymshark, with its demographic skewed towards people in their twenties. "We didn't write a strategy – we just got going," she revealed, saying this approach allowed them to be agile and fast-paced.

Any strategy, she added, would have swiftly become outdated in the face of the pandemic. While a strategy has since been penned, she emphasised that they must keep listening to employees so that it remained a good fit. And they had to keep reminding people of the help that was at hand. "It's only relevant when they need it," she reasoned.

Cathryn Crow talked of the male-dominated, high-pressure sales environment she found herself in at Sky Media. "I noticed a distinct lack of softness around, a lack of empathy," she admitted, "and I really wanted to make sure that we opened up the conversation and bring mental health out of the shadows." →



FACILITATOR:
KATIE LEGG
Director
Mental Health UK

PANEL

KIZZY AGUSTIN
Partner
Russell Cooke
Solicitors

SOPHIE BEGG
Director of Executive
Engagement &
Governance
Visa

CATHRYN CROW
Head of Performance
Sky Media

AMANDA WEBB
Group Pay & Perks
Director
Gymshark

THIS CAN HAPPEN 2021

THIS CAN HAPPEN. Index

This Can Happen Index

We established our Insights and Measurement Division to help organisations understand the effect of their mental health programmes.

Led by Kathryn Courteny-Evans we are undertaking consultancy, listen & learning exercises, pulse, qualitative and quantitative surveys to understand the impact of strategies.

We have also launched This Can Happen Index, our global mental health benchmarking survey aligning the voices of the employer and the employee.



To find out more about our research offering and 2022 launch of This Can Happen Index, email: hello@thiscanhappenglobal.com

DAY 1 - 16.11.21



Sophie (left) and Kizzy helped launch initiatives in response to challenging situations

The first step was to introduce Mental Health First Aiders – colleagues who would be trained to support others who were struggling. But while there was initial enthusiasm for the training, this waned over time. So they started telling stories in forums and company gatherings – and Cathryn was among the storytellers, revealing her own and her daughter's struggles with anxiety. For anyone to stand up and tell their story, is so powerful, she said. And doing that helped to boost interest and motivation.

Despite the company being a fast-paced sales business, she was proud that mental health was now one of its pillars. "It's in the very structure of the business – that's a brilliant place to be." And she hoped that Sky would invest in a full-time person to steer the company through its mental health journey.

The suicide of a colleague four years ago was the sad starting point for the mental health journey at Visa, explained Sophie Begg. She recognised a disconnect between the immediate needs of the team struggling to come to terms with the loss of their colleague and what was happening at the top of the organisation.

"The facilities, the services that you think are there; when you get one of these really challenging situations, it really tests that," she said.

Despite the difficulties of pulling a strategy together in a global organisation, they now have a "great" one, including an Employee Assistance Programme and Mental Health First Aiders. But most importantly, she said, "we need to be a family". She added: "We are starting to get really nice movement at the base of the organisation where colleagues are feeling really open to talk to each other." The employee network group, meanwhile, was able to speak candidly to leadership teams as part of a constant feedback cycle.

Asked for a single piece of advice for companies about to embark on similar journeys, the panellists agreed that the best way forward was simply to get on and do it, and adapt the approach along the way. As Amanda put it: "Don't be put off by leadership, don't be afraid, and listen to what employees want." ■

At the base of the organisation colleagues are feeling really open to talk to each other

KEY TAKEAWAYS

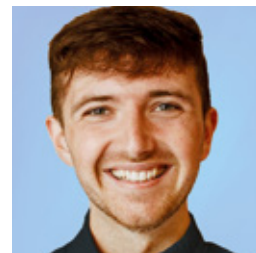
1 The pandemic was the trigger for many organisations to start their mental health journey, with wellbeing a hot topic. Covid accelerated talks around agile working and it's now normal in many workplaces to operate where you feel you can be most effective on any particular day.

2 Introducing Mental Health First Aiders – colleagues who are trained to support others who are struggling – is a good first step, while storytelling in forums and at company gatherings can help maintain interest and motivation.

3 Just get on and start your company's mental health journey by opening up the conversation, listening to what colleagues need and bringing mental health out of the shadows. Don't worry if senior leadership isn't yet on board; strategies can come later.

Battling Cancer – and its Effect on Mental Health

Cancer can take a huge toll on mental as well as physical wellbeing. What can the workplace do to help?



FACILITATOR:
TJ POWER
Psychological Wellbeing Consultant and Director of Mental Health & Wellbeing TJ Power

PANEL

TARA MCGOVERN
Head of Recruitment and Career Development Metropolitan Police Service

EMMA HOLDEN
Global Head of Human Resources Schroder Investment Management

BARBARA WILSON
Founder & Director Working With Cancer

Anxiety, depression, loss of confidence, a feeling that your body has let you down, even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – the psychological toll of cancer is huge. This is something that's often misunderstood in the workplace.

What kind of challenges do people face with their mental health when navigating cancer in the workplace, asked moderator TJ Power. "The emotional impact can affect people long after the physical impact," explained Barbara Wilson. Her organisation Working With Cancer supports anyone affected by cancer to manage work, remain in work or find work, dealing in particular with the fear of recurrence. Barbara spoke about the work she did within organisations to provide education and awareness – not just to individuals with cancer, but to their colleagues and managers. Many managers, she said, didn't understand cancer – its varieties, stages and treatments – and needed to be educated. And they often needed to be given the tools to have emotionally intelligent conversations around the subject.

Tara McGovern felt she was lucky in this respect. The Detective Chief Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police



was diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago, just after landing her dream job. "I really needed that reassurance that my job was safe and that I would be able to get back on track with where I was headed," explained Tara, who feared she might get written off. Her line manager, who was familiar with the illness through a friend's experience and was comfortable talking about it, provided that reassurance and relieved that stress.

Tara was in touch with a welfare officer from day one and remained in regular contact with the team while she was away. They included her when there was workplace news and invited her to gatherings. She couldn't always go, but it was brilliant when she could. "I'd turn up with my latest wig," she recalled. "I was still Tara. I was still part of that team."

Sharing and support

She was unprepared for the loss of her long hair, as well as the significant surgery. "I'd look in the mirror and I didn't recognise myself, and that was a real challenge for me," she said. But she found support from other women at the Met who had been through the same experience and reached out to her while she was away from work. This encouraged her to set up

We buddy up when someone's diagnosed. We support women going through breast cancer, partners and line managers



an internal support group – Breast Mates – when she returned. "We buddy up when someone's newly diagnosed. We support women going through [breast cancer], we support partners and we support line managers," she explained.

They send flowers on treatment days or special deodorants to use post-surgery, and provide forums where the women can chat, share tips, moan and offer camaraderie. In particular, the group is there to support the return to work, which Tara described as "scary".

She mentioned one colleague who could barely bring herself to re-enter the building she'd worked in for years. "She looked completely different, she felt completely different – she didn't know if she could go in," Barbara echoed this. "It's a bit like getting in a cold shower," she said. "You've finished your treatment, you're on your own and it's important you manage it." She recommended a phased, carefully planned return to work, as well as thinking ahead about how to manage expectations and what to say to people.

It was this kind of advice that encouraged Schroder's Emma Holden to work with Barbara in supporting the company's people whenever there was a cancer diagnosis. TJ noted how cancer is a subject that many people are afraid to talk about, making the conversation in the workplace difficult. Emma wanted to make the language of cancer more accessible and to enable people to talk more openly about it, but recognised that it was unfamiliar territory for some, which was where Barbara's training came in. It's vital said Emma, to recognise that everyone's cancer journey is different. It's only through the conversation that you can really understand how you can adapt and make reasonable adjustments to give them the best experience.

Emma added that the company's Mental Health First Aiders were also trained specifically about cancer, believing that network allowed them to "put an extra safety blanket around people" – particularly after their return to work. And what would Tara have most wanted to hear on her return to work, asked TJ. "I love to hear, 'we've missed you'," she replied. ■

(Left to right) TJ, Barbara, Emma and Tara discussed how talking openly about cancer could make work a source of support

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Many managers don't understand enough about cancer to have emotionally intelligent conversations with team members. They need to be educated about its varieties, stages and treatments because everybody's cancer journey is different.
- 2 The return to work after cancer is particularly scary – even long-term employees may feel alone or out of place. A phased and carefully planned return to work is best, while people should think ahead how to manage expectations and difficult conversations.
- 3 It is helpful if managers and colleagues keep in regular contact with team members away from work for cancer treatment. Sharing news or inviting them to gatherings – even if they can't always make it – makes people feel they are still part of the team.

Four Steps to Stress-Free Living

Stress is never a good thing, argues psychologist Jo Clarke. In her solo session, she outlined four simple steps to say goodbye to stressful responding for good



JO CLARKE
Director
Petros

Some people think that stress is necessary and inevitable in our day-to-day lives, but stress is never a good thing. That was the opening gambit from Professor Jo Clarke in her solo session on stress-free living.

The former prison psychologist said stress might manifest itself as irritability, tiredness, anxiety, depression, eating and sleeping poorly or drinking more alcohol than usual. And there was no way that any of these things could be seen as a good thing.

She went on to say that those who believed that stress was needed to motivate, enthuse and engage people at work, were actually talking about pressure – something we're under all the time. That pressure, she said, only became stress if we failed to make sense of it. Her heightened heart rate ahead of delivering the session was pressure; she would only become stressed if she dwelt on what might go wrong, how many people were watching or whether she'd sound stupid.

She said that there was no such thing as a stressful event in our day-to-day lives, only a stressful response. Getting married, going for an interview or breaking down on the motorway were all events that were only stressful if our response made them so. And the director of Petros, which won the This Can Happen consultancy award this year, stated that all stress would lead to a "possibly shorter but definitely miserable life".

After genetics and lifestyle, she said, the next best predictor of our longevity was cortisol – a naturally occurring hormone in our systems that functions as an alarm system, anti-inflammatory, painkiller and facilitator of the release of sugar when we're under pressure. But stressful

With practice,
we can focus
and control our
attention

thoughts also produce cortisol, and excess production is toxic and damages our wellbeing, she warned.

The professor said we all have the choice not to respond stressfully. "I think that's a superpower and one that we can all attain," she said. With all this in mind, she set out her four steps to stress-free living.

1. Wake up

She said too many of us go through life absent-mindedly and that it was easy for those "idle daydreams" to turn into waking nightmares" and cause stress. Rather, we should have our minds engaged in the present as much as possible.

The way to do this, she advised, was to "come to our senses", particularly through listening. If this sense was connected to what we could hear right now, it meant our mind was present. If your mind had wandered off to imagine a catastrophe that might happen next week or panic about something you hadn't done this week, then we should simply reconnect with our sense of listening.

2. Control your attention

With practice, we can focus and control our attention, said Jo, adding that around 90 minutes was our maximum attention span. After this, we get easily distracted,



Jo urged us to pay attention to the present and let go of frustrations in order to lead a stress-free life

so we must also give ourselves downtime. To manage it, we need to give our attention to what was important in any particular moment and to the people around you at that point. If we were at home, for instance, it was important to avoid drifting back to that email we didn't send or that deadline we faced tomorrow. Another way of putting it was to be in the room you're in, ie. to have your mind with you wherever you are.

3. Detach

This, she said, was not about disconnecting but about keeping a perspective on what was going on around you and "not turning molehills into mountains". She spoke of all the pressures of life that can get into our minds and grow and swell until we are lost in a "maelstrom of misery".

We could shut them out temporarily, but they would inevitably find a way back in at some point. Alternatively, we could "go up to the loft of the mind and get a perspective of what's going on".

4. Let go

People need to let go of those frustrations or resentments that can make us miserable and cause us to respond stressfully, she said. That will bring a huge sense of relief, where hanging on to them would only do damage to us. Wake up, control attention, detach and let go. It takes practice, advised Jo, but it could be a life-saving mantra. ■

Go up to the loft of
the mind and get
a perspective of
what's going on

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 There is no such thing as a stressful situation in our day-to-day lives, only a stressful response. Whether it's getting married, going for an interview or breaking down on the motorway, we can choose whether or not to respond stressfully.

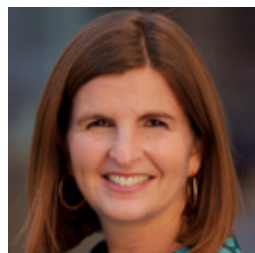
2 Stress may shorten our lives but will definitely make them more miserable. Cortisol is a key predictor of how long we will live and while the hormone plays a crucial role in our bodies when we are under pressure, stressful thoughts can see it rise to dangerous levels.

3 To live a stress-free life, we should keep our minds as present as possible, control our attention and give ourselves downtime. We can detach ourselves from potential stress by gaining perspective, and let go of frustrations and resentments that make us miserable or anxious.



UK and Europe Leadership Panel

In this session, leaders from some of the world's largest organisations shared what they are doing to create change and support employees' mental health



FACILITATOR:
ZOE SINCLAIR,
Co-Founder,
This Can Happen

PANEL

CHRIS DUNCAN
CEO - UK Publishing
Bauer Media

TERESA PARKER
President, Europe,
Middle East and Africa
Northern Trust

SIMON VOSS
Head of Finance,
Northern Europe
Colgate-Palmolive

Where does mental health sit within your industries? That was Zoe's starting question to the three senior leaders on the panel. Teresa Parker identified a "growing openness" in financial services to discuss mental health issues, with most of the large companies now offering mental health and wellbeing programmes. But she set this against it being a stressful industry. The sector has a "reputation for presenteeism" and most roles are desk-based. "This is not a great combination," she conceded.

It's also a highly regulated industry, she pointed out. This is a double-edged sword, she said, bringing some pressure but also, increasingly, greater understanding from regulators of the benefits of good conduct and good mental health.

Chris Duncan spoke of publishing and media as a deadline – and output-driven industry that was very creative, but also sometimes stressful. "It's an environment where there's a lot of teamwork, but there can also be a lot of individual stress over performance and delivery," he said.

It was a similar story for the consumer goods industry, said Simon Voss, with employees facing pressures around commercial targets. He said that he was

now seeing greater investment in the mental health of employees.

A push from the pandemic

For many years, Colgate-Palmolive had offered an Employee Assistance Programme and resources would focus on promoting what was available. More recently, he said, they had invested in training of managers and employees, increased the medical insurance offer to include access to mental health professionals without the need for a GP referral and broadened employee fitness allowances to include mental health and wellbeing. The pandemic – and operating in a virtual environment – had required the leaders to step up and make discussions around wellbeing "more purposeful", he said. "You need to make a conscious interaction with someone's day – to spend some time with them, to take them out of the day-to-day, to have those one-to-one conversations with them." With the help of coaching, he believed that they had become better listeners, more empathetic listeners and able to listen without judgement or prejudice.

Teresa said the Mental Health First Aid programme had brought about a huge cultural shift. Northern Trust started training its senior management in Mental



Health First Aid in 2018. Since then, the company has trained around 600 people out of 3,500 overall. It has created an openness around mental health, given people the language and comfort to discuss it, removed the stigma and highlighted the importance of addressing mental health issues at the earliest point.

Teresa has gone through the training herself and it has changed the way she manages, she says. Additionally, some of the company's most senior people had talked on video to staff about their own mental health experiences, which had been really significant and important in facilitating that shift.

Zoe asked how you get the balance right between engaging with mental health and getting staff to perform at the highest level. Early intervention was crucial, said Teresa, so that people didn't get to the stage where they were unable to perform. Allowing staff to participate in setting goals and deciding how to reach them was another important measure.

On whether mental health was one of the

biggest challenges his business faced, Chris said it was part of the challenge of maintaining a culture where you attract the best talent and provide a great place for people to do their best work. Within that, he said, you had to make sure to protect those who need help and deliver the skills to work in high-pressure environments. "That's part of the challenge of providing a great culture."

Teresa agreed, adding that the culture at work had changed around mental health. "Previously it was private, it was your personal life and now it's part of the work environment."

Leaders had to make sure that culture was good for everyone and took into account the values and purposes of the organisation, the conduct of people and the support they needed to perform.

"So mental health is a bigger issue, it has come into the workplace and the pandemic has emphasised it." ■

(From left) Zoe talked to Chris, Teresa and Simon about the cultural shift in mental health provision

You need to make a conscious interaction with someone's day, to have one of those one-to-one conversations

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Coaching has made leaders better listeners who are less likely to judge. It has equipped them with the language and confidence to discuss mental health and removed some of the stigma. But leaders need to have conscious and purposeful interactions with team members to promote wellbeing.

2 Even though many big companies have improved their employee mental health offering, it is still often difficult to balance their requirement for deadlines and targets with wellbeing. Company ambitions often create individual stress over performance and delivery.

3 One of the biggest challenges facing any business is creating and maintaining a culture where you attract the best talent and provide a great place for people to perform. Part of that challenge is protecting those who need support to work effectively under pressure.

Masculinity And Mental Health: The Good, The Bad And The Ugly

With phrases such as 'man up' still all too common, men can ignore their emotions. This session looked at how men could manage stress more healthily

PANEL



DR. NICK EARLEY
Head of Psychology
Happence



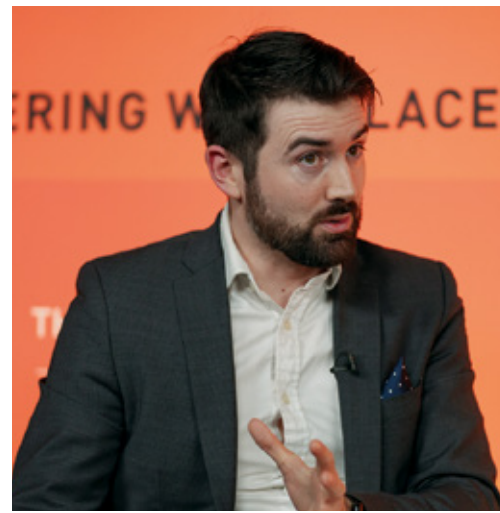
LEON OUTAR
Neuropsychology
Practitioner
Happence

Growing up in the '80s and '90s, Nick Earley's role models were the likes of Arnie, Van Damme and Phil Mitchell from *EastEnders*. "I suppose they were manly men, tough, getting-the-women kind of men," said the clinical psychologist, who shared the stage for the session with his colleague Leon Outar from digital wellbeing company Happence.

The concept of what it meant to be a man was reinforced at his all-boys schools, where they were encouraged to play rugby and football, not to whinge, and to get on with it. Leon picked out the Diet Coke adverts through the years, which always featured a male with large pectorals, broad shoulders and narrow waist who attracted the admiration of women. "It reinforces the narrative that achieving this body ideal would be conducive to attracting the opposite sex."

While masculinity wasn't necessarily a bad thing, continued Nick, it was unhelpful if too rigidly defined. That could impact on the way men viewed themselves in the world and might lead to them ignoring or failing to process emotions that didn't fit – such as confusion, weakness, shame and anger. "That leaves a very dark place where it feels that you're powerless to communicate," he added.

The speakers highlighted some key statistics reinforcing the idea that men's failure to speak out about how they were feeling is dangerous. Men are three times more likely than women to take their own lives. Nick pointed to the suicide of his uncle and godfather six years ago. It was unexpected, he said, as his uncle had seemed a confident and affable person. Men often put



up fronts, he said. "I can only imagine how difficult it must be to feel that you can't communicate, that you're holding it in in that way."

Similarly, only 36% of GP referrals for therapy are for men. Men are clearly suffering in silence and dealing with things by themselves, said Leon. And even when they do engage with services, added Nick, the dropout rate is high. Men are more likely to externalise their emotions in order to cope, whether that's through aggression towards others or alcohol abuse (men are three times more likely to be alcohol-dependent than women). Leon noted, too, that copious drinking is often celebrated within male groups.

And this lack of effective coping mechanisms to deal with psychological difficulties also relates to men reporting lower life satisfaction. Even exercise and diets could become unhealthy behaviour, Leon warned. Exercise addiction, for instance, is a key coping mechanism to appease stress, anxiety and moods, but also a way of gaining masculinity through muscles. And social media encouraged the behaviour, pushing ideals all the time.

Men are clearly suffering in silence and dealing with things by themselves



As Nick put it: exercise and watching what we eat are fine in moderation, but when they become obsessive "the other great things in life get pushed to the side".

Give boys a break

So what can be done? It has to be made as easy as possible for men to seek help within organisations, teams or groups of friends. This might involve reaching out more. "Really ask how people are," encouraged Nick, and keep watch for any unusual behaviours.

Athletes, for example, might be vulnerable to psychological challenges at certain points in their career, such as when they get injured. "It can compromise their self-worth." It's also vital to create safe and non-judgemental environments where people can be themselves and speak about any issues. There is no place, argued Leon, for phrases like "man up" or "big boys don't cry" in these spaces. Men need to be able to express their emotions.

Nick said we also needed to act against gender norms and engage more compassionately with men. Even some school or club mottos, he felt, promoted the idea of being fearless and courageous to go on and prosper – and this was a "huge barrier" for some men.

The speakers called for the term masculinity to be reconstructed. Too rigid an interpretation, they said, and there was no room for manoeuvre when things went wrong (job loss or injury, say). "There's not much middle ground, which can have a big impact on wellbeing. A more flexible narrative in society is needed."

Their final call was for men to recognise their emotions, use them as guides and be open to learning more ways of addressing them, whether through mindfulness or CBT. ■

Nick (left) and Leon agreed that men needed to be given space to express their emotions

There's not much middle ground. A more flexible narrative in society is needed

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Masculinity isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it's unhelpful when it's too rigidly linked with things such as bravery, toughness and muscularity. For those who don't fit the definition, it could lead to them ignoring or suppressing "unmanly" emotions such as confusion, weakness or shame.

2 Many men don't speak out about their feelings. They put up fronts and suffer alone in silence. This explains why they are three times more likely to take their own lives than women and represent only 36% of GP referrals for therapy.

3 Exercise is fine in moderation but can become unhealthy behaviour. Excessive exercise, for instance, is often used by men to cope with stress, anxiety and moods, as well to gain masculinity through muscles. It can push other aspects of life to the side.

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DAY 1 - 16.11.21



Starting the Mental Health Journey in the US

The opening session for the US explored local nuances to understand how one company developed tangible mental health initiatives for its employees

"It's amazing how one individual can make a huge impact within an organisation," said Monika Misra by way of introduction to her discussion with Nicole Brown, who works for Rock Central. Beginning her story, Nicole went back to the night she woke up vomiting and unable to keep anything down. At the hospital the next morning, she spent much of her time frantically messaging and phoning colleagues about the important event that she was no longer able to attend. "I wanted to be this person that was really put together and had everything under control," she explained.

The doctors ran tests but found no

I was thrilled – finally a physical illness that gave me a reason to be out for this treatment. It didn't sit well

explanation for the problem. Then one doctor, rather sheepishly, told Nicole he'd ordered a psychiatric consultation, before swiftly leaving her bedside. As the psychiatrist went through their questions, Nicole weighed up her options. "I can be honest and truly face this and not be in denial and truly discover what's going on, or I can continue on this path where everything is OK, I can figure it out, I don't need help."

She chose to get the treatment she needed. But she felt shame and guilt being away from work. During her treatment, Nicole had a cancer scare – and her reaction was unexpected. "I was ecstatic, I was thrilled – finally a physical illness that gave me a reason to be out for this treatment," she said. Reflecting on her immediate reaction, she thought how sad it was to feel relieved to possibly have cancer because she didn't want to admit to having mental illness. "It had a profound impact on me. It didn't sit well." It led her to wonder why people didn't have the same empathetic reaction to mental illness as to a physical one.

On her return to work, she explained her absence with the surgery she had →



FACILITATOR:
MONIKA MISRA
Head of Employee Health and Wellbeing for Europe and Middle East
GSK

PANEL

NICOLE BROWN
Senior Program Manager
Rock Central

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DAY 1 - 16.11.21

(she didn't have cancer). She felt very comfortable sharing the physical health piece, but not the mental health piece. But she did not feel authentic telling that story. "I just felt icky, it didn't feel right. I almost felt I had put myself back into that mask of not sharing myself, of not sharing my story and experience."

A few days later she had a dream. She dreamt of a world where people talked about mental illness, didn't hide from it and where it was equal to physical illness.

"This is where it starts to shift," said Nicole. "And I take back my power and I take back my story."

Back in the waking world, she took her proposal for new mental health training to the CEO for Learning and Development, supported by research along with her personal story. "How fantastic if we could equip people to step into the light, not into the darkness," she said to the CEO. "And she loved it."

Buoyed by the backing of the leader, she set about creating the training course. She asked frontline leaders what was preventing them having conversations around mental health. She involved all levels of leadership during pilots, she worked closely with the legal team over confidentiality and she provided data and research to convince other senior managers the training was needed.

The leader version of the training was rolled out first, with a team member version launched a year later. It covered stigma, how to get help, what to look for and how to have that empathetic conversation. Every participant is surveyed after the training and asked to provide



feedback, explained Nicole, who said there had also been a spike in leveraging the resources the course promoted.

Nicole secured the backing of her CEO before creating a training course

People had since thanked her for creating the space, normalising the conversation, improving the connections between people and signposting resources. Many of them said they had taken the tools from their training back to their families, peer groups and communities. "It's no longer this thing that has to live in the shadows."

So what was next, Monika asked. More training would be added in response to feedback, explained Monika. For instance, the impacts of the pandemic would need to be incorporated.

As our communities change, our cultures change, our countries change, she asked, how do we incorporate those changes into these conversations, continue to move forward and ensure that it doesn't get pushed aside? ■

How fantastic if we
could equip people
to step into the
light, not into the
darkness

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Mental illness is as real as physical illness – we should not feel guilty about taking time off for treatment, any more than we should if we had cancer or a broken leg. We shouldn't be ashamed to admit it to colleagues – and we should expect an empathetic reaction.

2 Physical symptoms may be a direct result of mental illness. It's easy to ignore them when there is no physical illness, but our long-term wellbeing depends on facing up to mental illness, discovering what's really going on and accepting help.

3 Mental health training in the workplace should cover stigma, how to spot the signs of mental struggle, how to signpost people towards help and how to have empathetic conversations. Only then will mental health at work step into the light, not the darkness.

Parenting Through Mental Ill-Health

Parenting is a doubly difficult job when your children are struggling with mental ill-health. The speakers shared their experiences and the impact on their work



FACILITATOR:
MATTHEW HOLMAN
Owner
Simpila Mental Health

PANEL

SUZANNE ALDERSON
Founder
Parenting Mental Health

SEAN FLETCHER
Broadcaster
BBC, ITV

NICK WORRALL
Group HR Director
Barratt Developments

With a panel of parents of children experiencing mental illness, the overriding message of this session was that you are not alone. Host Matthew Holman asked each panel member to share their story.

Sean Fletcher discussed his son Reuben's struggles with OCD, which emerged when he was 13 and spiralled pretty much overnight. Within about two weeks he was unable to do basic things such as get out of bed and feed himself, explained Sean, adding that the terrible thoughts whirling around Reuben's head were leading him to self-harm.

He missed a year of school and was in hospital for six months. "It almost tore our family apart," admitted the television broadcaster. He contrasted his professional life where he was expected to be happy, positive and productive, with and coming home to carnage and worry that it was the lull before the storm. That contrast was almost impossible to manage, he said.

Bullying at school triggered Suzanne Alderson's daughter's mental health struggles. Returning to school after the summer holidays and finding the bullies in her class was the last straw. "Within a couple of days, she wasn't eating or sleeping, she couldn't leave the house," Suzanne said.

Following a conversation between her daughter and the GP, Suzanne learnt that her daughter had a plan to end her life imminently – a revelation that changed the whole trajectory of their lives. "We did not know how to deal with this," admitted Suzanne, "we had no frame of reference, nobody was talking about it, our family didn't understand, our friends didn't get it." She remembered sitting on her daughter's

floor at 3am in utter isolation. Then she realised others must be going through similar traumas. She pledged that if they made it through, she'd make sure no other parent need feel so isolated, ill-equipped and scared. This led to her founding the Parenting Mental Health charity.

Nick Worrall's daughter Katie was also bullied and, when she moved from primary to secondary education, "the façade that had been up came crashing down and she stopped functioning". She came out of school and wasn't learning at all until they started home tutoring. But any concerns about her academic advancement were secondary to simply keeping her alive. She was hearing voices, telling her to harm herself and more.

Suffering in silence

The powerful stigma around mental health affected all three families. Sean's family kept quiet and suffered alone at first. "We learnt the hard way. We thought we'd be blamed, we'd be judged, he'd be judged," he recalled. "We were protecting ourselves and we were protecting him, but actually we were protecting no-one by not talking about it."

He broke the stigma in unlikely and unplanned fashion at a London Marathon event for the Young Minds and royal charity Heads Together. Sean was asked by Prince William why he was running for the cause and his story spilt out for the first time to the future King and surrounding press. "I felt like a weight had been lifted," said Sean, who went on to find support from other families in similar situations through social media.

For Nick, the stigma of mental health was a "double whammy". "One is that your child has a mental illness; two is that you're a failed parent because of that."

He said they have since become "so open"



about Katie as a couple, and their friends know "chapter and verse" about what they were going through." Part of the coping mechanism is talking about it," explained Nick, who said he couldn't put a price on the support of the likeminded people he has met through Suzanne's Parenting Mental Health community.

Work as a safe space

Suzanne said she started to challenge who she was as a person – not just as a parent – during her daughter's struggles. She was running her own business with her husband, but was consumed by her daughter and uninterested in clients and work conversations.

But as her daughter recovered, work became a safe haven. "It was somewhere

that could give me the perspective I needed to go back and be a better parent."

And she called on employers to put the frameworks in place and provide the support for parents like her. "We're losing a huge amount of talent because we haven't got the mechanisms in place yet to support them correctly," she said.

Nick urged people in similar situations to speak up as early as possible at work, choose the right person to speak to confide in and form a joint plan. He said that Barratt had given mental health training to 1,400+ managers to help them spot signs of mental struggle, but admitted that parenting mental health is a whole new dimension. "You may be fine but have an all-consuming problem at home." ■

(From left) Matthew heard from Sean, Suzanne and Nick about how the stigma around mental health affected all three families

Work became somewhere that gave me the perspective I needed to go back and be a better parent

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 The stigma around mental health still prevents many parents talking about their child's mental illness to family or friends or seeking professional help. They fear their child will be judged and that they will be blamed or considered bad parents.

2 In the early hours of the morning, when you're sitting helplessly on your child's bedroom floor to make sure they stay alive and feeling scared and isolated, remember that you are not alone. Forums that bring together parents in similar situations can offer priceless support.

3 Speak up at work as early as possible about your child's mental illness. Find the right person to confide in and form a joint plan to help you manage the situation, which may require you to take time away. If employers cannot deliver appropriate support, they will lose talent.

(Dis)ability and Mental Health

The experience of disability throws up not only physical challenges but mental ones too. The panel looked at the impact of these inside and outside work



FACILITATOR:
TAB AHMAD
Founder and CEO
EmployAbility

PANEL

PHILIP FIELDING
Co-Head, Emerging
Markets Debt
BMO Global Asset
Management

KUNAL MAHAJAN
CSR & Social Impact,
Americas
SMBC

**SARAH
PETHERBRIDGE**
Disability awareness
trainer and public
speaker
Freelance

Tab Ahmad introduced a session looking at the crossover between disability and mental health and discussing what employers could do to be more supportive. Sarah Petherbridge told of being born profoundly deaf at a time when disability carried a social stigma and sign language wasn't widely accepted. A "frustrated" toddler because she couldn't communicate, she learnt to speak through lip reading at a mainstream primary school. She left education with a first-class degree, and worked for various accountancy firms, before starting work as a disability awareness trainer this year.

She said deafness is a largely hidden disability and has many hidden mental health impacts. These are largely due to barriers in the workplace and in society resulting from a lack of understanding and awareness, which can lead to prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. She pointed to statistics suggesting that one in two deaf people had mental health issues, compared with one in four hearing people.

"It's not the disability that tires you out mentally," she said, "it's people's attitudes towards disability." Meanwhile, a lack of communication around people with disabilities, with people unsure what to say or scared to say the wrong thing, could lead to social isolation and exclusion, she said. Another negative impact was the "closed mindset" where people focused on what people with disabilities couldn't do, rather than what or how they could.

It's not the disability that tires you out mentally. It's people's attitudes to disability

Accessibility in the workplace is really important, she added. "If we're not given workplace adjustment then we can't do the job properly. That leads to a sense of frustration, anxiety, lack of engagement and belonging."



Kunal worried about perceptions of his stutter

Philip Fielding's disability appeared suddenly. Ten years into a career in the City, he ended up in hospital with septic shock following a severe bout of flu. "My body was attacking its inner organs and I had multi-organ failure," he explained. It led to him becoming a double amputee at the age of 35. The "able-bodied high achiever" had to come to terms with his severe disability and how to newly navigate through family, work and life in general.

Every experience is different

The mental health impact of the trauma went further than the physical, with the ability to cope with pain a key driver. Amputees have to learn to live with pain, explained Philip, and if you can't deal with it, the likelihood of suffering mental health trauma is quite great. He added that employers had to recognise that every disability was experienced differently and that each conversation with an employee with disabilities had to be a new one.

Philip requested both physical adaptations at work and understanding – the kind of understanding that the pandemic had enabled, with a shift towards output (work achieved) rather than input (hours worked).

He said it shouldn't matter to an employer if somebody needed to lie down mid-afternoon or work flexibly, any more than



if he wore his prosthetics or not during a Zoom meeting. It was about finding the right way to get the best out of somebody.

Finding the words

Kunal Mahajan, joining the conversation from New York, told of his lifelong stuttering disability, which he grew up trying to hide for fear of judgement. This fear followed him into a career in investment banking. There, he didn't want to be seen as weak and was constantly worried about what his disability might do for his reputation and credibility. He worried whether people would think he was nervous, didn't know what he was talking about, or was unprepared or dithering. Not being able to be authentic took its toll on his mental health, and it was only when he joined his current

company that he started to own his stutter. He talked of the mock interview he hosted for the stuttering community at work.

"Twenty-five members of senior management came and I educated them about my stuttering journey. That was the first time I really felt accepted," he said. "I felt these allies really care, they're empathetic."

It led to the creation of the company's mental health and disabilities network, with Kunal its global advisor. With his value recognised, he felt empowered and confident. "I don't even think about my stutter any more," he said. ■

I educated 25 members of senior management about my stuttering journey. That was the first time I felt accepted

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Statistically, deaf people have more mental health challenges than hearing people. In the workplace environment and in society, this is partly due to unintentional barriers – resulting from a lack of understanding and awareness – that lead to prejudice, discrimination and exclusion.

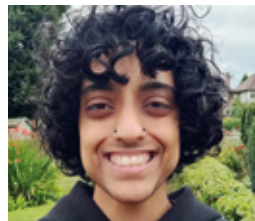
2 Accessibility in the workplace is crucial. If workplace adjustments aren't made to enable people with disabilities to do their jobs, they are likely to feel frustrated, anxious, disengaged and excluded from the team.

3 Trying to hide disabilities at work, for fear of being judged or losing credibility, is likely to have a mental health toll. People need to feel they can be open and authentic at work and expect acceptance and empathy in return.



How to Look After the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Employees

LGBTQ+ employees experience unique mental health challenges. The session highlighted varied experiences and looked at how the workplace can be inclusive



FACILITATOR:
MARYAM DIN
Client Account
Manager
Stonewall

PANEL

PAUL ASHLEY
Director, Strategic
Engagement -
Strategic Sourcing and
Procurement
Bristol Myers Squibb

ANATO CHOWDHURY
Senior Policy Advisor
Department of
Business, Energy and
Industrial Strategy

MICHAELA DEMETER
Security Researcher
Intel

Maryam Din introduced the conversation around the particular mental health challenges of the LGBTQ+ community and the need for supportive employers.

Michaela Demeter applauded her US employer Intel for providing everything she needed at every stage of her transition. "I wasn't really comfortable being out," she admitted. "They've allowed me to do it at my own pace and come out as I wanted to." An "amazing" manager eased the way, enabling a seamless switchover. "One day I was in as myself, the next day I came in as me now." She said it was crucial on both sides that employers gave trans employees mental health support. The time and energy spent on maintaining their lives and denying their authentic selves was bound to impact on the amount and quality of work they produced, she said. But since transitioning, Michaela has felt the benefits. "I'm not trying to maintain two or three different lives," she said. "It's 100% authentically me. My work has got better, I enjoy my work better."

For black, Christian, gay Paul Ashley, the "conflict and strife" came where those key identities intersected. Also speaking from the US, he said: "It's taken a lot of time and therapy to discover how I can actualise

all three of these and be comfortable in those intersections." He added that it was important to be aware that all options were open – something he promoted as a board member of the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce. As well as providing a voice and "leg up" for 1,500-odd LGBT-owned businesses, he said it also runs programmes to enlighten younger LGBTQ+ communities. "I've heard people say, wow, I didn't know that was an option," he said. "I can be in corporate America as a trans person. I can own my own business as a gay man of colour."

Anato Chowdhury spoke from the studio about the particular mental health toll of being bi. It derived from the energy that had to be expended on explaining his sexuality against constant assumptions he was gay or straight. "Don't assume," he said. "That really helps. And when people tell you they are bi, just believe them." Building inclusive workspaces was vital, too. If you're not worried about hiding parts of your life away, he said, that stress goes away and your mental health improves and, if you're commercially minded, your productivity improves.

Role models played a part at work – particularly those that you could relate to



most readily – and gave you confidence you could be accepted and successful.

But while it made sense to harness the knowledge of any visible people from a particular community, he said, employers shouldn't overburden them as front people for every related initiative. Instead, they should ensure there was a support network around them – particularly allies who could help communicate messages, challenges and bust myths.

Spotting the cycles

And he warned against "missing anyone out" when trying to build an inclusive workplace, particularly bi people who were more likely to remain closeted. Once out, Anato's mental health soared. "It helped me relate to colleagues better, I showed up more energetically at work. Everything was in colour after I came out." But while he was fine in the workplace, organisations must be mindful that somebody else might not be. Paul said it was vital to train managers to deal with people who aren't like them and to spot mental struggles – which were often cyclical. "In 2019, I was on top of the world and fully actualising myself; then the pandemic happened,"

he recalled. Isolation, stories of sickness and death and the murder of George Floyd were a big hit on his mental health.

But he was able to have an open conversation with his manager and take time off to refocus. "I needed to give myself grace, time and some self-care," he said. Michaela, too, said that culture change in a corporation had to come from the top, and that training really helped. So when she was struggling during the pandemic, her boss knew something wasn't right and reached out to her.

Anato wanted to see pre-emptive action from organisations so that they got the tools in place before that "one minority person became visible". This might include building staff networks, even if you couldn't see who would join. His advice to smaller organisations was to form Diversity and Inclusion groups covering multiple identities, linking up with other organisations in the sector and bringing in external help. ■

(From left) Maryam, Anato, Michaela and Paul come from varied backgrounds but all needed to be their true selves at work

I'm not trying to maintain two or three different lives. It's authentically me, my work has got better

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Before transitioning, trans people often expend so much time and energy on maintaining their identities that it's bound to have an impact their mental health. Understanding managers who support them to come out at their own pace and in their own manner can relieve some of this burden.

2 Anxiety and strife often come where key identities intersect. A black, gay, Christian, for instance, may feel conflict where those three important aspects of their life overlap. And it may take therapy over many years to become comfortable in those intersections.

3 Being bi may bring particular mental health challenges in the workplace. Bi people often have to expend much energy on explaining their sexuality to colleagues who assume they are either gay or straight – or to those who simply don't believe them.

Using Personal Storytelling to Unlock Mental Health Conversations

Speakers highlighted the intricacies around sharing their personal journeys, what role work environments played and how opening up created change



FACILITATOR:
GIAN POWER
Founder & CEO
TLC Lions

PANEL

CHARLES ALBERTS
Head of Wellbeing
Solutions
Aon

JO KANE
Strategic Partner
Sales Director
Capita

JODY RUDD WILSON
Global Enterprise
Account Executive
Hitachi Energy

"For me, storytelling is no longer a 'nice to have'; it's a strategic imperative that can really provoke empathy and spark change." That was how host Gian Power introduced the session, which focused on workplaces where people felt empowered to tell their stories. After all, he said, everyone had one.

Gian divulged how his life was shattered in May 2015 when his father was murdered during a business trip to India. "It was thanks to having a culture at work that allowed me to share my story that kept everything together. I saw that storytelling didn't make us less professional; it made us more human." He saw the incredible bonds it created within teams and how it humanised the workplace. He left his City job and launched TLC Lions, which promotes the power of storytelling in the workplace via speakers and campaigns.

He asked the panel to share their stories. Jo Kane was diagnosed with PTSD and post-natal depression after the birth of her son in 2007. The post-natal depression never went away, said Jo, who was subsequently diagnosed with manic depression and anxiety. Her mental health took a further downturn in 2010, when she suddenly lost her beloved father and her husband had a mental health breakdown.

This was a year after she'd set up her own company. She became her husband's support and the main breadwinner while struggling with grief and depression herself. It was while working at PWC some years later, she said, that she was inspired by people speaking about their whole selves as part of the "This is Me" campaign. It made her realise that her mental health journey was something to be proud of, gave her more to bring to the table and could inspire others.

Turning crisis into opportunity

Charles Alberts was bullied at work. It was relentless, embarrassing and had no end in sight, he said, pointing to "the endless worry, the going round in circles in my mind, constantly watching my back, blaming myself for the situation". He wished he'd put his hand up earlier, but only opened up about his mental health experiences after a senior colleague, returning to work after depression, set the ball rolling. His story went viral in the organisation, said Charles, with many coming forward to help or be involved. It led to the creation of Aon's Mental Health Business Resource Group, which harnessed the response to the article and gave others the chance to tell their stories. This helped normalise discussions about mental health, said Charles, and



create an inclusive, open and supportive environment. "It was so much easier [to open up] because other brave colleagues had done so before me," he said.

Bipolar since 16, Canadian Jody Rudd Wilson shared this at work only in the last two years. Previously, she'd struggled on. So mid-career, when she embarked on an MBA in global energy, which involved going around the world to learn, she didn't share that this was impacting on the things that kept her healthy, such as routine and proper sleep. She credited the specially trained wellbeing champions at Hitachi Energy for making it easier for employees to share their struggles, while leadership-backed mental health showcases had given employees encouragement to talk about subjects like suicide or depression. Jody then felt ready to tell her own story. Pinching a phrase from her mother, she said: "If you don't make it a big deal, it won't be a big deal."

While challenging, she said she now regards her bipolar as a "gift" for her employer because she thinks and acts differently. Employers need to see "great human beings with mental health challenges who are fantastic at their jobs",



she insisted. "Everyone's got their deal and this just happens to be mine. Let's just figure it out and move forward together."

When Jo's story was launched internally, she experienced a "phenomenal sense of freedom". Her professional network quadrupled overnight and there was "genuine gratitude and support". Any managers unconvinced by the power of storytelling should "wake up", she argued, adding that people are intrinsically storytellers who want to connect with each other. Employees were demanding it and employers who denied it were risking their reputation and ability to retain staff. You need personal connection to an organisation to engender affection and loyalty, reasoned Jo. Asked how workplaces could get started on storytelling, Jo advised starting small, at team level, and using tools provided by specialist organisations.

Things won't change overnight, Gian warned, but "we can change the culture of workplaces together, one story at a time". ■

Jody and Charles credited their workplaces for making it easier for them to open up

Everyone's got their deal and this just happens to be mine. Let's figure it out and move forward together

Jo (left) and Gian recognised that telling their stories made them more human at work



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Telling personal stories of our mental health experiences can provoke empathy, create bonds within teams and inspire others to tell their stories. In turn, this can change the culture of a workplace.

2 Employers that don't allow storytelling are risking their reputation and ability to retain staff. Storytelling doesn't make us less professional; it makes us more human. And it is only when we have a personal connection to an organisation that we can feel affection and loyalty to it.

3 If you don't make it a big deal, it won't be a big deal. Sharing your mental health journey at work can lead to employers seeing people with mental health challenges as an asset to the workforce, who bring something different and can inspire others.

Menopause and mental health: Learning from the UK workforce

The UK has led the way in recent years with growing support for employees experiencing the menopause. This session looked at what the US can learn



FACILITATOR:
JO BREWIS
Professor of People
and Organizations
The Open University
Business School

PANEL

**ALISON MARTIN-
CAMPBELL**
EA & Chair Of EY 40+
Network
EY

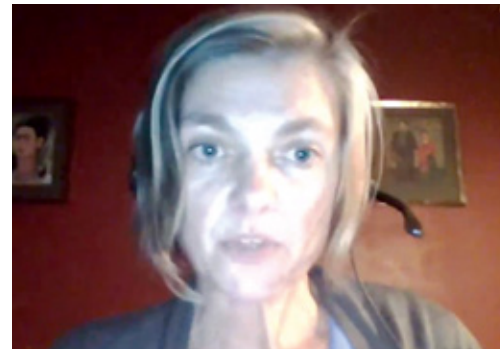
THERESA WINTERS
Senior HR Manager -
Employee Experience
Proposition
Santander

Jo Brewis provided a backdrop for the discussion about menopause at work based on almost six years of research. She explained that while the average age of menopause for those in the global north is 51, symptoms often start earlier during what was called the perimenopause. Symptoms could continue for several years into postmenopause. Jo said there are 34 recognised symptoms. Some are physical, such as hot flushes, muscle and joint pain, migraines and menstrual flooding. But there are also psychological symptoms, with a direct link to mental health, including depression, anxiety, loss of confidence and difficulties concentrating or remembering.

She stressed that women are very conscious of their symptoms being visible in the workplace and often take steps to mask them, which require additional mental effort. She added that work sometimes makes symptoms worse, particularly during stressful periods.

Jo outlined four reasons why employers in the global north should take menopause seriously. The first was legal: legislation was in place, she said, and employers could end up in court if they failed to support their menopausal staff. The second was demographic: women of menopausal age are the fastest-growing group in the workforce. The third was economic: it would cost employers to replace menopausal women leaving their jobs or reducing their hours due to a lack of support. The final reason was social responsibility: Looking after menopausal staff was the right thing to do.

With those in mind, she asked Theresa Winters how Santander



Jo Brewis gave four reasons to take the menopause seriously

supported menopausal staff. Theresa said the work started two years ago to make sure menopausal staff could thrive in the workplace rather than just survive. It began by talking to colleagues. She said the stories were "humbling" and included women who felt that they had turned into people they didn't know during menopause, while others feared they were suffering from dementia.

Generational pressures

Theresa pointed out that many in the 45-60 age group spoke of additional pressures from caring for elderly parents or guiding children through exams or university. "We wanted to build a psychologically safe workplace where people could speak up and get the help they needed," she explained. While the bank didn't expect managers to be counsellors or menopause experts, it did want them to know the facts, be able to signpost colleagues to support and be able to have good conversations. An e-learning module was created with an external provider, which helped managers understand the symptoms and make "reasonable adjustments".

"Many colleagues have told me they don't want to be off sick but sometimes might need a bit of help," continued Theresa, such as starting work a bit later due to



insomnia the night before or making notes to aid their memory. Menopause became a recurring theme in the company's wellbeing communications and a topic senior leaders discussed. Chat groups were created where wanted, and 12 "passionate advocates" were recruited and trained to deliver awareness sessions. Santander also launched an online site – Let's Talk About Menopause – on its wellbeing hub. "We made sure there were multiple channels through which colleagues could speak up, ask for help and find support," explained Theresa.

Companies starting out on the journey should promote existing free external resources before asking menopausal colleagues what support they need, she recommended. And where senior leaders needed convincing, she suggested people built a case with data appealing to the company's agenda, such as the cost of failing to provide support.

At EY, it was Alison Martin-Campbell's own experience of menopause that shaped the company response. After she was diagnosed with vaginal atrophy and perimenopause, she kept notes on the lifestyle changes and remedies she

tried. When a colleague brought up the menopause in conversation, she offered the notes as support. And from there it snowballed. "Before I knew it, I had dozens of women asking for the notes," said Alison, who was encouraged to set up a menopause network. Branded the 40+ network by Diversity and Inclusion, it kept health and menopause at its core.

"I chair and manage it and have reached out to hundreds of women – and men – and given them the benefit of my experience," explained Alison, who has led many "lunch and learn" sessions.

While EY had no specific menopause policy – something Alison called for to provide "an extra layer of security" – it did have a flexible working policy for UK staff. When her anxiety over the busy morning commute increased, she could tweak her hours from 9-5 to 8-4 easily and reduce anxiety.

Asked for the best support to give a menopausal colleague, Alison said: "Just listen." ■

Theresa (left) and Alison helped build safe spaces for women to discuss the issues in the workplace

We made sure there were multiple channels through which colleagues could speak up, ask for help and find support

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Employers must take menopause seriously because the law insists they provide menopausal colleagues with adequate support. Menopausal women are the fastest-growing group in the workforce. It would be costly to replace those who leave or cut their hours. And it's the right thing to do.

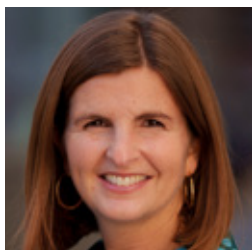
2 Many menopausal women don't want time off work to deal with their symptoms; they want employers' help. This might be allowing them to start work later when insomnia has ruined their night or tweak their working hours to avoid the anxiety of having hot flushes on a rush-hour train.

3 Organisations should promote free, online resources while they take the time to ask their menopausal colleagues about their experiences. This feedback will help them design effective support and create a safe space where these women can thrive, not just survive.

We wanted to build a psychologically safe workplace where people could speak up and get help

US and Canadian leadership panel

This session heard from the leaders of three very different organisations that have mental health high on their list of priorities, in very different ways



FACILITATOR:
ZOE SINCLAIR,
Co-Founder,
This Can Happen

PANEL

KEVIN DEDNER
Founder and CEO
Hurdle

SADIE LINCOLN
Co-founder and CEO
barre3

JILL NYKOLIATION
CEO
Juniper Park/TBWA

In the closing session of day one, Zoe Sinclair welcomed three small company CEOs from the US and Canada to discuss leadership and mental health.

Jill Nykoliation spoke of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and how she elected to lead her 160-strong workforce through it with "brutal honesty and incredible hope". The pandemic had destabilised them so much, she said, and prolonged uncertainty was exhausting.

Her focus was on resilience because, as an ad agency working for some of the world's biggest brands, her staff had to be sharp shooters. "It's hard to be creative if you're scared, bored or exhausted," she reasoned. To build collective resilience meant being deeply human, she added. So every Friday staff were asked how their week had been and the comments – good or bad – were shared every Monday. "It's about getting things out and allowing emotions and frustrations to flow." An optional "huddle" each Thursday, which around 100 staff usually attended, was all about sharing feelings.

"We focus a lot on gratitude," said Jill, who said people at all levels did "shout outs" for those who had helped them with a project or through a difficult week. "Part of vulnerability is admitting people are helping," she observed.

Jill said building collective resistance entailed being deeply human



Kevin Dedner worked himself into mental exhaustion a few years back, leading to depression. It led to his focus on mental health at work and the implementation of company-wide measures. Downtime was key, building on the idea that you couldn't be creative or thoughtful if you didn't have space to think.

Kevin said he'd banned back-to-back meetings and insisted upon a 15-minute minimum buffer between them. And on Fridays, people came together to celebrate something they'd done in the week, shout out to those who'd helped and share something that was going on in their lives.

Culturally specific care

He acknowledged the specific mental health toll faced by people of colour due to discrimination and micro aggression. "The repetitiveness begins to wear people down," said Kevin, whose company provides culturally specific mental health care. He said that historically oppressed and marginalised people of colour had been denied the comfort of sharing their stories and being heard.

Zoe asked about the tension between building a new company and preserving everyone's mental health. Kevin admitted that if his leadership team wasn't feeling the tension, they probably weren't working hard enough to move the company forward. He said deadlines were part of the deal, but he encouraged his employees to take walks, breaks, holidays or time to recalibrate.

Sadie Lincoln, CEO of women's fitness company barre3, was asked who looked after the mental health of leaders. She said she made sure that her staff had circles and conversations, but added that she couldn't lean on her team in the way they leant on each other. Instead, an entrepreneur group of people with their own companies provided support.



She said it was "awkward" to overshare with her senior team, like the time she told them she took a nap if she did one productive thing. Her intention was to give them permission to take care of themselves, but it did not sit well with a team who felt they were the ones under pressure. "It was the wrong audience," concluded Sadie, who shared her own journey with therapy with the whole organisation to highlight the importance of investing in yourself. "It's something everyone can do," she said. "Not everyone can nap at 3 o'clock in the afternoon."

She told the conference about the time she stepped back from the business to protect her mental health. Struck by the Black Lives Matter movement, she'd become "overwhelmed" by the realisation that her organisation was largely white, affluent women who looked like her. She came out publicly with a statement. Managing the aftermath of that at the same time as the company was losing 60% of its revenue because of Covid created "the perfect storm", she said.



Anxiety prevented her from making decisions, so she took a sabbatical to work things through with therapy and a diversity and inclusion coach. Her team felt she'd abandoned them, but she invited them all to do the same, insisting it was brave to walk away and she was better placed to lead as a result.

"When we start to practice out loud, that's when we can actually shift the system and hopefully create a work culture that doesn't judge people for taking care of themselves," she said. Warning of burnout, she added: "Saying no is a positive, not a negative."

Kevin argued people had to understand that recalibration was incredibly productive. "You can think of the brain like a computer that does have the potential to overheat and so every so often it needs to be rebooted, shut down, given some space." ■

Kevin (left) and Sadie agreed people needed to understand recalibration could be very productive

When we start to practice out loud, that's when we can actually shift the system

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Brains are like computers. They have the potential to overheat and, when they do, they may need to be shut down, given some space and rebooted. We may need downtime or time away when the pressure gets too much – but it will allow us to come back stronger.

2 There is inevitable tension between building a new company and preserving the mental health of employees. If there's no tension, the company probably won't move forward; if there's too much tension, it can lead to burnout. It's a difficult balance to achieve.

3 Saying no is a positive, not a negative and it is brave to step away from work to look after your mental health. It is only when leaders practice what they preach that we can create a work culture that doesn't judge people for taking care of themselves.



Tackling Asia's Mental Health Stigma

Stigma around mental health remains prevalent in many countries in Asia. This session showcased some companies in the region that have broken the taboo



FACILITATOR:
DIANA TEOH
Programme Manager
SOSV, Chinaccelerator
& MOX
Head of China for She
Loves Tech
SOSV & She Loves Tech

PANEL

KSHANIKA ANTHONY
Director, Organization
Effectiveness, APAC
Medtronic

HAYLY LEUNG
General Manager,
Group Human
Resource Services,
Jardine Matheson

CHRIS PARSONS
Partner, Chairman of
India Practice
Herbert Smith
Freehills

Diana Teoh opened the session by asking the panellists how they had experienced mental health stigma in Asia. Kshanika Anthony noted how Asia's collectivist societies meant people don't want to be connected with mental health issues, so typically they are not spoken about. She contrasted this with the USA, where people are very open to talking about their issues.

Chris Parsons started sharing his own struggles with mental wellbeing around 2015. The stigma across the region quickly became clear to him. In India, he said, the extended family is a very important part of life. While this can be very supportive, it can also be detrimental to individuals. If a family member were struggling, the response might often be to say: "Please don't bring shame on the family. Don't discuss this outside the family, do some yoga, pay some money at the temple and all will be well."

Diana asked Chris whether he had any advice for someone in this situation. Chris tells people they should find a friend, counsellor or someone else to share their story with. "The danger is that we think it's only us that's struggling. Actually it's extraordinary from the statistics how many of us are impacted," he said. Probably all of us are impacted, he added – if not directly, then through friends and colleagues.

The danger is we think it's only us that's struggling. Actually it's extraordinary from the statistics how many of us are

Diana asked Kshanika how she encourages conversations about mental health in her business. Kshanika said a silver lining to the Covid pandemic was everybody needing to find language to address this shared experience. During the surge of Covid-19 in India, Medtronic's team were looking at vaccines and hospital beds for employees and realised they had to look at mental health too. They made available an emotional support app, accessible 24/7 and confidential, allowing people to circumvent the taboo and find support.

Diana then invited Hayly Leung to tell the panel about Jardine Matheson's history in mental health. Hayly said there are more than 40,000 people on the waiting list for public psychiatric care in Hong Kong, with



the waiting time for young people being over a year. Jardine Matheson aimed to fill this gap by setting up the Healthy in Mind programme with Hong Kong Hospital Authority, to help secondary school students become advocates for mental health. The company's Mindset charity also set up the Mindset College, offering self-recovery courses, and Mindset Place, a home providing professional care services. The group also offers training and job placements to help people back to work.

Leaders can make the difference

Diana asked Chris whether stigma exists across all industries in Asia. Chris replied that it does, but more in some than others. Research has shown lawyers are affected disproportionately, he said, perhaps because the law attracts perfectionists and trains them to always think about problems. There was also great variation between how good organisations are at addressing mental health, he added. "We need to be extremely careful not to hold up the West as some great panacea of how to do it all," he stressed. However, he was encouraged by how quickly change could happen within an organisation, given the right approach and the right leadership.

Diana's final question was how stigma varies between Asian countries. Kshanika replied that applying an effective strategy across the region entailed adapting it to each country's reality. Chris said Singapore government research revealed more than half the population thought anybody who had suffered from mental ill health should not be given a position of responsibility again. "If that's the perception," he asked, "who in their right mind would put their hand up and say: 'I'm struggling with mental health, I need some help'?" We need to deal with stigma as the first stepping stone to open this up and make progress, he concluded.

An audience question asked how to broach the idea of setting up a mental health initiative with an employer. Kshanika said if you find the right people to approach about meeting a specific need, it can organically grow from there. Just checking in on each other can go a long way, added Hayly. Chris agreed, saying all of us, however senior or junior, can make a difference. ■

(From left) Diana, Kshanika, Hayly and Chris talked of how Asia's collectivist societies could lead to mental health issues being hushed up

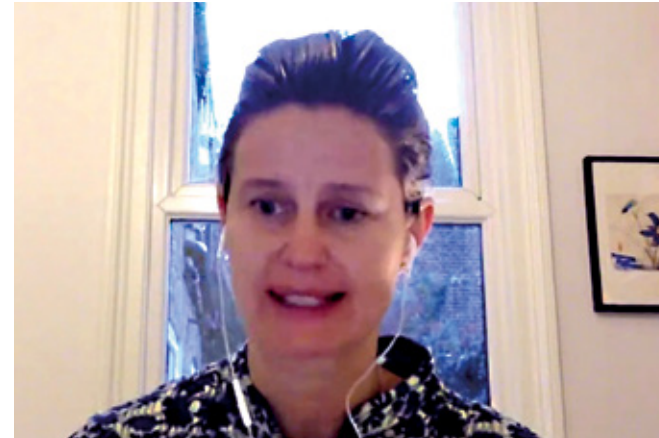
We need to be extremely careful not to hold up the West as some great panacea of how to do it all

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Asia's countries' collectivist societies mean the taboo around mental health has an impact extending to the family and wider community. People's reluctance to be associated with mental health issues fosters a damaging culture of silence.

2 Finding an outlet for people to share their experiences with others is absolutely vital. If people are forced to suffer in silence, the consequences can be deadly.

3 With the right leadership and the right approach, change can be effected quickly in an organisation and great strides can be made in changing attitudes. Addressing the stigma is the key to opening up the conversation.



The Missing Voice: Understanding Staff Mental Health in China

Enoch Li, founder of wellness organisational consultancy Bearapy, shared the findings from her research into employee wellbeing in China



FACILITATOR:
ALISHA FERNANDO
Head of Diversity & Inclusion, APAC Bloomberg

PANEL

ENOCH LI
Managing Director
Bearapy

ERLA MAGNUSDOTTIR
Consultant/
Researcher
Bearapy

Opening the talk, Alisha Fernando introduced Enoch Li, who posed the question: we can do mental health initiatives, but will we really have mentally healthy workplaces?

Enoch said when her company works with businesses to improve workplace mental health, while they often talk to HR directors and senior management, they do not really hear what staff want. She also highlighted the lack of published research on the topic, which led Bearapy to carry out its own research into workplace mental health in China.

Through surveys and interviews with employees, Enoch said they found the general feeling was companies in China do not offer much in the way of workplace mental health support. Furthermore, even where Employee Assistance Programmes and other support are available, employees often view such programmes with caution and scepticism. Respondents said they often felt they needed to give "the correct answer" – what they thought HR wanted to hear, which highlighted a lack of trust in the process.

This should not be seen as employees not wanting to have discussions about

mental health at work, Enoch said. Many respondents were open to learning about mental health at work, but questioned the credibility of the information. Others were wary about confidentiality and some said they wanted to speak up and champion mental health initiatives, but not at the company they worked for.

Changing the culture

There are three main factors contributing to this situation: culture, leadership and psychological safety. Enoch said in China culture was overused as a reason not to address "taboo" mental health topics. However, culture can also be an enabler, she continued, and changing an organisation's culture can create an environment where such issues are accepted. Leadership also has a role in this, she said, with management needing to set the tone and make the workplace a psychologically safe environment in which conversations about mental health can take place.

For business leaders, Enoch said there are five main actions needed to achieve this: aligning an organisation's internal structures, processes and senior support; setting a comprehensive, long-term strategy; talking and listening to staff;

If we see culture as the norm of behaviours and mindset, we're trying to change the majority and that will take time

educating management and staff on psychological safety and privacy issues; and being physically and emotionally present and engaged.

Alisha then asked Enoch about specific ways in which management can be encouraged to develop a culture of mental health wellbeing at work. Both agreed the key was to educate leaders that there was an alternative to "what they grew up with" – managers who were autocratic and dictatorial. Alisha highlighted a growing trend of "vulnerable leadership" as a sign things are beginning to change.

Understanding the language

At companies trying to develop a psychologically safe workplace, Enoch said management needs to understand the meaning of the language of mental health. "A lot of it is equipping people with the skills and the definitions so we don't hear words without understanding them and repeating them," she said.

Erla Magnusdottir, researcher and adviser to Bearapy, added that Bearapy's research found while interviewees often said they were happy to talk about issues of mental



health at work, this changed when they had lived experience of mental health problems themselves – they became more reluctant to share their experience. "In theory there is an openness and interest to change the culture around mental health but in practice we're not quite there yet," she said. Again, this often came down to workplace culture.

Alisha said community or societal culture can override the culture an organisation is trying to develop – this was something she had seen in Asia, particularly with non-Asian companies with offices there. Overcoming this is a challenge, Enoch acknowledged. "If we see culture as the norm of behaviours and mindset, we're trying to change the majority and that's going to take time," she said.

Erla agreed with this, saying that Bearapy's survey interviews showed there is a willingness on the part of employees to talk about mental health. So while it is important to take the prevailing societal culture into consideration when looking to change workplace culture, it is also important not to make assumptions or rely on stereotypes. ■

(From left) Enoch, Erla and Alisha discussed the need to show leaders there is an alternative to what they grew up with

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Not enough research into workplace mental health in China talks to the "consumers" of wellbeing initiatives – the employees. Consulting your staff about what they want in terms of workplace mental health is the equivalent of a business doing customer research.

2 Managers need to know there are other ways of managing staff than they may have experienced themselves – they can think about leadership as a relationship and talk to staff with empathy, knowing that vulnerability is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength.

3 Culture can be used as an excuse not to address mental health in the workplace but it can also be an enabler. Companies need to ask "how can we create an organisational culture that is stronger than the local culture?"

The 2022 Checklist for Workplace Mental Health

The opening session for Day Two looked at the essential elements workplaces need to know when launching and maintaining mental health initiatives in 2022



FACILITATOR:
SUE BAKER OBE
Founding Director
Time to Change,
Director
Changing Minds Globally

PANEL

RYAN CANDY
Head of Change,
Employee Experience
& People Performance
Sodexo Group

PAUL DOCKERTY
HR Benefits and
Wellbeing Manager
HSBC UK

SUSAN GEE
Head of Occupational
Health and Wellbeing
Yorkshire Water

CLAIRE WALSH
Health, Wellbeing
& Injury Prevention
Manager
BAE Systems

Sue Baker OBE led this panel session with four high-level advocates for improving the mental health of employees in their businesses. They discussed their practical experience of driving change in the workplace and what they see as important work to be done in 2022.

First she addressed Sodexo's Ryan Candy. Ryan said his role sits as part of the company's central HR team and he is responsible for managing the deployment of Sodexo's global engagement and people performance processes – "a complicated role because it is a complicated organisation", he said. Sue asked Ryan about the challenges of embedding mental health and wellbeing strategies in a complicated corporate structure. He emphasised the importance of getting senior stakeholder buy-in and making HR and operational leaders accountable for understanding the needs of their teams. In addition, Ryan said Sodexo has a group of mental health champions who act as intermediaries, working with the communications team to deploy initiatives and provide feedback to him on how these are received.

Sue then turned to Susan Gee. Susan outlined a number of initiatives Yorkshire Water has introduced, including

mandatory Mental Health First Aid training for leaders. During the pandemic, Susan continued, more than half of referrals (52%) to Yorkshire Water's occupational health team related to mental health, up from 31%. She also highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the company's call handlers, who have received many calls from distressed customers, and said Yorkshire Water has had to develop policies to help them deal with this.

Setting an example from the top

Picking up on Susan saying Yorkshire Water's Chief Executive herself had held a company-wide session on the impact the menopause had had on her, Sue asked about the importance of finding the right lead for mental health initiatives. Susan said Yorkshire Water has set up a strategic wellbeing group, chaired by a director with representatives from all areas of the business, to provide a bespoke approach. "You need help from the top, definitely – you need your board, your CEO, your directors to be engaged, but then I would rather have a dozen enthusiastic amateurs than a couple of professionals who are not on fire about the agenda," Susan said.

Sue then asked Paul Dockerty about how he goes about instilling a mental health



Susan (left) and Claire said the pandemic had created new stresses for their workforces



(From left) Sue, Ryan and Paul discussed different approaches to training mental health champions

culture across HSBC UK. Paul said he sees it as about giving people a platform to be open and honest about their mental health. Having a structure is also important, he added, pointing out HSBC UK's Chief Executive is a global mental health ambassador within the group.

Sue then brought in Claire Walsh. Claire said her main focus since August 2020 has been building an overarching mental health strategy for the BAE Systems. The pandemic presented particular challenges for BAE employees, she continued, because "no matter how hard you try, you can't build a submarine in your back garden". Much of the focus has been on making sure employees feel physically safe at work, because "if people don't feel physically safe they won't feel psychologically safe".

Moving on to questions from the audience, Sue asked Paul and Ryan about the training they provide for their mental

health champions. Paul said HSBC's mental health leads offer a programme of continuing development delivered through partners from different professional disciplines. Ryan said his champions do not have a specific role in terms of building or managing initiatives within Sodexo. He is always there to support them but they do not receive structured training. Sue said this highlighted the importance of leaders getting feedback from their champions to stay in touch with the needs of the workforce.

Finally, Susan and Claire talked about the importance of finding the right person to lead initiatives. This could be someone external, they agreed, but it was a case of getting the right fit. Claire highlighted the importance of an external candidate understanding the culture of the business. ■

I'd rather have a dozen enthusiastic amateurs than a couple of professionals who are not on fire about the agenda

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 A multidisciplinary approach is important. Claire said the backgrounds of the members of the panel – HR, occupational health, rewards and benefits and health and safety – reflect the disciplines organisations can use to develop an effective mental health and wellbeing approach.

2 Engagement is essential – whether it is executives right at the top of an organisation buying in to the value of mental wellbeing initiatives or grassroots advocates within the business, belief in the importance of taking mental health matters seriously makes a real difference.

3 Delivering wellbeing is a conversation, not a one-way process. Mental health champions can have a critical role not only in rolling out initiatives but also reporting back on how they are being received.



Loneliness and Mental Health

Loneliness and mental challenges feed into each other, and the pandemic has seen loneliness rocket. Experts and employees discussed what employers can do



FACILITATOR:
EMILY HAMILTON
VP Strategic Change
RS Components

PANEL

RACHEL EDWARDS
Senior Strategist,
Customer and
Workplace Futures
Lendlease

JACOB HEITLAND
Commercial Manager -
Development, Europe
Lendlease

MICHELLE LIM
Chair and Scientific
Chair
Ending Loneliness
Together

Emily Hamilton began by saying loneliness is a difficult concept for some to grasp, but one many will be familiar with. Academic and clinical psychologist Michelle Lim said she was increasingly seeing the impact of loneliness on our workplaces. Jake Heitland shared his passion for health in cities, adding that loneliness was something he'd experienced first-hand. It was critical, he said, to have this conversation in the context of a world dealing with Covid. Jake's colleague Rachel Lim explained how their company was interested in urban regeneration and helping people be at their best.

Emily asked Michelle to define loneliness. Michelle replied that loneliness was feeling like you're alone even if you're not physically alone. People suffering from loneliness might feel they can't talk to others. Loneliness has been consistently trivialised, she continued. Simplistic solutions such as getting to know more people were often proposed, but it's a lot more complicated than that.

Lonely people have poorer health and shorter lives. In the workplace, they score poorly on performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and creativity. They make more errors, take more sick

leave and express a stronger intention to resign. In the UK, the New Economics Foundation Report noted that employee loneliness costs up to \$2.5bn per year. Loneliness is costing us both socially and economically.

Jake, who identifies as queer, explained how as a young person moving between cities, he felt incredibly isolated. Being queer presented a challenge when trying to fit into a new workplace. People would remark on how he looked, acted and dressed. One interaction could snowball, he said, and he had experienced depression, anxiety and even suicide attempts. "We spend five days a week in the workplace and saying the wrong thing at the wrong time can be dangerous."

Emily asked Rachel what Lendlease is doing to combat loneliness. Rachel introduced the Loneliness Lab, co-founded by Lendlease and grassroots organisation Collectively, which designs spaces to reduce loneliness in cities.

In 2017, she said, British Red Cross, Co-op and New Economics Foundation research found nine million people in the UK have chronic loneliness, costing the NHS £600 per person, per year. There's a huge



business case for organisations to invest in creating a sense of belonging.

Emily shared her experience as a member of the trans community. She has many other interests, but wondered whether she was still part of these interest groups, due to being perceived as something other. She could be in a room with 30 or 40 people and feel utterly lonely, she said.

The return to face-to-face

Emily moved the discussion on to the effects of the pandemic. Michelle said social anxiety had increased as people returned to work, and we need to help people adapt. Remote working had been detrimental for younger people beginning their careers, who hadn't been able to build relationships and benefit from mentoring. "Minute social interactions can build into more meaningful interactions, and you change an acquaintance into a friend over time," she observed, "and that's been taken away from us". Rachel acknowledged varying attitudes to remote working. Lendlease is trying to build that

choice into the return to the office.

"For someone to be truly honest about how they're feeling takes genuine relationship-building, Jake added, and more than ever people need to see that their employers care. If someone is feeling lonely, it shouldn't be taken as a sign there's something wrong with them. Michelle observed: "If you have a heartbeat, then you will feel lonely at some point."

Jake chimed in: "We are social creatures, and we've been through an 18-month period when we haven't been able to be social. This is the same thing as being tired or being hungry" – a raw emotion that we need to do something about.

"It's clear that loneliness is a human condition," concluded Emily. "It can affect any of us, it affects us in different ways, but it's also a business issue. It costs your bottom line. Good business is good humanity." ■

Facing page: Jacob (left) and Rachel talked about the importance of creating a sense of belonging

This page: Emily (left) and Michelle discussed how we need to take loneliness more seriously

We are social creatures, and we've been through an 18-month period when we haven't been able to be social

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Have open dialogues with as many people as you can, so that you can understand as many people as possible and create solutions for as many people as possible. There's no one-size-fits-all solution.

2 Remember "social hygiene" skills. Take the time to be truly supportive and attentive, and remember that deep, meaningful relationships are built over time.

3 Think about the social glue in your organisation, and how to structure the operational side of the business in such a way as to enable people to make lots of friends.

Why a Digitally Well Workforce is Vital in the Post-Covid Hybrid Workplace

With the pandemic having accelerated the move to flexible working, employees need support to ensure digital behaviours are healthy and sustainable



FACILITATOR:
LAURA WILLIS
Director
Shine Offline Ltd

PANEL

HELEN HODGKINSON
Chief People Officer
TLT

Changes to working practices in response to the coronavirus pandemic have seen employees' reliance on digital technologies increase rapidly. As a result, the idea of digital wellbeing has become increasingly important to businesses.

Laura Willis, co-founder of digital wellbeing consultancy Shine Offline, began by introducing Helen Hodgkinson. In October this year, Helen's law firm TLT made digital wellbeing one of its wellbeing pillars as it embraces a fully flexible working strategy. Laura said the end goal of initiatives like this is to protect employees' wellbeing, work/life balance and mental health.

Laura said that 82% of people say their digital technology causes them stress or to feel overwhelmed, impairing their ability to deliver their best work. Home working has also led to a culture of digital presenteeism, with employees feeling under pressure to be available online all the time.

Laura noted that digital technology causes stress for most employees



Home working has led to a culture of digital presenteeism, with employees feeling under pressure to be available all the time

to make digital wellbeing a key part of the business's strategy. Laura said as a law firm, TLT's people and their knowledge and expertise are part of their product. For this reason, the company needs to have the best people and for them to be at their most productive. This is why employee wellbeing has always been important to the firm, she added.

Digital double-edged sword

The pandemic then made digital wellbeing of even more central importance to the firm, Helen continued. She emphasised that digital technology has many positive aspects, allowing staff to continue to work through lockdowns, but can also have negative impacts. For TLT, increasing the focus on digital wellbeing was therefore a natural conversation, which developed firstly into a strategic intent and then into a set of plans to help employees manage their digital lives and develop healthy digital habits.

Regarding TLT's move to a fully flexible working strategy, Laura asking how the firm ensures employees are not adversely affected by the blurring of boundaries between work and home. Highlighting the importance of trusting its employees, Helen said TLT made "a head and heart

decision" to set up a change programme called TLT World, allowing staff to choose the hours, location and environment they work in. While saying this had been a huge success, Helen acknowledged it had also created new issues for the business in terms of digital wellbeing.

To address this, TLT has given staff permission to manage their own time, using quieter times at work to take breaks, turn off their phone and step away from their computer. Helen said: "This is a consistent journey of story-telling, leadership behaviour, leadership connection and making sure people are enabled to make the best use of their time." Laura agreed on the importance of leadership behaviour here. She said there is a ripple effect, where management can demonstrate positive digital habits of their own and set an example to help improve those of their staff.

Speaking the same language

With TLT being a signatory to the Mindful Business Charter, Laura asked what value the company sees in this. Helen said it gives TLT a common language and framework with clients, as well as internally. It also gives employees permission to pull back on the hours they work and, since moving to fully flexible working, to communicate what times of day best suit them to work.

What does "digitally well" look like to you, Laura asked Helen, as a client-facing firm operating in an always-on world? Helen mentioned two principles: having a blend of on- and offline work and the flexibility to manage your time; and removing immediacy. She added: "What the digital world does is make us very 'in the moment' and we're almost having to



unlearn that behaviour where we deal with everything straight away."

Helen said giving staff flexibility to manage their own time was key

Laura brought up being aware of how an individual's digital habits affect those around them. Helen added there is a generational aspect to this and it was important not to view younger people's use of technology solely from an older generation's point of view. Digital rituals for starting and ending work can also help establish boundaries in a flexible working environment, Laura said.

Finally, in response to an question from the audience about what steps an individual could take to improve their digital health, Laura said making changes is important but then talking about them, acting as an ambassador for mental wellbeing, was one powerful way to effect change in a work culture. ■

The digital world makes us very 'in the moment' and we're almost having to unlearn that behaviour

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Digital technology has many positive aspects, and it allowed staff to continue working through lockdowns. However, it can also cause stress and cause staff to feel overwhelmed. Adapting successfully and healthily to the new way of working will take thought and effort.

2 Empowering and trusting employees to make decisions about when, where and how they work can help to counter some of the negative effects of always-on hybrid working environments.

3 Managerial success stories can help change the broader culture of a workplace. If management can demonstrate positive digital habits, they can create a ripple effect that helps their staff improve their own habits too.

Breaking the Cycle: Domestic Abuse and Mental Health

Living through domestic abuse takes a huge toll on mental health. This session spotlighted personal experiences and discussed how employers can support staff



FACILITATOR:
STEVE MAULE
Acting CEO
Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse

PANEL

NATALIE CURTIS
Ambassador
Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse

Steve Maule explained how the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA) is a membership organisation comprising nearly 1,000 employers with about three million employees. It encourages employers to put policies, procedures and signposting in place to help employees who are victims of abuse.

Steve then introduced Natalie Curtis, a senior health & safety officer with Balfour Beatty and survivor of domestic abuse. Natalie shared how in 2018, she fled her home with just the clothes on her back. The perpetrator was arrested and given a two-year jail sentence for controlling and coercive behaviour. Natalie has shared her experience as an ambassador for EIDA and Women's Aid to let other people know that they're not alone.

Natalie was living on eggshells, waiting for the next episode of violence. She was subjected to outbursts of rage, with her husband smashing up the kitchen and throwing her possessions around. He isolated Natalie from friends and family and bullied her into taking out loans in

One in four women will experience domestic abuse, but fewer than 10 per cent of employers have a specific policy

her name. When she eventually fled she was £88,000 in debt, which had a huge impact on her mental wellbeing (she is now debt-free). He even threatened to kill her. Natalie healed much more quickly from the violence than she did from the emotional and psychological abuse. Shortly before she fled he said they had to make a suicide pact. Natalie was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and suffered from panic attacks which left her shaking from head to foot.

The impact on working life

Steve expressed his admiration for Natalie being able to relate her story with such confidence. He imagined that while all this was going on, Natalie would have been behaving differently at work. How did this manifest itself, he asked, and what reaction did she get from colleagues?

Natalie replied that she started taking more sick days, and asked to work from home. She started wearing roll-neck jumpers to hide the bruises, and constantly looking exhausted. She would reject work events for fear he was going to show up. He worked as a subcontractor to the business, and would demand to take her home if he finished his shift first. A couple of people at work asked whether she

was OK, but she was good at covering up.

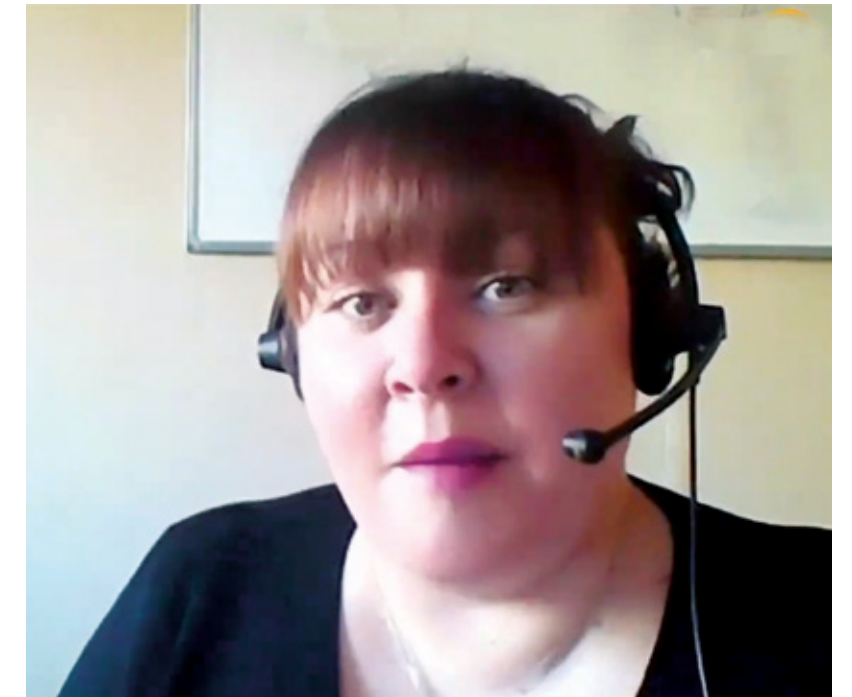
One in four women in the UK will experience some form of domestic abuse in their lifetime, Steve said, as will one in six men. But within an average-sized organisation, in most years nobody will disclose domestic abuse in their workplace, and only five to 10 per cent of employers have a specific domestic abuse policy in place. Relating this back to Natalie's case, Steve said that if the employer wasn't making employees aware of the issue, none of the signals Natalie was subconsciously sending out would have been noticed.

Breaking free

So how did Natalie manage to break the cycle, Steve asked. As soon as the perpetrator was arrested, she called one of her bosses and explained she was going through a difficult time. She found the business very supportive, allowing her to have days working from home and giving her the time off she needed. Once she told her story, she couldn't have asked for a better response.

If domestic abuse had been discussed in the business before the arrest, Natalie said, it would have given her the confidence to speak out. She wants to build that kind of culture in her workplace, so she started working as a leader in Balfour Beatty's domestic abuse working group. The group has launched many initiatives to raise awareness, including training, podcasts and tie-ups with other charities.

Steve asked Natalie how employers should approach someone in the position she was in. Don't interrogate them, she said. Make it personal. Say something like: "I've noticed that you seem upset, is everything



OK at home?" Give them the space to talk confidentially. If they're working from home a lot, invite them to meet outside the business somewhere.

Natalie found her employer very supportive once she told her story

Steve said that while Natalie's employer did help when they became aware of the abuse, EIDA comes across many cases where that doesn't happen. The length of time it takes domestic violence victims to recover on all fronts is exacerbated enormously if the employer doesn't get involved. While Natalie is now in a much better place, her recovery continues. Having the support from her workplace has allowed her to continue working in a place she loves and progress along her journey back to mental wellbeing. ■

The length of time it takes victims to recover on all fronts is exacerbated enormously if employers don't get involved

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Visit www.eida.org.uk for loads of signposted resources to get any business started on setting up a domestic abuse policy. There are made-to-fit policies for all sizes of business on the site.

2 When a business engages with domestic violence, the reality, sadly, is there will be disclosures. Somewhere in your workforce there is likely to be someone who is or will be a victim. Someone who starts coming in to work very early and staying very late could be using the office as a sanctuary.

3 When you broach the topic of domestic violence, you have to be prepared for an initial denial. But if you take a human approach and ask whether someone's OK, the way in which they answer that question will probably give you an indication of whether there's an issue.

Redefining Conflict: How it Arises and Challenges Employee Mental Health

This session took a deep dive into the role of conflict in the workplace, looking at how it can be healthy and how avoiding conflict can be harmful in the long run



FACILITATOR:
SARAH BODDEY
Chief Diversity, Equity
& Inclusion Officer,
EMEA & APAC
Northern Trust

PANEL

JUSTINE LUTTERODT
Managing Director
Centre for
Synchronous
Leadership

Setting out the discussion's intention to reimagine conflict in the context of mental health, Sarah Boddey started with the traditional view that conflict is bad for our mental health, both inside and outside the workplace. This idea has led to conflict being seen as something to avoid in its many forms.

She then brought in Justine Lutterodt, who has been challenging perceptions of conflict in relation to mental health.

A different perspective

Justine opened by referencing studies suggesting that workplace conflict is the single biggest perceived source of workplace stress. This, Justine said, reinforced that traditional view that conflict has a negative impact on psychological wellbeing.

"But I think what we need to appreciate is lack of conflict is also a problem," Justine continued. Conflict can be a negative force, but that's not always the case. And just because conflict isn't apparent, that doesn't mean it isn't present. It could be that conflict exists but is not being expressed – and suppressing emotions can have negative consequences for mental health. She drew parallels with the experiences of LGBT employees feeling unable to express their true identity in the workplace.

Sarah agreed, saying that from a diversity and inclusion perspective getting diverse people into leadership teams and boardrooms is one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is then to get these differing opinions and views to work together. This is a management skill, she said – managed badly, the process can

lead to "bad" conflict that affects people's mental health, but managed well it allows people who think differently to challenge each other constructively, resulting in positive conflict.

Beyond winning and losing

Justine followed up on Sarah's point about enabling people to work through differing opinions, saying: "Traditionally, a lot of organisations have resolved differences by domination. Someone has the status and they have the authoritative view and they win." She added that looking at conflict as something where there has to be one view that wins fails to tap into collective wisdom and fails to build trust.

Rather than focusing on winning, we need to shift to shared understanding and innovation, she added.

Sarah highlighted the importance of building trust and psychologically safe work environments to allow conflict to arise in a healthy and useful way. Justine expanded on this, noting how the academic literature recognises two different types of conflict: task conflict and relational conflict. Task conflict is defined as disagreement about ideas, perspectives and decisions, whereas relational conflict arises from interpersonal incompatibility. Task conflict improves the quality of ideas, while relational conflict damages performance and mental health, so the goal is to promote task conflict while minimising relational conflict.

Diversity presents a challenge here, Justine added, because it tends to increase both forms of conflict unless managed properly.

In the context of the coronavirus



Justine (left) and Sarah explored the roots of conflict and how differences of opinion could be constructive

pandemic, Justine said that the past two years have increased conflict but also created opportunities by redefining the employer-employee relationship. Citing the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer, she said employees are now recognised as the most important stakeholders in an organisation, leading management to consider their mental health needs more and employees to feel that they can ask for their needs to be met. Sarah added that what employees are asking for now is nothing new, but that these days they feel more empowered to make demands of their employers.

The importance of trust

Sarah asked whether Justine had any suggestions about how to promote healthy conflict. Justine made two points. Firstly, she said, workplace conflict rarely starts with the intention to cause harm or undermine but occurs when one party feels their needs will not be

met, so trust and being able to provide a vision of mutual benefit is important. Understanding the other side's needs is key to this, she said. Secondly, she said, avoiding binaries can promote a more productive discussion. "Innovation matters because some of the stuff where it feels like it's this or it's that, it locks us into a yes/no, where we actually need to find a new version," Justine said.

In response to an audience question about team alignment, Justine emphasised the value of pre-emptively trying to build understanding in teams of individuals' strengths and needs. "The more teams do that before, the easier it is for them to recognise when tensions are emerging and create space to address them before they become bigger questions," she said. ■

Traditionally, a lot of organisations have resolved differences by domination. Someone has the authority and they win

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Invest in skills to handle and promote positive conflict. Organisations and individuals need to gain the skills to deal with conflict without resorting to domination or suppression. We need to be able to provide an environment of psychological safety for workers who have different views.

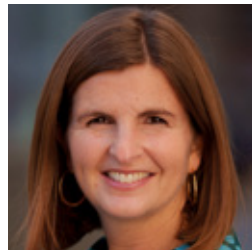
2 Failing to allow conflict can have a negative impact on organisations. Whistleblowing is the result of organisations that don't engage with voices that have something to say and end up being in a much worse situation because eventually something blows up.

3 Positive conflict can only arise when employers and management have a good relationship. That will only happen if you have a foundation of trust and psychological safety, along with the skill that's required to manage that with individuals.

Lack of conflict is also a problem. It's not necessarily the binary of 'is conflict good or is conflict bad?'

Keynote: Nicky Campbell

Broadcaster and writer Nicky Campbell talked to TCH founder Zoe Sinclair about his adoption, his diagnosis of bipolar and his four-legged therapist



FACILITATOR:
ZOE SINCLAIR
Co-Founder
This Can Happen

PANEL

NICKY CAMPBELL
Broadcaster and
Writer

Among the many projects Nicky is involved in, he co-presents ITV's *Long Lost Family* TV series, which aims to reunite family members after years of separation. Zoe started by asking Nicky whether the experience was a catalyst for him to search for his own birth mother.

Nicky thought it was. When he searched for his birth mother he was looking for the reasons that he was unhappy. The issue of his parentage had been lurking throughout his life. At the time he thought it could be a key to everything. He met his birth mother, Stella. He feels guilty to say it, but he found her very needy. He already had a mum, and he didn't bond with his birth mother.

Stella had had a hell of a life. She'd had two babies adopted within 18 months, she'd had bipolar type 1 all her life and her brother took his own life. Nicky put the experience to one side and lived with the guilt that he'd failed to establish a relationship with Stella. But *Long Lost Family* was an education. He met birth mothers from all over the world and got a sense of their trauma. A flight steward told him how he'd traced his birth mother but she wasn't interested. The story stayed with Nicky, and he thought how lucky he was that he didn't have the door slammed in his face. He now feels completely differently about his birth mother.

Was there any link between adoption and his mental health, Zoe asked. Having felt no connection to his birth mother, finding out that she and he were both bipolar gave him a massive sense of connection, he said. "It was almost like a gift."

How did his bipolar present itself over the years, Zoe asked. From his teens, terrible lows, said Nicky. The work he does, phone-ins and debates, suits the

way his brain works, he said. He doesn't think deep but he thinks fast. And you're successful, Zoe said. He was driven to succeed partly because he wanted to prove himself, Nicky replied. A lot of adopted people are like that, because they feel rejected and want to prove they're worth something. It's a paradox because he had a loving family, but "there's still something inside you that thinks you're worthless".

Breaking point

Nicky had a breakdown in central London. It had been coming for years. He got involved with animal welfare, and he internalised everything. He had an obsession with family, and couldn't get pictures of abandoned baby elephants out of his mind. He did his radio programme on autopilot, then wandered down the road in the greyest cloud. He collapsed with his head in his hands, heaving and weeping. He called his wife, who said "come home to Maxwell". Maxwell is Nicky's dog, and when he heard that he lifted a bit, because he knew he could be with Maxwell and they'd have a connection, but he wouldn't have to say anything. He got home. "I lay on the bed and then I heard Maxwell coming up the stairs and he put his head on me," recalled Nicky. "I absolutely know he was there for me."

The breakdown was a dreadful experience, said Nicky, but it was good in that he



A lot of adopted people feel rejected and want to prove themselves



realised something needed to be done. It took a long time to diagnose and prescribe treatment for Nicky. Diagnosis is so important, he said, and still it's not prioritised as it should be.

Why did Nicky decide to talk about such personal things, Zoe asked. Life has been very good to Nicky, he said, and it's good to do what he can to help others. He gets letters telling him he's encouraged people to do something about their own issues, and that's a great feeling.

Four-legged family member

Nicky let his dog out of the room, saying Maxwell had been his main therapist. He's obviously been a major part of your healing, said Zoe. It goes back to the family

dog Candy they had after he was adopted, Nicky said, who was like a brother to him. After Candy died, he had no dog for 35 years, then when he got Maxwell it took him back to that unique connection that we can have with an animal.

Zoe returned to the genetic component of Nicky's bipolarity. How does he discuss it with his daughters? They live in a world where the Instagram culture threatens their mental health, says Nicky. But talking about mental health is normalised for their generation, and they deal with it from a situation of experience, knowledge and strength. ■

I heard Maxwell coming up the stairs and he put his head on me. I absolutely know he was there for me

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Being adopted can affect people's mentality throughout their lives in many different ways. Even people who have been adopted into loving homes can often feel driven to prove themselves, because deep down they feel they were rejected.

2 Having a mental breakdown is an awful experience to go through, but it can have a good outcome if it functions as a catalyst for doing something about mental issues. For Nicky this was seeking therapy, then sharing his story to help others as well as himself.

3 Animals can be a huge comfort to people in mental distress. They don't need you to say anything to them, and they can provide a connection that goes beyond words.

Understanding and Processing Grief

Coping with grief can be a huge barrier to mental health. Various employees shared their experiences to help employers understand what they can do to help



FACILITATOR:
KATIE LYNCH
Founder and CEO
Apiary Life

PANEL

MILES GILLEARD
Health and Wellbeing
Policy Consultant
Civil Service HR

CAROLINE JORDAN
Benefits Director,
UK & Ireland
Marsh McLennan

MIKE MOSS
Supply Chain
Development Director
Tesco

DR CHLOE PAIDOUSSIS-MITCHELL
Chartered Counselling
Psychologist
The 21: Consultants in
Clinical Wellness

Katie Lynch opened the session by noting how the last couple of years had brought grief in the workplace into focus. She turned first to Dr Chloe Paidoussis-Mitchell, asking how the pandemic might have shifted people's understanding of grief. Chloe said the pandemic has highlighted that to embrace life again after a period of grief, we need to protect our mental health. The workplace is key, she said, to helping people access support and build human connections.

Katie then brought in Mike Moss. Mike and his wife lost their two-day-old baby Alexander just as the pandemic hit. He returned from his bereavement leave into a remote world, which he found very difficult. He chose to speak very openly about what he was experiencing, which opened up conversations with other people about their own grief. "If you're not talking, I don't think you're processing," said Mike. "It's not time that goes by that helps you heal, it's a matter of processing grief, and talking is such an important part of that."

Katie then asked Miles Gilleard about his work in the Civil Service HR creating open

environments. The team had identified a hesitancy among some managers to open the conversation, as they could be anxious about whether they were saying the right thing. So they put together a good-practice guide to dealing with bereavement, including the first phone call, facilitating the return to work, and how different religions deal with funerals. There is the appetite for these conversations, he said, and organisations needed to tap into it.

Working through grief

Katie asked Mike whether throwing himself into work was important when recovering from his bereavement. Mike said it gave him purpose but it was trickier for his wife to go back to her job, dealing with other women and their babies. The experience is different for everyone, Katie observed, which can make it difficult for organisations to know what to do.

Katie then asked a question from the audience. This was the question, she said: why do we find it so hard to talk about grief? Grief isn't just one thing, Chloe replied. It's a complicated psychological experience. Traumatic grief is not the



Chloe (left) talked about how grief is different for everyone. Mike shared his experience of losing a baby during the pandemic



same thing as anticipatory grief, and it's not the same to lose a baby as it is to lose an elderly parent. Grief is a profoundly difficult experience for almost everybody, but how people cope with it varies greatly. People are afraid of appearing weak, losing control, people not understanding.

Expressing to evolve

All of us will go through grief at some stage, she said. So how do we make it OK to express ourselves, and how do we make it a normal thing for our colleagues to say "I'm having a really bad day today?" Research has shown that bottling up grief can lead to mental or physical illness. Expressing our feelings mobilises what's inside us and makes us feel that we're evolving. It gives us the chance to embrace life again, in the face of unbelievable pain.

Caroline Jordan shared how she had lost both her parents. You never forget how people treated you at that time, she said. Twenty years ago when she lost her father, her line manager didn't seem interested



in how she was managing. Her experience when she lost her mother was completely different. She was able to work from home and gradually ease herself back in, explaining to people what had happened and getting past the awkwardness of those initial conversations.

Katie (far left) spoke to Miles (centre) and Caroline about how the workplace could facilitate effective grieving

It's not time that goes by that helps you heal, it's a matter of processing grief, and talking is such an important part of that

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Grief is not a simple thing. It's a complicated psychological experience that varies from person to person and situation to situation. We need to give people the time and space to express their feelings in their own terms.
- 2 Grief is not mental illness, it's a part of life that all of us will experience at some stage. But if it's not processed properly, it can lead to mental ill health. Grieving is a normal part of the human experience, and we need to recognise it as such.
- 3 The workplace can play a key role in allowing people to build the human connections that can help them heal, as well as in helping people access support. Looking after people properly during their toughest times will build strong and thriving teams.

When Mental Illness Causes Long-Term Absence: Supporting Staff Returning to Work

Mental health issues can lead to long-term absence, and the return to work can present further challenges. Four employees shared how they were supported



FACILITATOR:
MARK GOLDBERG
Director of Global Health
& Well-Being
Latham & Watkins

PANEL

ANITA GURU
Partner Development
Manager
BDO

ADAM LAND
Senior Director
Competition and
Markets Authority

RACHEL WEBSTER
Business Support
Manager
Barclays

Introducing the panellists for this session, Mark Goldberg explained how all three had experienced mental ill health that led to them taking an extended period of absence from work. This, he said, had given them valuable perspectives on what businesses can do to support those returning to work or suffering with their mental health.

Mark asked the panellists to outline their experiences returning from long-term absence and reintegrating into work. Anita Guru said within the first two months of starting work at BDO she felt her mental health deteriorating and realised that she needed to seek help. Returning to work after two-and-a-half months off, she said she knew she did not have the capacity to work full-time and, following discussions with her manager and HR, agreed to a three-and-a-half-day working week spread over five days.

An open conversation

Mark highlighted the honest and open dialogue Anita had with her manager, saying it seemed this had been important to her successfully returning to work. Anita agreed, saying the positive response she received encouraged her to continue this dialogue.

Adam Land then recounted his experience of burnout after a period of overwork and related anxiety in his thirties.

Attempting to return to work too early, Adam said, ended up with him "melting down" and having to check in to a psychiatric facility, after which he was signed off work for an extended period.

In common with Anita, he said a phased return to work over six to nine months, was necessary for him to recover to the point where he

was able to work full-time again. He also had to take the time to understand the role that work had played in his problems. Some of the mental health management techniques he learned to assist his recovery he still uses today, Adam added.

This proved vital when, three years ago, his daughter took her own life. "Having had the experience I had had before, I really prioritised my own mental health and recovery. I tried to replicate some of the things that had worked well for me when making my journey back to work," he said.

Again, Mark said, having open and honest communication with his manager allowed his employer to support him in this.

Flexible lifeline

Moving on to Rachel Webster, Mark asked her about her experience following her diagnosis of PTSD. Rachel had served 24 years in the military before entering civilian life and joining Barclays. Her mental health imploded following what was later declared to be a wrongful arrest by military police. She was offered a period signed off work by her employer but chose to continue to work at this time. Rachel recalled how for two years she was in total denial about her mental health, but then "everything just imploded and I needed to seek help".

Initiating the conversation with her line manager, she said she had been offered long-term sick leave but felt that this would be the wrong thing for her. Her manager offered her the flexibility to work when she felt able but also to take days off as she needed, she said. Explaining her reasons for wanting to continue to work despite her diagnosis, she said: "Isolation was an absolute killer. If I had carried on with the 12 weeks at home, I probably wouldn't be here now."

Isolation was an absolute killer. If I had carried on with the 12 weeks at home I probably wouldn't be here now



Following up on the social benefits of being at work, Adam said the support that he received from close colleagues and the wider organisation meant a great deal to him. Anita added that she decided to share her story at work in Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2020. "Off the back of that a lot of conversations and relationships developed," she said.

Responding to an audience question about when to begin the conversation about mental health when due to return to work after a period signed off, Anita said the

earlier the better. Adam highlighted the value of making the first work interaction a small one – going for a coffee with a colleague, for example.

What if your manager or team are not supportive? Rachel highlighted the importance of raising this with the employee relations team, while Mark said you should make use of all available resources. The experience of all the panellists, Mark added, showed the value of constant communication and dialogue between employee and employer. ■

(Clockwise) Mark talked to Anita, Adam and Rachel about their experiences. All were very different, but the need for open, honest dialogue was a common theme

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Talk to employees about what kind of help they need. Often employers want to help but they fail to deliver because they don't know what to do. Everyone's needs will be different, so having that conversation is vitally important.

2 Flexibility can be key. The social benefits of spending time at work can be a great help to people working through difficult issues, but this needs to be balanced against the additional stresses work can bring. Simply signing someone off on long-term sick leave might not be the answer.

3 There is no one "right" way to deal with a period of mental distress in relation to work. Time off followed by a phased return might be the ideal solution for some people, while others might need to continue to work while also getting help.

Mindfulness at Work: the Evidence for its Power and Efficacy

Experts in mindfulness took us through the evidence for the power and efficacy of implementing mindfulness in the workplace



FACILITATOR:
ANDREW McNEILL
Director
Lines of Sight
Consultancy

PANEL

JANNA BILSKI
Investments Division
Ford Foundation

DEAN FRANCIS
Mindfulness EDI
Consultant
Urban Mindfulness
Foundation

DR STEPHANIE PALACIOS
Stephanie Palacios
Consulting

Janna (left) told Andrew mindfulness was needed

After inviting the panellists and audience to join in with a short mindfulness exercise, the panel chair, Andrew McNeill, asked the panellists what mindfulness meant to each of them.

Dean Francis said his approach focused on its ethical aspects. Making the point that mindfulness will mean different things to different people, Dean said: "From my lived experience, we're talking about inviting ourselves to access our own authenticity. Freedom from socially conditioned constructs, moving into our own felt sense of who we are."

Relating this to the workplace, he continued: "Mindfulness challenges the autopilot – the conditioned patterns of our behaviour, our thoughts and thinking. If mindfulness is socially focused, we start to challenge stereotyping, automatic categorisation, biases and prejudices."

Andrew then brought in Stephanie Palacios to outline the benefits of mindfulness in the workplace. Stephanie said it can help to cultivate skills to handle the very problems organisations are most worried about: lack of concentration, and stress. In addition, she highlighted the challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic: overwhelm,

and how to create community in hybrid working environments. Mindfulness can help give people the mental and emotional flexibility to handle these.

Andrew agreed, saying: "This is no longer weird." From not telling people at work he practiced mindfulness when he started 10 years ago, Andrew said he now sees many corporates have established mindfulness networks and are embracing the solutions it can offer.

Bringing it to business

Moving on to Janna Bilski, Andrew asked what the biggest challenges are in bringing mindfulness to the business environment. Janna highlighted a lack of funding, and of experience of the practice. "There's a difference between intellectually understanding something and understanding it experientially," she said. "Once people experience it from a practice perspective, there's a much better chance of them wanting to share this with others."

Addressing an audience question about how to set up a workplace mindfulness group, Janna stressed the value of honesty and passion. She said: "I don't think there's any doubt, looking at the statistics of increasing anxiety and stress,



that practices like these are needed and I think speaking from your heart, you have a good chance of getting support."

Talking about factors in the success of bringing mindfulness to the workplace, Dean highlighted the power of mindfulness to effect cultural change. The biggest success stories he has seen, Dean said, are where organisations have become more willing to introduce and embrace difference in the workplace as a result of practising mindfulness. "It's not about the quantitative data for me – you can see the ease in the faces of the employees," he said. "That's a real benefit to business leaders."

Measuring mindfulness

Building on ways to measure the impact that mindfulness has on organisations, Stephanie said that much depends on what the aims of the business are. "There isn't a one-size-fits-all when it comes to measuring mindfulness," she said. "Because it touches on so many different skills and helps enhance so many different part of your company, it really has to do with where you want to see improvement."



Responding to an audience question about how to make time for mindfulness in busy working lives, Janna emphasised the importance of setting small, achievable targets. "Be really practical – start small. Start with five minutes a day and if five minutes sounds like too much, start with two minutes."

Stephanie expanded on this, saying she found value in the variety of ways to practice mindfulness, as this meant that she was able to tailor it to what she wanted or had time for. "Mindfulness is so much more than meditation," she said. "It can be mindful movement, taking in all the five senses, slowing down when eating a meal, gratitude... the list goes on."

Dean agreed with this approach. He said: "Mindfulness is not a way out of our lives, it's a way into our lives. If we find ourselves in hectic, busy places, how do we carry our bodies in a mindful way?" Central to all this, Andrew said, was allowing us to be kind to ourselves. ■

Dean (left) focused on the ethical aspects while Stephanie said mindfulness brought emotional flexibility

You can see the ease in the faces of employees. That's a real benefit to business leaders



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 With anxiety and stress on the rise, there's never been a better time to bring mindfulness into your business. It's a great way to address some of the problems businesses are most worried about, such as stress and lack of concentration.

2 Start with your own practice and build from there. As opposed to going into this thinking "how can this be used to help my organisation", go into it thinking "what can I put into this and how can this help me to profoundly understand myself?"

3 Focus on how mindfulness can change people's lived experiences rather than expecting immediate business improvement. Trust in the benefits that practice can bring to your workforce and the bottom line will follow suit.

The Road to Recovery: Gambling, Addiction and Mental Health

An employee and a therapist shared their experiences with addiction, discussed how it affects work performance, and suggested how managers could help



FACILITATOR:
DR. STEPHEN PEREIRA
Founder and CEO
Happence

PANEL

LIZ KARTER MBE
Therapist, Author,
Consultant.
Level Ground Therapy

JIM LAWRENCE
Partner
Bryan Cave Leighton
Paisner

Dr Stephen Pereira kicked off the session by inviting attorney Jim Lawrence to share his experiences of addiction. Addiction is endemic in the legal profession but can affect people from all walks of life, Jim said. He came from a hard-drinking family, typical of his area. After he graduated from university, most of his friends moved on to more responsible habits, whereas Jim's drinking never abated. When you're a problem drinker, he said, it's easy to surround yourself with people like you: "If you look around and everybody's acting the same way you do, it doesn't seem like anything's out of the ordinary."

Jim went to work for a big law firm in New York City. His drinking turned from a hobby into a problem. He never knew whether that first drink would lead to two or 20. "I had a hard time admitting my alcoholism as a big firm associate because it was so taboo, no-one talked about it," he recalled. His drinking was so intertwined with his identity as a hard-drinking, hard-working attorney that he couldn't imagine a future being sober.

Liz (left) said getting beyond self-loathing poses a challenge. Jim shared his story and found others eager to share too

As the binges grew longer and more frequent, he felt suicidal and his first thought every morning when he woke up was "damn it, I did it again". He finally went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, got

sober and hasn't had a drink now in 14 years. His career flourished, he stayed married, and he has two beautiful children. None of that would have been possible, he says, without getting sober.

The power of sharing

A couple of years ago, Jim was encouraged to tell his story to the whole firm. He sent an email to all 1,400 employees around the world, not leaving out any details. Statistically, he said, there must be many people in need of recovery at his law firm. He didn't have that role model 14 years ago, so he was happy to put his hand up and say: "I'm Jim Lawrence, I'm an attorney with Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, I'm an alcoholic. I have substance abuse disorder, I'm in recovery, I'm not ashamed of my substance abuse disorder and you shouldn't be either."

"I just cracked the door open, and hundreds of people rushed in," he said. He found people were just so hungry to share their stories.

Stephen then asked Liz what challenges she had encountered in working with people addicted to gambling. Helping her clients understand that their addiction is about so much more than money is one of her biggest challenges, she says. By



Stephen explored the roots and solutions to addiction with the two panellists

the time someone comes to her, they are obsessed with the debt they're in. They think if they can only get their money back, their problem will be gone.

Digging deeper

Getting beyond their self-loathing and guilt is another challenge. Often they will say "I don't want to make excuses", but she helps them find the reasons behind their addiction. Has there been a life crisis such as a bereavement or a trauma such as coercive control, making them feel gambling is the only escape from the trap that they're in? Her difficulty is getting them to believe that they deserve to find those reasons, she said, and getting the people who love and care for them to understand those reasons too.

If we suspect something is amiss, how can we raise it, Stephen asked. Liz suggested

the "feedback sandwich". You might say: "Usually you're such easy company and you're so engaged, and I just noticed that that seems to have changed over the last week or so, so I just wanted to check in and see whether there's anything going on."

Jim urged people to think of someone struggling with addiction as they would a cancer patient. "I know I was born with substance abuse disorder, and I'm going to die with substance abuse disorder," he said. "It is who I am, and I can't wish it away." An addict doesn't choose to be an addict any more than a cancer patient chooses to be a cancer patient, he said. It's difficult to approach an addict openly and lovingly, he said, but that's what they need. ■

I had a hard time admitting my alcoholism as a big firm associate, because it was so taboo

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Addiction is an illness that people don't choose, any more than people choose cancer. But while cancer patients are viewed as brave battlers, addicts are perceived as losers. It's not easy to approach addictive behaviour without judgement, but it's vital that we try.

2 Gambling addiction is about more than money. Recovering a gambling debt won't make the problem go away. We need to find the deeper reasons behind the addictive behaviour and address them.

3 Fostering an open environment where people can discuss their issues is vital to helping people confront their addictions. At work we're often expected to be a certain way, and if people can't face up to their issues they will never be able to tackle them.

Maximising the Impact of Your EAP Provision

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) can be a great support for employee mental health. This session looked at how to ensure staff get their full support



FACILITATOR:
PAUL ROBERTS
Founder
Enlighten

PANEL

CHARLES DUNN
Global EAP Manager
BNY Mellon

LAURA McLEOD
Global Health Program
Lead
GSK

SABRINA ROBINSON
Wellbeing Lead
Essex County Council

REBECCA WHITING-HOLLIDAY
Mental Health Clinical
Lead
Google Benefits

Beginning the panel discussion by making the point that Employee Assistance Programmes are now a recognised and established part of organisations' mental health strategies, Paul Roberts asked Sabrina Robinson how the coronavirus pandemic has changed Essex County Council's approach to its EAP.

Sabrina said that even before the pandemic the council had renewed its focus on its wellbeing agenda. In September 2020 it launched a new five-year wellbeing strategy, with mental wellbeing a central part of this. Sabrina said that one of the major aims of this was increasing employee awareness of the council's EAP and its role as part of the wider support offering. "It's really important for us to link up our different areas of wellbeing with mental health," she said.

Paul then posed the same question to Rebecca Whiting-Holliday. Rebecca highlighted the challenges presented by the move to remote/home working and making sure there were no gaps in access or experience in Google's EAP.

Moving on to Charles Dunn, Paul made the point that pre-pandemic, virtual counselling was not something clients generally accepted. Charles agreed, saying: "I had approached BNY Mellon nine years ago about having some kind of virtual component to its EAP, and in this risk-averse culture of finance they didn't want to hear it. And then Covid hit and, amazingly, everybody changed their tune and in a day we did it." This has opened up the EAP to people who would not otherwise have used it, Charles added.

Laura McLeod echoed this, saying that in association with GSK's EAP provider, the company moved quickly to offer webinars

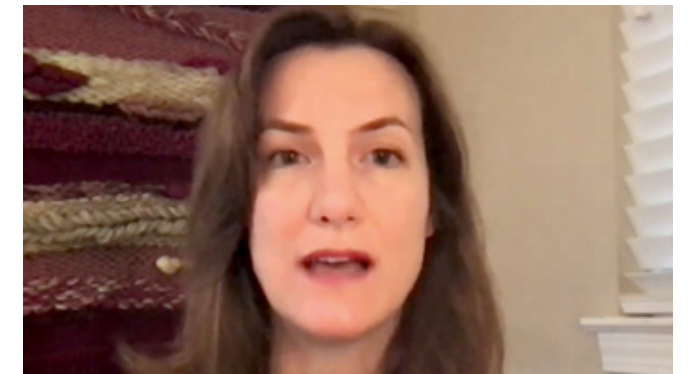
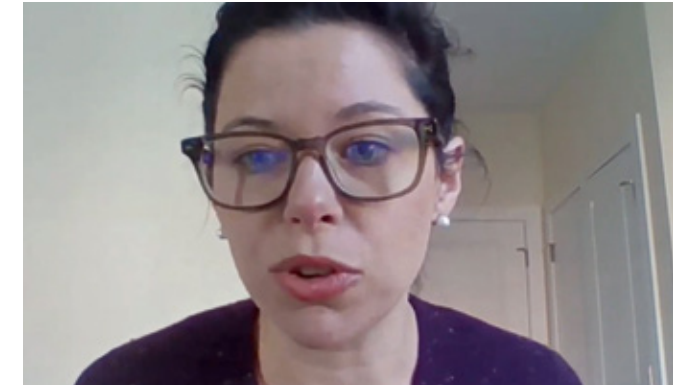
and training on Covid-related topics. In particular, Laura said, GSK saw much greater demand for parenting-related resources, as both parents and children were working from home.

Metrics for measurement

Paul then asked about the metrics the panellists used to measure EAP efficacy and who reviews this information. Sabrina said improvements in clinical outcomes were an important measure for Essex County Council, alongside data provided by the council's EAP provider. This information is presented to each of the council's functional areas to give a broad overview of trends. Rebecca stressed the data Google gathers on its EAP is anonymised and made available only to a limited group of people.

Charles also touched on the importance of confidentiality in the EAP process. He said as BNY Mellon has an external EAP provider with on-site counselling staff, there is a "firewall" between the on-site counsellors and him. "I don't need to know, nor do I want to know, who they're seeing," he said. Employee trust in this system is crucial, he added, as word of mouth can sell your programme or sink it.

Paul asked whether the panellists'



organisations had a target level of EAP usage. Sabrina said the council was concerned about low usage compared with other local authorities, so increasing awareness of its EAP offering among employees was a priority. However, she added, the EAP should be seen as one item on a menu of wellbeing resources, so the main thing was that employees were able to access the right support.

Rebecca said greater use tends to be considered a positive thing, but this needs to be compared with broader data on the general population. "It's not a scary thing when you see more people are using counselling. It doesn't mean there's a problem with our workforce," In the general population, one in four or

five could experience a mental health problem in any given year, she observed.

Laura said GSK looks at year-on-year quarterly EAP usage data trends, in recognition of different demand for services at different times of the year. "What we like to see is a fairly consistent utilisation. That lets us know people who need the services are able to access them and we know not everybody needs the EAP every year, every quarter," Laura said. An unexpected spike or drop in usage would lead GSK to look into what the underlying causes might be, she added. ■

(Clockwise from top left) Sabrina, Laura, Rebecca and Charles discussed how EAPs are evolving

It's not a scary thing when you see more people are using counselling. It doesn't mean there's a problem with the workforce

KEY TAKEAWAYS

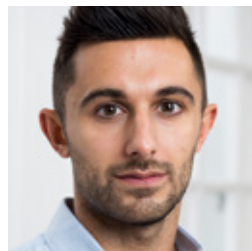
1 The coronavirus pandemic has changed perceptions about how EAPs can be delivered and made virtual counselling viable. Virtual counselling appears to be here to stay.

2 Confidentiality is vital. Employees need to have trust in the system, as word of mouth can sell or sink it. Using an external EAP provider can help provide that firewall between employees accessing the EAP and management.

3 High usage levels may look worrying to management but can often be a positive sign. In the general population as many as one in four people experience a mental health problem each year.

The Survival Story: Kevin Hines on Suicide, Hope and Healing

Kevin Hines is one of the few people to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge and survive. He shared his powerful story about the road to healing



FACILITATOR:
GIAN POWER
Founder & CEO
TLC Lions

PANEL

KEVIN HINES
Mental Health Activist,
film maker, author and
speaker

Gian Power opened by saying everybody has a story, and it's by sharing these stories that we can transform workplace cultures. He introduced his friend Kevin Hines, who had a terribly traumatic infancy. His birth parents struggled with manic depression, drugs and alcohol. They neglected Kevin and his brother, who lived in severe poverty, in crack motels. The boys were put into foster care. They both got bronchitis in a home filled with neglect and Kevin's brother died. Before he had learnt to speak, Kevin had developed a severe detachment disorder, with abandonment issues that follow him to this day.

Kevin was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 17. He started to have paranoid delusions, hallucinations, manic highs and depressive lows. He was falling apart, but he was burying his pain. This led him, at age 19, to go to the Golden Gate Bridge and attempt to take his own life.

As he walked up to that bridge, all he wanted was for one person to say: "Hey kid, are you OK?" If they had, he would have told them everything and begged them to save him. But the only person to react to him was a man who pointed and said to the guy next to him "what the hell's wrong with that kid?", with a smile on his face. "I couldn't reach out, I needed to be reached into," Kevin said. "And that's what real suicide prevention is all about."

He wished he knew then what he did today – that his thoughts don't have to become his actions. On that day, Kevin did jump from the Golden Gate Bridge. What was going through his mind the second his hands left that bridge, Gian asked. "What have I just done,

I don't want to die, God please save me... and I hit the water," replied Kevin. "It's a 220ft fall, 25 storeys. You fall at 95mph, the speed of terminal velocity. You hit in four seconds." The impact shattered three vertebrae and missed severing his spinal cord by 2mm. He went down 70ft in the water. His eyes began to bulge, his ears began to ring because of the depth, but he managed to swim to the surface. "And I just prayed, God please save me, I don't want to die, I made a mistake, on repeat." Something circled beneath him. He thought it was a shark, but it turned out to be a sea-lion. People looking down claimed the sea-lion kept him afloat until the coastguard got to him. "No person that day would help me. But this mammal comes to my aid and literally kept me afloat."

Other suicide survivors Kevin has talked to report that same immediate feeling of not wanting to die. We can stop things getting that far by reaching out, he said.

A worthwhile investment

Gian said many companies will try to implement a mental health strategy on a shoestring, yet they'll invest heavily in other things. Why should companies invest in mental health? If they do, employees will be more productive, effective and aware than ever, said Kevin. Nobody is immune to mental struggle – not the highest CEO, not the most prominent founders in the world. In order to keep people ready to work, you have to take care of their minds. Time and again, he has seen that when companies implement mental health programmes, things change.

Suicide prevention has been stagnant for 60 years, he added. We need to meet cultures and people where they're at. We need to say to people: "What are you going through, what do you need from me and how can I best serve you?" That takes time, effort

What have I just done, I don't want to die, God please save me... and I hit the water



Kevin still lives with all the symptoms he ever had, but now he is honest about his feelings, he is always able to seek help as well as helping others

and research. One of the biggest costs to companies is their employees' mental health failing, so we need to address it full-on.

Learning to live with himself

Kevin silenced his own pain for so long that no-one knew he was going to the Golden Gate Bridge. He still lives with all the symptoms he ever had, including paranoid delusions, panic attacks, depression and chronic thoughts of ending his life, but he has never attempted suicide again. Now he tells the truth about his feelings, he always asks for help. If the first person he asks is unavailable, he asks the next and the next until somebody is willing to empathise. "That's success with suicide prevention training," he concluded. "Getting people who are suicidal to be open and honest so

we can help them be here tomorrow."

An audience question asked how to balance the message that suicide is highly preventable with sensitivity to those who've lost loved ones. Before every presentation he does, Kevin takes a moment of silence for all those lost to suicide. We'll never find out why we lost those people, he said, because we can't ask them why. What we can do is look to the living and find ways to move forward. Sometimes we can't save people's lives. But there's a new wave of suicide preventers trying to shift the narrative, and Kevin is excited to see where the field goes in the next 10 years. ■

I couldn't reach out, I needed to be reached into. And that's what real suicide prevention is all about

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Feeling that you have to die and actually wanting to die are categorically different things. Many suicide survivors report regretting their decision the instant they think it's too late. If we can reach people before it gets that far, we have a chance to save their life.

2 People who are feeling suicidal often feel unable to reach out. But they can be desperate to be reached into. We need to find out what they need from us. Sometimes our attempts to help might be rejected, but we can try our best to help.

3 More and more organisations are waking up to the vital role suicide prevention training can play, and there are many providers out there with a proven record of success. Do your research and find the provider that's right for your organisation.

Supporting Staff in the Age of Racial Trauma

This section looked at how employers can tangibly support their workforce with living through the trauma that sparked the racial justice movement



FACILITATOR:
DR STEPHANIE PALACIOS
Organisational Mental
Wellness Consultant
& Trainer
Stephanie Palacios
Consulting

PANEL

EILEEN PARK ROBERTSON
Founder and
Filmmaker
Anecdota Media

Dr Stephanie Palacios opened up the conversation with Eileen Park Robertson. Eileen said this conversation was so critical right now, at a time of multiple racial movements happening simultaneously and a lot of confusion and fear about discussing this subject.

Just because those feelings come up, that doesn't mean that it's something we should avoid, said Stephanie – we could lean into it and learn from it. The list of racially motivated events in the US over the past few years is so long. There have been murders, and protests against what has happened. Names such as George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Shaun Monterrosa, Raychard Brooks and the eight people in Atlanta this year including six Asian-identified women have resonated around the world. How do these shocking events permeate the workplace and what can we do about it? How does racism show up at work and how does that affect people's mental health?

Stephanie gave an example from her personal experience – in 2016 she was abducted for a week. When she escaped,

she had severe injuries, but when she approached police to ask for help, they refused to help her. Detectives on her case were told the police interpreted her as a young Hispanic runaway, likely illegal, who had been beaten by a gang. They had so many other cases to work on that they couldn't make her a priority.

Having to heal from that knowledge as well as the physical injuries took years. She decided to speak on the subject and advocate for other trauma survivors. Stephanie said she had to be really careful about who she worked with after that experience, that her supervisor would have an understanding of trauma sensitivity and how racism can show up.

Everyday racism

Stephanie asked Eileen about her experience with racism while working as a journalist. In news, said Eileen, hidden racism affects the stories that you can work on. People asked "can you read English well?" or "you're not actually American are you?" People might think that doesn't rise to the level of extreme racism, but it doesn't have to be extreme. It could be thousands of micro-aggressions launched at you every day, perpetuating this idea of you as a foreigner.

People can look at Asian-Americans and say you're smart, wealthy, and privileged, you're basically the model minority. What we have unpacked in the last year-and-a-half, with the rise of anti-Asian hate, is that the model minority is a myth, which is used to say oppression of Asian-Americans doesn't exist. All of this is under a terrible construct that pits communities of colour against each other.

How can people help in the workplace, Stephanie asked. Eileen replied that she has had conversations with good friends



Eileen Park Robertson shared her experiences as an Asian-American working in newsrooms. The world is waking up to the oppression of minorities, she argued

who are not people of colour, who told Eileen what she was saying made them feel uncomfortable and defensive. The best thing you can do, said Eileen, is listen and acknowledge, no matter your personal take on what they share with you. That's when honest, vulnerable conversations can be had and division can be diminished.

How do we initiate these kinds of conversations, especially when most of the leadership is white and male, Stephanie asked. We should listen to the experiences of people of colour, said Eileen, but at a certain point it becomes a burden to constantly share these stories.

Bring in the professionals

What leadership can do is to hire people who are active racial advocates or are trained to facilitate difficult conversations. Take it seriously by investing in diversity and inclusion training courses and have it not just as a one-off but repeatedly. A question from the audience asked

how someone could check to make sure staff are OK without it seeming like a superficial effort. Eileen suggested hiring a professional. You can't just have these conversations ad hoc, because it's such a messy issue to address and various employees may or may not be ready to initiate those conversations. And do it regularly, not just after a big Black Lives Matter demonstration.

She added that this work is necessary not just for white people, but for people from ethnic minorities too. She herself is guilty of stereotyping, she admits, having come from a Korean community riven with ethnic tensions. We will all have made mistakes at some point, agreed Stephanie, and the idea behind this type of work is not perfection, it's improvement, compassion and self-awareness. ■

Listen and acknowledge, no matter your personal take on it. That's when division can be diminished

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 If you are a person of colour, be encouraged by what's happening. There's significant transformation occurring now that wasn't happening just two years ago.

2 If you're not a person of colour, insert no defensiveness into any conversation you have, just listen and acknowledge. And read – there are so many incredible resources out there now that you can use to educate yourself and understand your colleagues' experience.

3 Be careful of tokenism, which is the danger when you specifically call on your colleagues of colour to share their opinions or personal stories. It needs to be a voluntary decision from the person to share their story, and effort is needed to sustain these conversations.

Recognising and Tackling Eating Disorders

The pandemic has only made the issue of eating disorders worse. This session looked at how this impacts on work and what employers can do to help



FACILITATOR:
GABBY WICKES
Wellbeing Lead
Experian

PANEL

GERALYN GIORGIO
Director, Change
Management, Global
Services
Johnson & Johnson

EMILY HER
Management
Consultant

Gabby Wickes kicked off by saying somewhere between 1.24 million and 1.38 million people in the UK are experiencing an eating disorder as we speak, with many more impacted through trying to support someone they care about. Eating disorders can affect people of all ages and backgrounds. They are extremely complex, but employers can do things to help.

Gabby's own eating disorder nearly cost her her life. She had anorexia, bulimia and everything in between. By their nature, eating disorders are secret and stigmatised. It can be really hard to ask for treatment, especially if a person doesn't meet expectations of what a person with an eating disorder "should" look like. Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness, which contrasts with the many misconceptions around it.

Gabby then introduced Emily Her, who shared how her mental health issues had begun with depression and anxiety as a teenager, eventually evolving into various eating disorders in high school. She had been hospitalised and come close to losing her life.

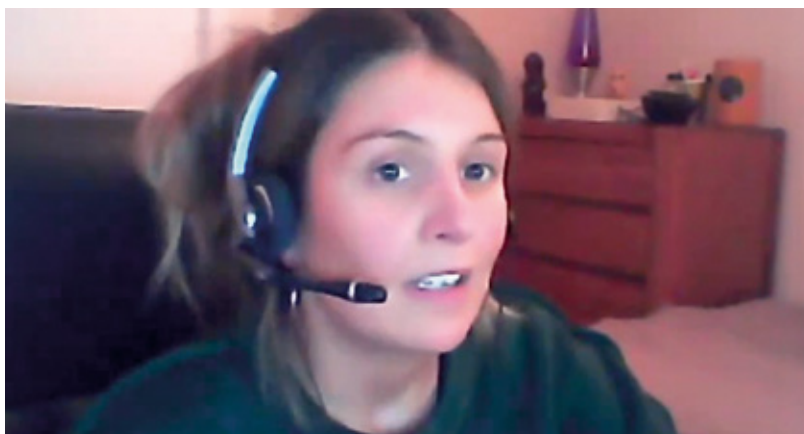
Geralyn Giorgio joined the conversation. "I've carried this deep, dark demon inside me all of my life," she said, and it emerges especially in times of stress and trauma.

I've carried this
deep, dark demon
inside me all
my life

A divorce in 2015, along with issues at work, brought out her eating disorder at its worst. She found it difficult to function at work, at home and as a single parent to her two children. She didn't realise how sick she was until she began to feel suicidal. She called the EAP and began her final journey to get healthy.

Gabby then asked Emily how the pandemic had exacerbated eating disorders. Eating disorders don't exist in a vacuum, said Emily. Emily struggled when the pandemic kept her away from family and friends, because they were the ones making sure she was eating. Routine is so important to managing eating disorders, Gabby added, and the pandemic threw routine right out of whack.

How could businesses help, asked Gabby. Eating disorders tend to be hard to identify unless you're very close to the person, replied Emily. And many people don't recognise that they have an eating disorder or know how to access help. She suggested creating safe spaces. These might be a community or an individual who is willing to be an ally. Gabby added that these safe spaces should be protected and monitored. Sometimes when you get a group of people together who have experienced an eating disorder and leave them unmonitored, with no boundaries



Gabby explained how
eating disorders are
secretive by nature



around the conversations, it can be unhelpful, she said.

Finding a way out

Gabby then asked Geralyn how her eating disorders impacted her life. Geralyn said she became very depressed, and even watering the flowers outside became an incredible chore. She was isolating herself from friends and family. She felt ashamed, hated herself and felt the eating disorder was controlling her. When she finally recognised she needed help and reached out to the EAP, she partnered with the mental health ambassador at Johnson & Johnson. In 2017, they launched the Mental Health Diplomats, part of the Alliance for Diverse Abilities employee resource group. Today the network is around 2,500 people strong across 40 countries. "I found my purpose, after all these years of searching," said Geralyn. She felt like she had no way out, she said, but people do have a choice and they can get the treatment that they need.

Gabby then asked Emily what warning signs employers could recognise. Emily

said for her, symptoms included making excuses not to eat with people and an obsession with calorie counting. Geralyn added that changing physical appearance could be another sign to look out for. She also recalled how she used to eat and hide wrappers in her office drawers. As for how to approach the conversation respectfully and responsibly, Emily said just some people might find it intrusive to be asked about their issues, but saying to somebody you're open to listen to them is the most helpful thing you can do. Helping them access resources is also great.

Eating disorders aren't about food, they're about emotion, said Gabby. Whatever you're doing with your food is a way of controlling your current emotions. So when approaching a conversation like this, keep the discussion away from weight and food, and focus on the emotion. You could say: "I notice you've seemed a bit down of late. How are you feeling, how can I help you?" ■

Emily (left) and Geralyn agreed eating disorders are a manifestation of wider issues



Eating disorders
aren't about food,
they're a way of
controlling your
current emotions

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Eating disorders are a secretive and often invisible illness. The biggest problem is the social stigma around them. People don't feel it's safe to talk about eating disorders, and that they have to hide them. The best way to counter this is to have open conversations and show you are a supporter.

2 Eating disorders aren't really about weight or food, they're about managing emotion. So approach conversations by talking about how the person is feeling, rather than what they look like or their eating habits.

3 Perhaps the three most important behaviours when dealing with an employee you suspect may be struggling are empathy, compassion and consistency. If you say you're going to have a meeting with someone, do your best to stick to that. Routine is so important.

Balancing the Wellbeing of Staff With Outstanding Performance

What happens to mental health initiatives at work when the workload reaches crunch point and there are deadlines to be met, this session asked



FACILITATOR:
DEIDRA JENKINS
Chief Diversity Officer - Americas
Northern Trust

PANEL

CLAIRE BAKER
Burnout Prevention & Recovery Coach
HR FOR HR

JESSICA DIVENTO
Chief Mental Health Advisor
YouTube

IMAN GIBSON
Director, Global Wellbeing
Visa

JASON LARUE
Principal-in-Charge,
Total Rewards
KPMG

Opening the panel talk, Deidra Jenkins, chief diversity and inclusion officer for the Americas region at Northern Trust, said a Deloitte study on workplace wellbeing found 78% of companies globally believe ensuring the wellbeing of employees is one of the drivers of organisational performance. What can business leaders and managers do to deliver on this?

In a world in which 42% of Millennials say they are stressed all or most of the time, Deidra asked burnout prevention expert Claire Baker, is balance achievable between wellbeing and outstanding performance? Claire said to her "balance" is about integrating all elements of a person's wellbeing, but because what this is will be unique to every person, businesses sometimes struggle to help employees find their balance because their policies are too broad.

Jessica DiVento expanded on this, saying work/life balance also encompasses being able to be fully present at work and fully present in the other areas of our lives when we disconnect from work. Strictly delineating time in and outside work might help some people but is unrealistic for others, she added.

Iman Gibson, director of wellbeing at Visa, agreed with this, adding companies need a paradigm shift to recognise the value of employees having time to rest and recharge. They can achieve this by setting boundaries so, for example, employees are not contacted outside their working hours. "You're not saying 'we're going to work less', it's about 'can we work more efficiently and smarter, so we're more productive and there's time for folks to get all their work done and rest and restore' - and that that's valued."

Iman also emphasised the importance of

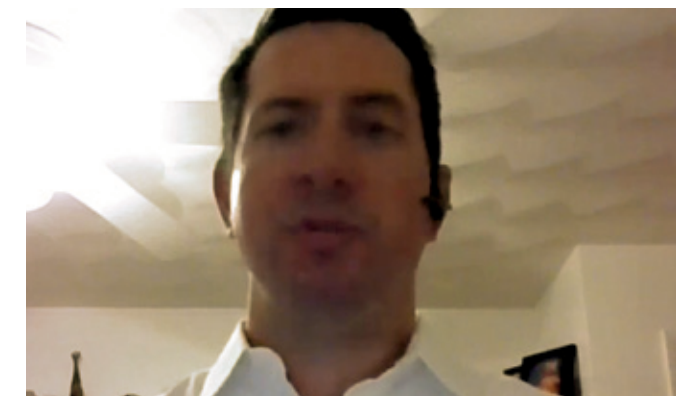
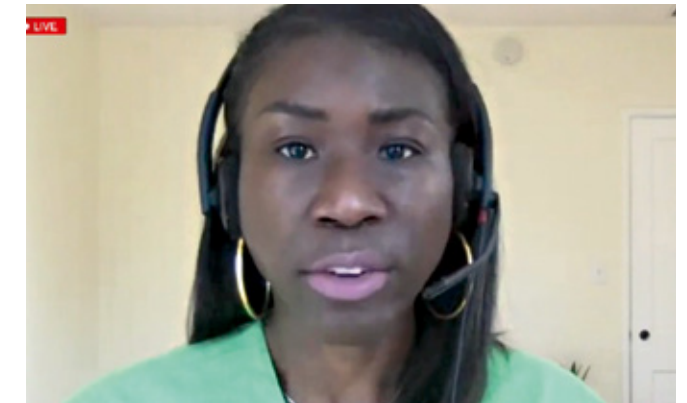
companies taking a tailored approach to wellbeing policies, recognising blanket guidelines are not helpful for everyone. She said these bespoke strategies are best deployed by leaders working with teams.

Leaders as role models

Deidra then brought in Jason LaRue, who agreed on the importance of getting leadership buy-in and then leaders being the ones who role model behaviour. Additionally, Jason said, because businesses are working through a period of change in beginning to consider employee wellbeing more, it is important that individuals at any level of the organisation are able to give feedback when a policy is not working and offer alternative suggestions.

Following on from this, Jessica said in her role she is embedded with YouTube's executive team and also works with front-line HR teams, giving her both an overview of the business and knowledge of what work grassroots employees are doing. This means she can help the executive teams tailor the company's wellbeing strategy to the needs of the individuals.

Moving to the problems caused by a lack of balance between performance and wellbeing, Jason said the fundamental



idea is one of psychological safety. Feeling safe does not mean staying within your comfort zone, he continued, but gives employees a foundation from which they can take on new challenges. Ultimately, he said, "you can't have sustained, long-term performance without a healthy and well employee". There are opportunities here for organisations to support the mental wellbeing of their employees, he added.

Iman expanded on this, saying embedding wellbeing in an organisation needs a cross-functional approach, rather than keeping it as a separate function.

Claire highlighted the cost to businesses of failing to address wellbeing issues,

warning that the impact of burnout on an individual has a ripple effect that can spread out to damage their team and the company as a whole.

Citing a survey finding 96% of companies see employee wellbeing as the company's responsibility, Deidra asked Jason whether he agreed with this or whether it was shared between employer and individual. Agreeing that companies have a role to play, he said it was incumbent on both parties to take responsibility for wellbeing. Iman agreed, adding: "When you spend more time working than you do anything else in your life, there's a certain responsibility organisations have to lead on psychological safety." ■

(Clockwise from top left) Claire, Iman, Jason and Jessica agreed sustained performance is impossible without a healthy workforce

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 There is no one-size-fits-all approach to wellbeing. Rather than trying to create a single policy to ensure employee wellbeing, organisations need to tailor their policies to suit the needs of different workloads, projects and requirements.

2 Do not be afraid of making mistakes or be unwilling to change. As we go through this era of transformation we need to accept that some of the things we initially think are good ideas turn out not to be when we come to put them into practice.

3 Instead of thinking of wellbeing and performance as competing objectives, where focusing on one necessarily detracts from the other, businesses should realise they are complementary: ensuring employee wellbeing will help them deliver the best performance.

Evidence for the Effectiveness of a Mental Health Strategy in the Workplace

GSK's global wellbeing chief explained how the business has successfully implemented a stress management programme to support its employees



FACILITATOR:
ZOE SINCLAIR
Co-Founder
This Can Happen

PANEL

GLAUCO CALLIA
Head of Employee
Health and Wellbeing,
Latin America
GSK

Zoe Sinclair, co-founder of This Can Happen, introduced Glauco Callia. Glauco heads up wellbeing at GSK, the founding partner of This Can Happen. Zoe asked him to outline the firm's approach to employee health and wellbeing and how it measures whether its initiatives are working.

Tying the function into GSK's three core values of innovation, performance and trust, Glauco said health and wellbeing falls under the "trust" pillar. Reflecting its status as a multinational organisation, GSK ensures it makes mental health and wellbeing support available in multiple languages, with the company providing separate resources targeting individual, teams and management level.

To inform the company's health and wellbeing programme, Glauco said GSK used data collated from a variety of internal sources: reports from the company's own Employee Assistance Programme, its benefits function, manager feedback and both local and company-wide surveys. These allow GSK to make regular organisational stress assessments, Glauco added.

Benefits of the organisational stress assessment include actionable insights to create a better work environment, which leads to a healthy workplace culture, happier employees and increased productivity, Glauco said.

Using the Heath and Safety Executive's public-domain Management Standards Indicator tool, the organisational stress assessment produces data analysis reports, which are fed back to every team in GSK showing stress scores in six risk areas – demands, control, support, relationships, role, change – on a scale of zero (worst) to five (best). The teams then use the reports to develop action plans

When the pandemic arrived, it's not 'home office', it's work under isolation, which is really different

to improve working practices. In the time GSK has been running its organisational stress programme, Glauco said it has delivered a demonstrable positive impact on employee health and wellbeing. From an average score of 3.71 in 2019, Glauco said GSK's 2020 score had improved to 3.91, with a 50% reduction in employees in the "danger zone" of below 3.5, where they are at risk of burnout. For 2021 GSK's score again improved to 4.10, which Glauco said meant another 30% reduction in employees in the danger zone.

Glauco said: "This shows the importance of having the right information to the right ears in terms of stakeholder engagement and also shows that having a very scientific approach over this subject, you can change the lives of your employees for better."

Buy-in is crucial

Turning to questions from the audience, Zoe asked Glauco what one thing a smaller, less well-resourced company than GSK should do to support its employees' mental health. Glauco emphasised the importance of getting buy-in – convincing staff you are doing the right thing. Being able to demonstrate that the approach you are using produces results is also important, he added.



Glauco said it was important to be able to demonstrate that the approach you are using produces results

Taking another audience question, Zoe asked Glauco about the differences in managing employees who are working from home compared with those in an office or factory. Highlighting the impact of lockdowns on teams, Glauco said: "When the pandemic arrived and we got thousands of employees going to home office – it's not 'home office', it's work under isolation, which is really different."

This was reflected in the organisational stress survey data, he continued. For some office-based teams that pre-lockdown had scored well on the communication risk score, the move to working from home saw their communication risk score worsen significantly, he said, as what had been a close team where members ate lunch together every day was forced apart.

For other teams, the pandemic resulted in increased workload, which was reflected

in worsening scores in their demand risk score. Both examples resulted in the teams reporting worse overall risk scores, Glauco said, but for very different reasons. "From seven pillars you may realise you have totally different results and totally different root causes," he said.

Understanding this is crucial to adapting mental health and wellbeing strategies to suit the different needs of different individuals and teams, Glauco continued. "The main thing is how you build up the plan based on the information you have, so we have a tailored approach to each one of the realities we have across the globe." Zoe agreed, adding: "It's all about tailoring – one size doesn't fit all and not every employee is going to be feeling the same." ■

From seven pillars you may realise you have totally different results and different root causes

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Choosing the right methodology to measure wellbeing matters. The HSE tool makes the root causes of the stress very clear, enabling management to design strategies that address those causes head-on.
- 2 An organisation's employees need to believe in the process and its ability to deliver results. This is why being able to demonstrate concrete numbers on stress reduction, as GSK was able to with its organisational stress assessment, has real value.
- 3 Granular data delivers better insights into the factors affecting teams' wellbeing. Having scores from six work stress risk areas allows GSK to identify causes of stress and tailor its wellbeing programmes to address them at team level.

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