

# A Guide for HR Leaders: Strategies for HR Burnout and Workplace Wellbeing



**intellect**

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1.

# A look at workplace mental health in APAC



Workplace mental health is a growing concern for many organisations in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, with McKinsey's research in 2022 signalling a rise in employee burnout. The COVID-19 pandemic and its continued impact on the economy, job security, and social isolation have put an enormous strain on the mental wellbeing of employees in the region.

A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2022 found that the prevalence of major depressive disorder and anxiety **increased by 28% and 27% within a year respectively.**

According to the recent Cigna Global Wellbeing Survey Report:

**80%** of workers in APAC experience stress-related symptoms

**23%** reporting severe or extremely severe stress.



These statistics have alarmed employers and policymakers about mental health crises at work.

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Singapore.

**A 2022 survey by Milieu and Intellect found that 89% of employees felt pressured to perform and excel in their jobs, leading to high levels of stress and burnout.**

This sheds light on the "hustle culture" in Singapore, where employees feel the need to work long hours and sacrifice their wellbeing to succeed in their careers.



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# High prevalence of burnout among HR professionals



According to a study conducted by employee experience app Workvivo in 2022, **98% of HR professionals reported feeling overwhelmed and stressed** due to feeling undervalued at work and under-resourced to do their jobs, along with mounting pressure from the pandemic.

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9 in 10 HR professionals are burnt out, with the majority feeling undervalued and under-resourced



- Only 29% consider their work valued in the organisation.
- 73% say they have neither the tools nor resources needed to do their jobs.
- 78% say they are open to quitting in the following year.

We need to support HR not only for their own wellbeing, but that of employees across the board. Ultimately, they play a crucial role in shaping workplace culture.



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# How are HR professionals in Singapore doing?

The role of HR professionals is increasingly complex, especially in the area of employee mental health. While this added responsibility is here to stay, it takes a toll on their wellbeing. What can employers do?

To find out, Intellect partnered with [Milieu Insight](#) to survey over 150 HR professionals across various industries in Singapore. The survey identified common challenges and raised awareness about the importance of workplace wellbeing.

Based on these findings, three HR leaders would share insights from the field and how their organisations prioritise wellbeing. These were launched as part of the [#CanYouHearMe](#) campaign in February 2023, and was featured in key HR publications in Asia.

## #CanYouHearMe

Spotlighting the caregivers  
of our workforce





## Meet the HR leaders

How do industry leaders prioritise the mental wellbeing of their teams?



**Cedric Chew**  
Deputy Executive Director



[Watch the interview](#)



**Ingo Laubender**  
Vice President, People and  
Enterprise Technology



[Watch the interview](#)



**Shailaja Sharma**  
Group Head, Learning,  
Development and DEIB



[Watch the interview](#)

The survey and campaign revealed that while HR professionals are highly burnt out, they are also less aware of what it means to their wellbeing. Wellbeing support and resources are lacking, and there is a significant gap between the provision of workplace mental health care and its associated stigma.

What tools do HR professionals and leaders need to address their own burnout and cultivate a healthy workplace?

## 2.

# Three key findings about Singapore's HR landscape

## **Urgently looking for:**

Supportive cultures,  
accessible resources, and  
open dialogue



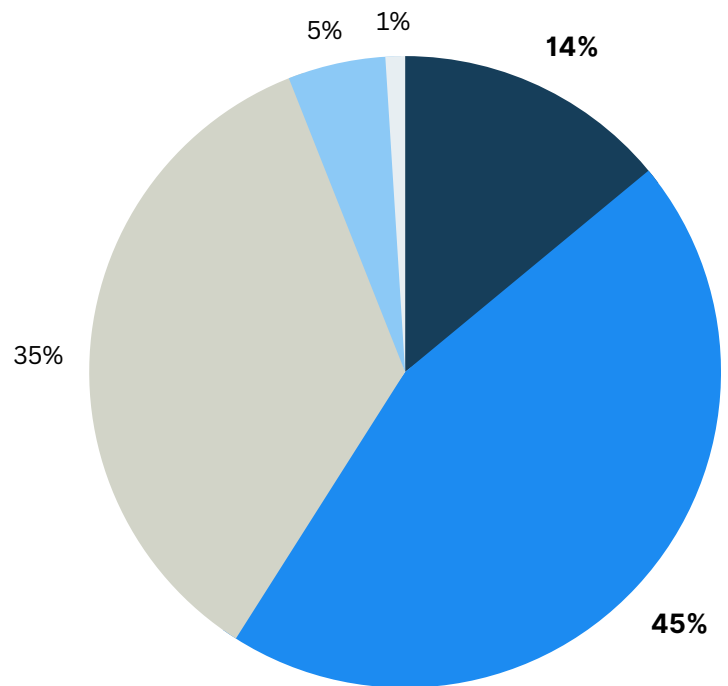
# #1 HR professionals are highly burnt out

3 in 4 of the surveyed HR professionals reported experiencing burnout due to their heavy workload.

## 59% describe their workload as 'heavy' or 'very heavy'

How would you describe your usual workload?

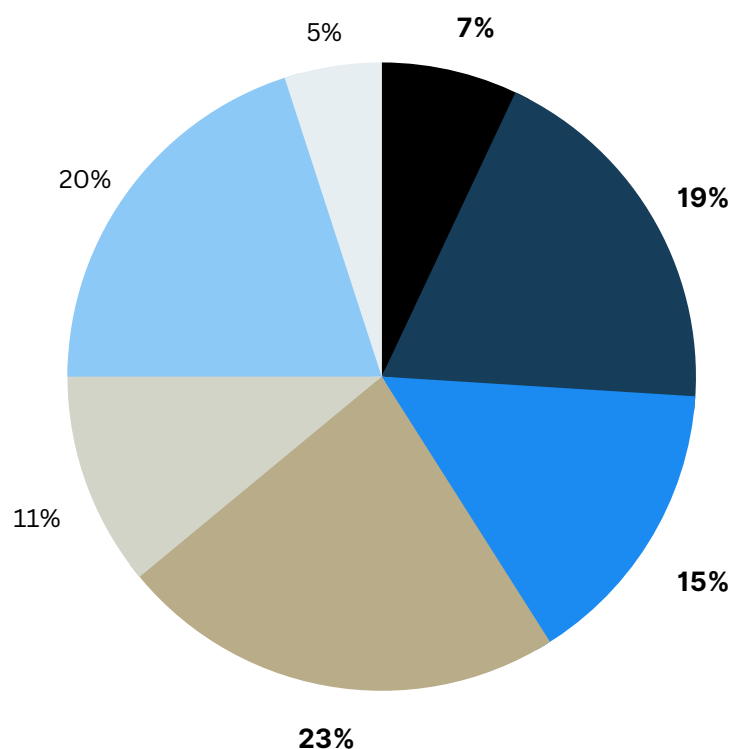
- Very heavy (45%)
- Somewhat heavy (14%)
- Just right (35%)
- Somewhat light (5%)
- Very light (1%)



## 64% experience burnout from work at least a few times a month

How often do you feel burned out from work?

- Everyday (7%)
- A few times a week (19%)
- Once a week (15%)
- A few times a month (23%)
- Once a month or less (11%)
- A few times a year or less (20%)
- Never (5%)

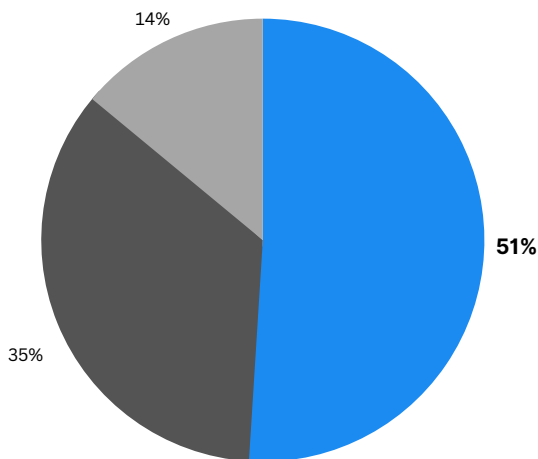


# #2 Resources aren't always available and seem to be lacking when they are

About half of the respondents have access to mental health resources but find them lacking.

**51%** say their companies provide mental health resources.

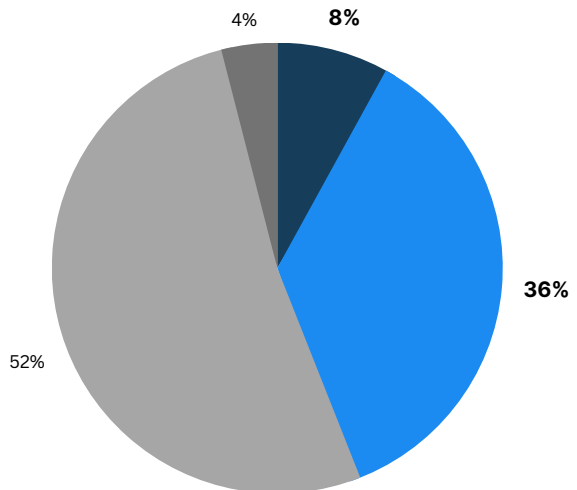
Does your current company provide mental health resources? For example, subsidised or free counselling, education on mental health etc.



- Yes (51%)
- No (35%)
- I'm not sure (14%)

Of these respondents, **less than half** are satisfied with the resources provided.

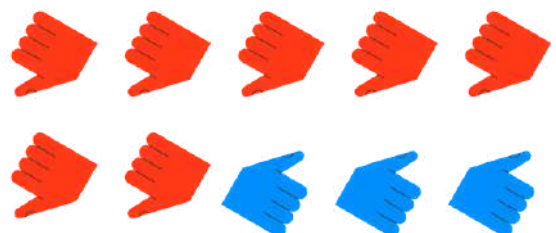
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current mental health resources provided by your company?



- Very satisfied (8%)
- Somewhat satisfied (36%)
- Neutral (52%)
- Somewhat dissatisfied (4%)

**Importance accorded to employee mental health is perceived to be low.**

7 in 10 employees do not think their companies give very high importance to employee mental health.



# #3 Utilisation of benefits is stumped by stigma in the workplace

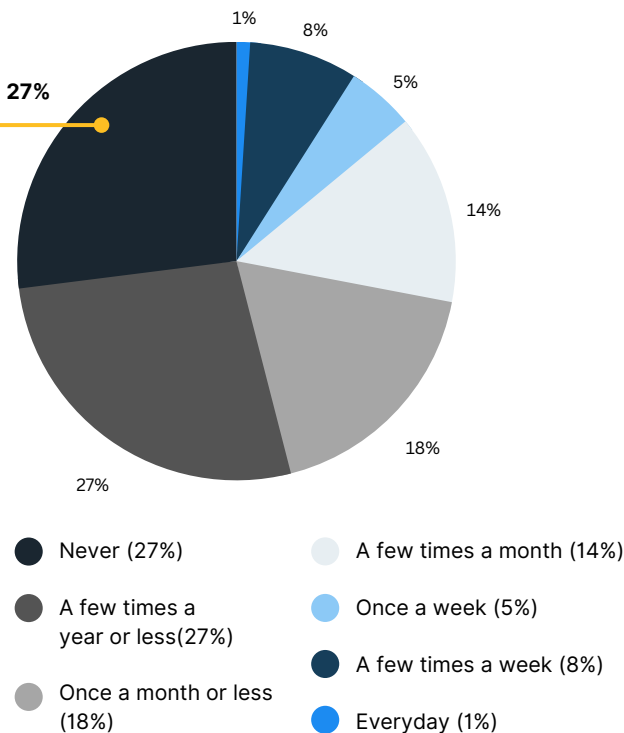
Over a quarter of HR professionals never discuss mental health and wellbeing with their colleagues.



**1 in 4 feel somewhat uncomfortable with utilising workplace benefits.**

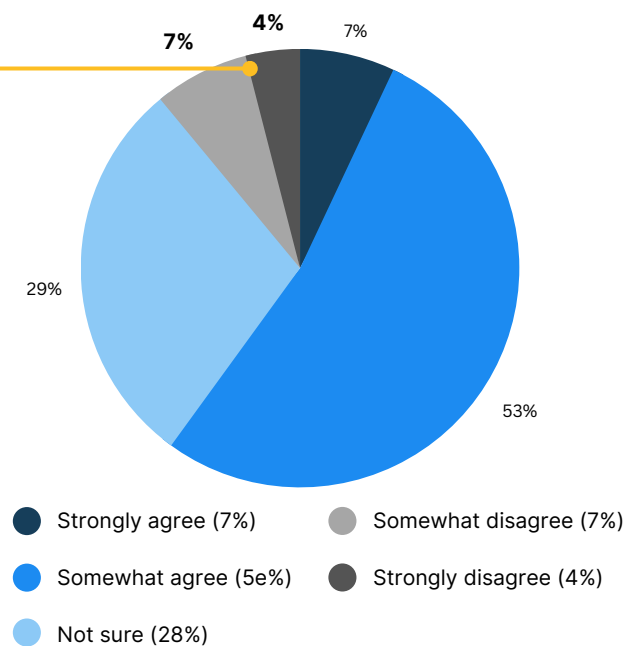
**27% never discuss** the topic of wellbeing with their colleagues.

How often, if at all, do you discuss the topic of mental health or wellbeing with your colleagues?



**11% somewhat or strongly disagree** that they have someone they can turn to for support at work.

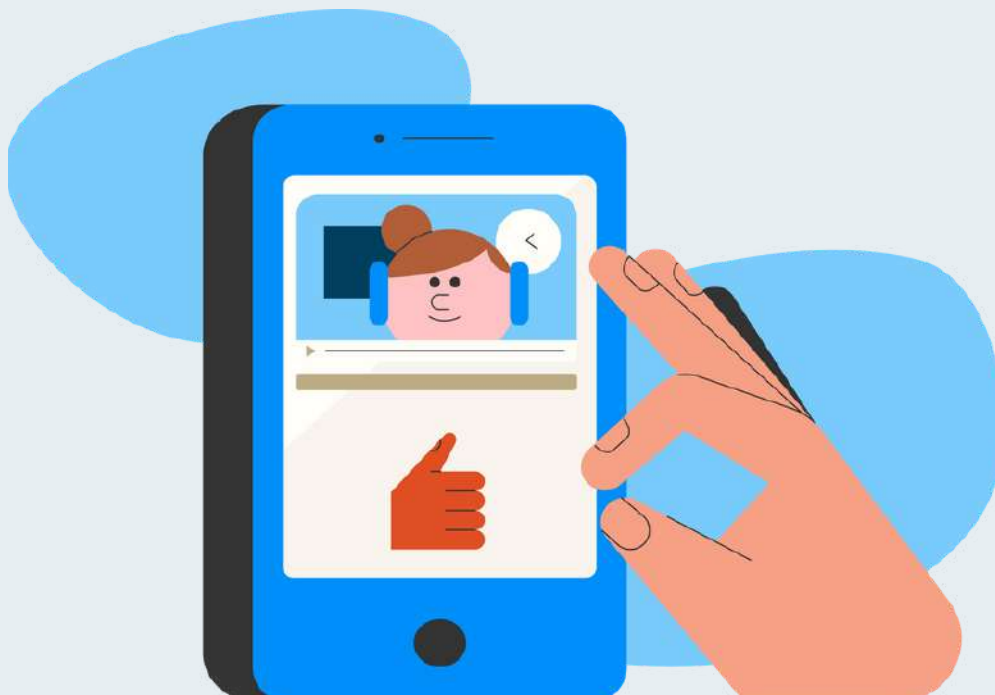
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "At work, I have someone I can turn to when I need help or support"



Some HR professionals do not feel comfortable using existing workplace benefits.

# In short, HR professionals in Singapore need:

1. Supportive cultures that recognise their contribution
2. Resources they and other employees can tap into
3. Discourse on mental health rooted in trust



# 3.

## Solving HR burnout and workplace mental health challenges

### **Championing wellbeing as a start-up, SME, and MNC.**

We interviewed HR leaders from foodpanda, Singapore Human Resources Institute (SHRI), and IHH Healthcare to understand the wellbeing landscapes across work environments and provide practical solutions.



# #1 Tackle HR-specific burnout with relevant care

Many HR professionals feel highly burnt out due to their workloads. What can HR leaders do? Ingo from foodpanda and Shailaja from IHH Healthcare weigh in.

## Challenges



**Ingo Laubender**  
Vice President, People and  
Enterprise Technology  
foodpanda

*"People functions have been facing many demands during COVID-19. Coming out of the pandemic opens a lot of challenges that naturally fall under the perceived responsibility of people functions."*



**Shailaja Sharma**  
Group Head, Learning,  
Development and DEIB  
IHH Healthcare

*"Anecdotal evidence shows that a lot of HR people have really struggled because they have carried a disproportionate burden and load of supporting employees on the ground. Like revamping processes and holding space for employees transitioning from the crisis."*

A survey by Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) found that 80% of respondents reported work-related stress and that 30% cited job insecurity as a significant source of stress. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) also revealed workplace stress as the greatest cause of depression among Singaporeans.

HR is the shoulders on which the rest of the organisation sits, but supporting employees in this climate is no easy feat. **3 in 4 HR professionals in Singapore experience burnout at least once a month.**

Burnout sows the seeds of disengagement, affecting productivity and morale. In fact, according to Intellect Workplace Health Survey 2021, **39% of employees who experience burnout disengage to cope.** This impacts performance, absenteeism, and turnover adversely.



To address burnout due to heavy workloads, Ingo of foodpanda recommends:



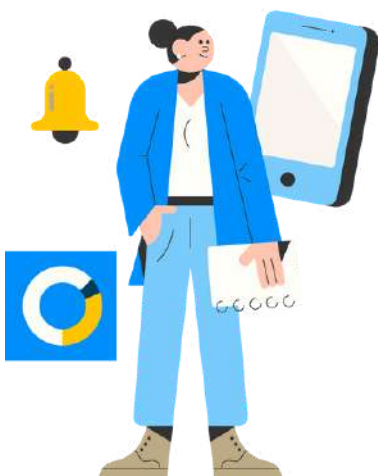
**Educating HR employees on burnout, building organisational transparency, and aligning employees' goals** so they can appreciate the impact they are making.



**Identifying early signs of burnout and stress by checking in frequently with them.** The Mental Health First Aid certification is one way of encouraging detection among team members.



**Empowering employees to become a key part of wellbeing solutions** foodpanda's Zen Pandas, for instance, comprises employees who are wellbeing advocates. They work together to tackle challenges related to workplace wellbeing.



Similarly, Shailaja of IHH Healthcare recommends that HR leaders practise active listening, engage with employees, and understand specific stressors.

These ensure that support is tailored to individual employees as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to workplace wellbeing.

Mental health is not a binary concept; it's a continuum. An organisation's suite of mental health resources should meet employees wherever they are on their journeys.

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# What HR leaders can do



Recognising the triggers and impact of burnout is crucial. Only then can HR leaders promote stress and anxiety management, prioritise workplace wellbeing, and encourage open dialogue about employee mental health.

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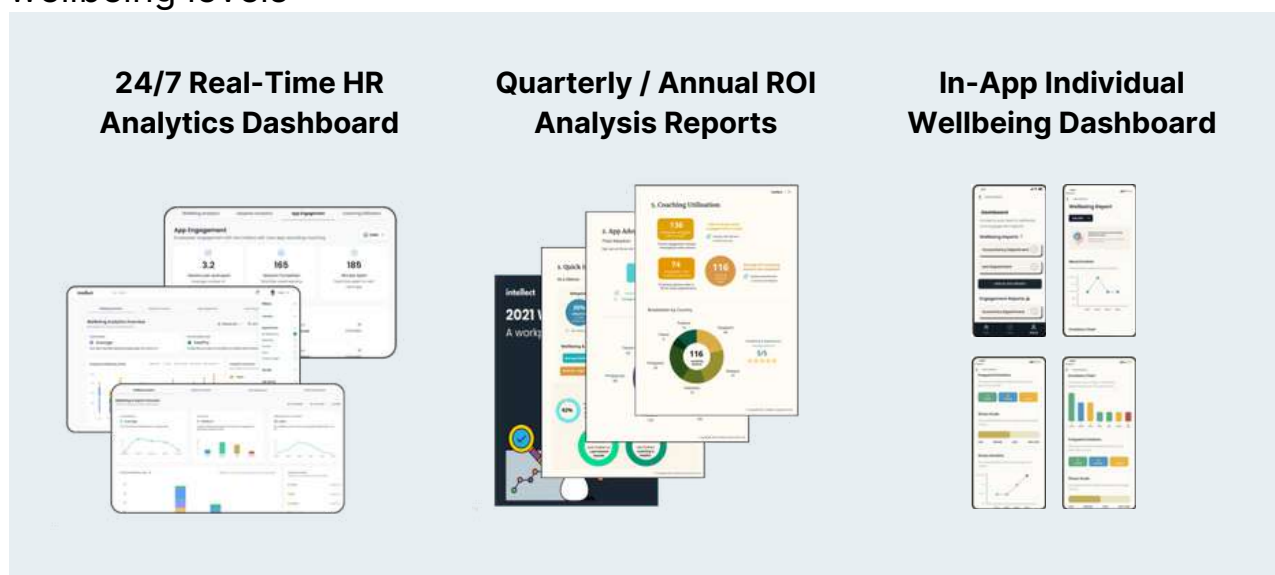
# How Intellect's progress-tracking tool can help

Intellect equips HR leaders with Intellect Dimensions — a tool that measures four fundamentals of workplace wellbeing: **Work engagement, employee wellbeing, organisational support, and employee wellness index.** Based on the results, leaders can craft strategies for a resilient and thriving workplace with greater conviction.

Additionally, HR employees can view their personal insights on the app. This allows them to assess their state of wellbeing, track mood and stress levels, and receive personalised content recommendations to help build self-awareness.

## Aggregated Wellbeing Analytics for HR

Real-time aggregated insights to provide a pulse on employee wellbeing levels



Intellect Dimensions provides an overview of workforces and informs the development of wellbeing programmes. Unlike traditional solutions that only share adoption levels, it enables HR leaders to bring a scientifically-backed Return on Investment (ROI) measurement to the boardroom.



[Reach out to us to learn more about Intellect Dimensions](#)

## #2 Provide multiple avenues for support

Despite that 51% of respondents have access to mental health resources, only 44% are satisfied with the provisions. The minority of respondents think mental health is a priority in their organisations. Why is this the case? We ask Cedric from SHRI.



**Cedric Chew**  
Deputy Executive Director  
Singapore Human Resources  
Institute (SHRI)

*"More often than not, people issues in SMEs or smaller organisations are deprioritised. With limited resources, SME owners need to focus on concrete ways to take care of their employees, but also make sure that it's results-oriented and not purely transactional."*

### Challenges

Inadequate support for workplace wellbeing is a growing concern across APAC.

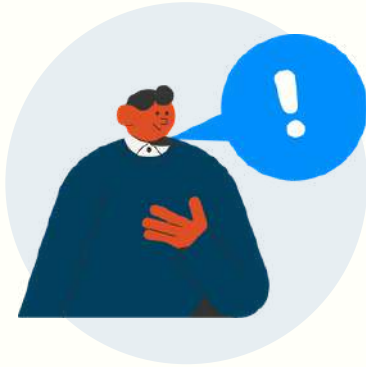
According to the  Mercer report in 2020 , only 37% of employers in the region offer mental health support programmes. This could have resulted from prioritising short-term productivity over sustainability, the underutilisation of benefits, and distrust between employees and employers.

When benefits are extended as a checkbox exercise without a sound understanding of what employees truly need, employees do not engage with them and resources go to waste. To mitigate this, leaders have to communicate wellbeing initiatives with tact.

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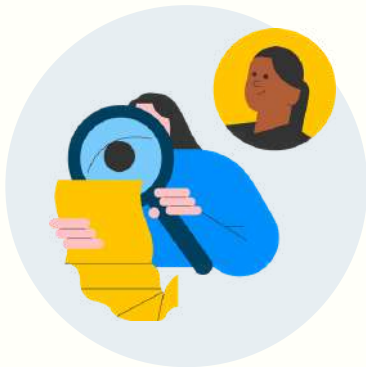
# What HR leaders can do

To ensure that employees receive the support they need, Shailaja and Cedric recommended that HR leaders:



## **Prioritise people**

Leaders can take a people-centric approach to HR by focusing on employee needs beyond standard operating procedures. This means bringing a human touch to "human resources" and acknowledging the correlation between workplace wellbeing and productivity.



## **Take a realistic approach**

For smaller organisations with limited resources, leaders can tap into educational resources or partner with consultancies that provide cost-effective mental health support that is tailored to employees' unique needs.



## **Encourage employees to reach out**

Leaders can normalise the act of seeking help by providing a variety of resources to choose from. These could include in-house support from medical health professionals, external providers, and self-paced educational resources.

*"Putting the human touch in 'human resources' is crucial to drive organisational change. As HR professionals, we need to focus on people, not just processes and progress, because any project revolves around people. Therefore, it's important to prioritise mental health and work with consultancies like SHRI or Intellect to provide realistic and effective mental health provisions to our employees."*



**Ingo Laubender**

Vice President, People and Enterprise Technology  
foodpanda

*"As solution providers, we need to acknowledge that we may not always be psychologically equipped to address all employee concerns. That's why a cafeteria approach, where we provide access to a range of solutions to guide employees to the resources they need, is vital to the success."*



**Shailaja Sharma**

Group Head, Learning, Development and DEIB  
IHH Healthcare

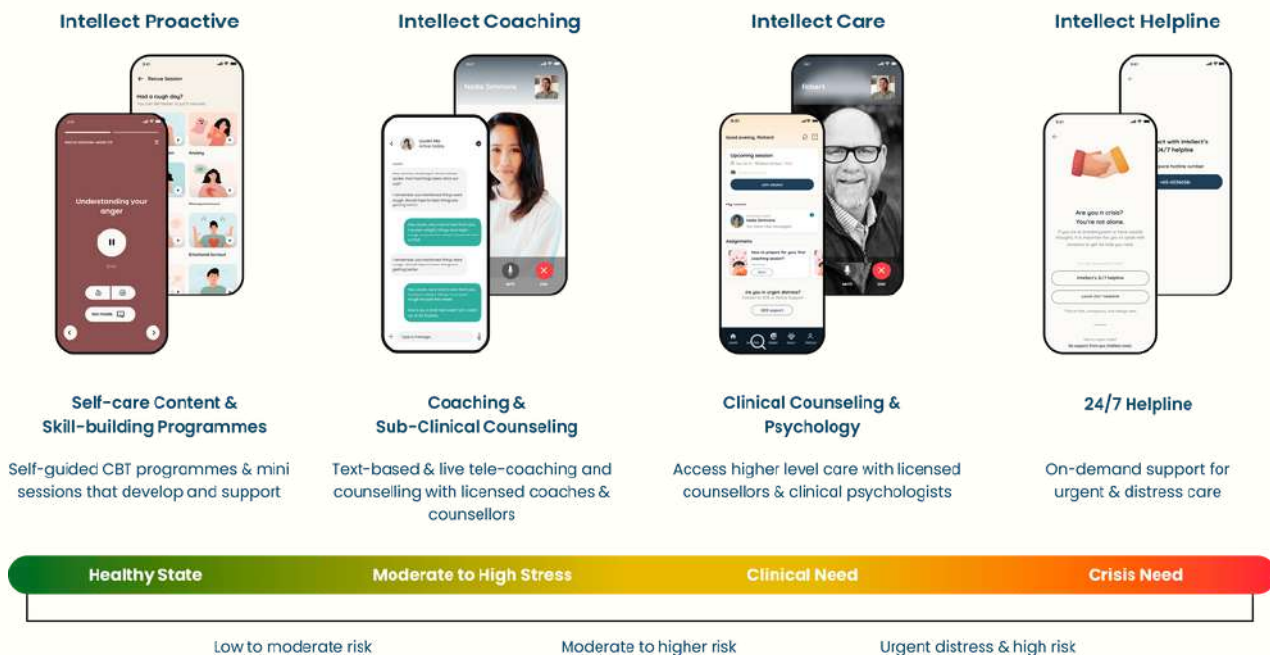
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**By following these steps, HR leaders can provide multiple avenues for support that can help employees address their mental health needs and ultimately increase workplace productivity.**



# Intellect 2.0 takes the guesswork out of employee mental wellbeing with new full-stack platform

Introducing Intellect 2.0: The future of employee wellbeing for Asia's leading workforces. Mental health is not black or white, and Intellect 2.0 is the only solution that addresses the entire continuum of mental health care. Our in-house clinical team and licensed practitioners tailor solutions to the individual needs of your employees.



At Intellect, we're committed to helping HR teams offer best-in-class mental health support to their organisations. Our full-stack platform takes the guesswork out of employee wellbeing by consolidating tailored solutions - from preventive care to responsive support - in one place. Now HR teams don't have to figure everything out on their own.



Our platform enables HR teams to proactively support their employees' mental health while ensuring timely support for stressful circumstances with a robust safety net.

With Intellect, employees in varying levels of distress can speak online or face-to-face with a local coach, counsellor, or psychologist in 13 languages and over 20 countries. Plus, our 24/7 helpline and EAP (employee assistance program) concierge means that care is always just a phone call away.

Discover how Intellect empowered industry leaders across Asia to cultivate a supportive workplace culture and provide multiple avenues for mental health support.

[Explore success stories](#)



# #3 Break the stigma through a 3-step approach

Despite increased awareness about mental health, the topic remains stigmatised.

27%

respondents are hesitant to discuss wellbeing matters with colleagues

11%

do not feel they have someone to turn to for support at work

1 in 4

feels uncomfortable utilising employee assistance programs and benefits such as time off

How do we break these barriers?



**Cedric Chew**

Deputy Executive Director  
Singapore Human Resources  
Institute (SHRI)

*"Mental health benefits are often stigmatised in SMEs, and employees are hesitant to prioritise their mental wellbeing over company profits. As HR leaders, we must work to change this culture and create a safe environment where mental health is prioritised."*



**Shailaja Sharma**

Group Head, Learning, Development  
and DEIB  
IHH Healthcare

*"The irony is that HR professionals who are responsible for supporting others tend to neglect their own mental wellbeing. Addressing this issue requires HR professionals to be vulnerable, which can be challenging for them. It's crucial to have both hard programs and processes, as well as a compassionate approach."*

## Challenges

A recent study in 2021 revealed that employees are reluctant to prioritise their wellbeing or use mental health benefits for fear of being perceived as unproductive or weak.

HR professionals aren't immune to this stigma either. A separate study in the same journal found that many tend to prioritise the organisation's needs over their personal wellbeing. This results in burnout, compassion fatigue, and other mental health issues.

HR professionals who felt that their organisation did not prioritise their wellbeing reported lower job satisfaction and were more likely to consider leaving their job. On the other hand, those who practised self-care through exercise and mindfulness reported lower burnout and higher job satisfaction levels.

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# What HR leaders can do:

## Step 1 - Take a top-down approach

Ingo and Cedric shared some actionable steps for HR leaders to lead by example and make workplace wellbeing collaborative. Leaders can walk the talk by participating in initiatives and showing employees that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

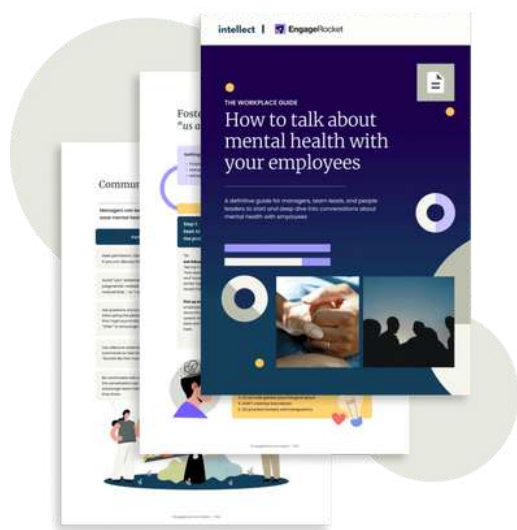
Plus, implementation need not fall on HR teams alone. While they can continue escalating findings around employee burnout, leaders can involve other employees in co-creating solutions and initiate a closed feedback cycle to ensure they're on the right track.

## Step 2 - Normalise mental health conversations

Shailaja emphasised the importance of open dialogue about mental health in the workplace. Leaders can recognise the contributions of HR professionals, address their heavy workloads, and encourage them to take regular breaks or utilise the provisions available.

Learn more from her talk at Intellect's [Mental Health Festival Asia 2022](#), where Shailaja shares self-care tips for HR professionals.

Here is a comprehensive guide on how managers could navigate conversations about mental health in the workplace.



## **The Workplace Guide: How to Talk about Mental Health with Your Employees**

- Setting the stage: How to broach the topic
- Communication tips: Verbal and non-verbal checklists
- 3-step guide: Fostering the feeling of “us against the problem”
- Do’s and Don’ts: Pitfalls and best practices advised by clinicians

[\*\*Download your guide\*\*](#)

### **Step 3: Create a culture of care**

To nurture workplace wellbeing, organisations can:

#### **Develop healthy microcultures:**

Daily interactions within teams can influence how employees feel. Investing in microcultures can look like scheduling regular team breaks, encouraging team members to take time off, and discouraging them from checking their inboxes outside work hours.

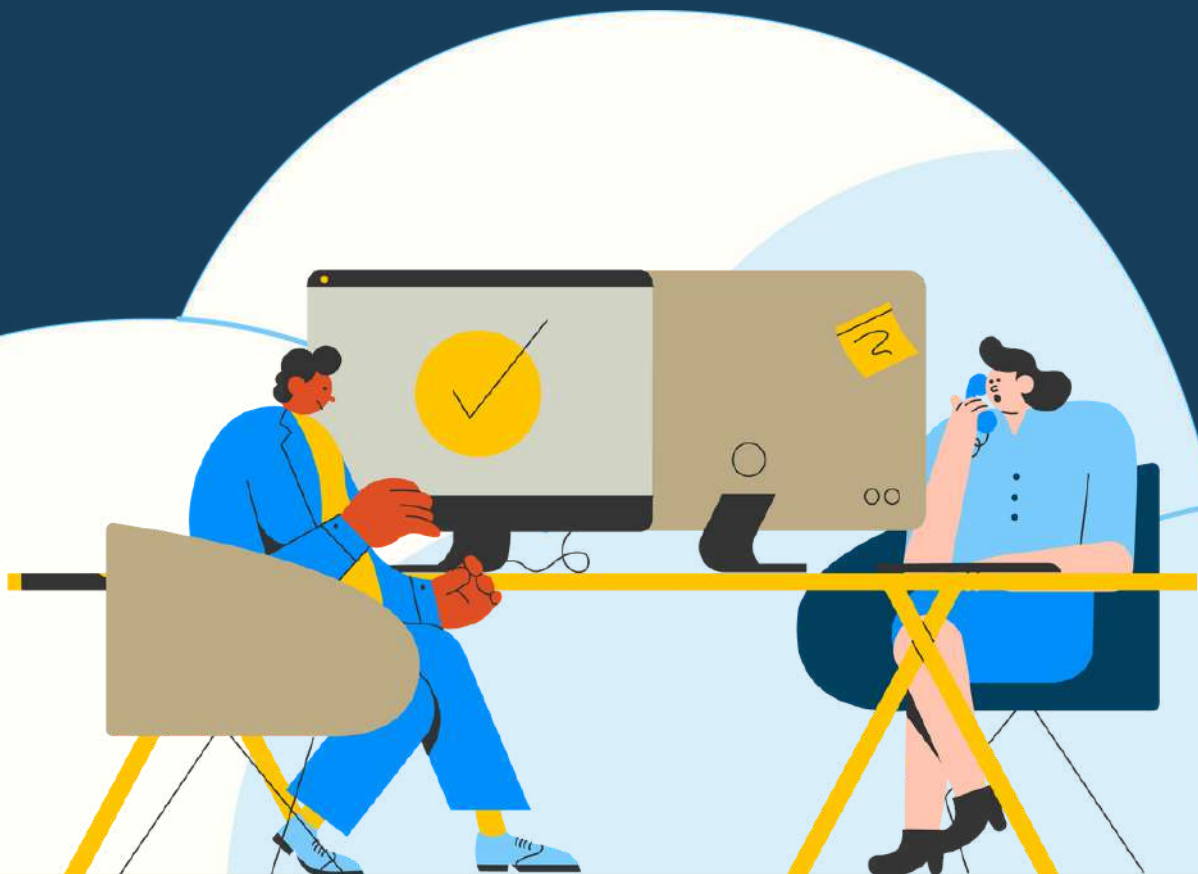
#### **Empower employees with relevant training:**

Caring for employees doesn’t fall solely on the shoulders of HR managers. Organisations can enable line managers with leadership workshops and training programs, such as the Mental Health First Aid certification.

#### **Establish a robust feedback mechanism:**

360-degree feedback holds line managers accountable for how they run their teams. It’s a step towards psychological safety and inclusion, which are essential ingredients for a healthy work environment.

# All together now: Takeaways for HR leaders and professionals



## **In a nutshell,**

- HR professionals play a key role in shaping workplace culture. A people team that practises self-care is well-placed to support the organisation's wellbeing and success.
- Workplace wellbeing directly affects culture, productivity, retention, and absenteeism. Neglecting it can lead to burnout, decreased performance, and high turnover.
- Self-care is proven to be effective in managing burnout. It can be challenging for the "caregivers" of the workforce to catch a break, but it is counterproductive to keep pouring from their cups when running on empty.
- Policies and processes aside, the message that it is okay to seek help is powerful. When employees realise they can do so from a place of strength and not weakness, they can take ownership of their personal wellbeing.

## HR CHECKLIST

# Revitalising HR: How leaders can address HR burnout and workplace wellbeing

### 1. HR professionals feel burnt out due to heavy workloads and the disproportionate responsibility of supporting employees.

#### HR Leaders can address this by:

- Educating HR and employees on the risks of burnout and aligning goals
- Identifying early signs of burnout and stress through frequent check-ins with employees
- Practising open communication and active listening to encourage employees to speak up
- Co-creating solutions with employees and providing access to support and resources

### 2. Despite the pressing need for employee mental health support, existing provisions leave much to be desired.

#### HR leaders can review them and:

- Take both a realistic and cafeteria approach
  - Realistic approach: Organisations with limited resources can tap into educational resources or consultancies for cost-effective solutions.
  - Cafeteria approach: Cater to the diverse needs of employees with a variety of mental health care programs
- Put a human touch in "human resources" by focusing not only on process and progress but also on employees' needs
- Encourage employees to seek help by acknowledging the limitations of HR and line managers and providing options

### 3. The mental health stigma prevalent among HR professionals is limiting the utilisation of company benefits.

#### HR leaders can shift perceptions by:

- Taking a top-down approach by personally walking the talk and spurring collaboration among teams when implementing new initiatives. They can also employees in co-creating solutions and collect feedback regularly.
- Normalising mental health conversations in the workplace by first recognising the heavy workloads of HR professionals and the impact of their contribution. They can follow up by encouraging them to take regular breaks and providing access to mental health support and resources.
- Creating a culture of workplace wellbeing by investing in microcultures, training line managers to care for their team members, and keeping them accountable for promoting psychological safety and inclusion.

# Looking for a wellbeing solution that suits your workplace?

Not every organisation benefits from the same solution — yours deserves one that is tailored to the needs of your diverse workforce. Contact us via [team@intellect.co](mailto:team@intellect.co) or visit [www.intellect.co](http://www.intellect.co) to book a demo and recalibrate your strategies for a happier, more productive, and thriving workplace.

## **About Intellect**

Intellect is a holistic mental wellbeing platform that provides support to over 3 million users in 20 countries.

Available in 13 languages, Intellect makes it easy for workforces to access clinically-validated self-care programmes, local behavioural coaches, counsellors, psychiatrists, and a 24/7 support helpline.

**Learn more at [www.intellect.co](http://www.intellect.co)  
or contact us [team@intellect.co](mailto:team@intellect.co)**