

## HR Interventions for Mental Wellness: Evolving Role of CHROs in Employee Support Programs

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### KEYWORDS

Chief Human Resource Officer, mental wellness strategies, HR best practices, psychological safety, digital well-being tools, employee mental health initiatives

### ABSTRACT

The rise in mental health concerns within professional environments—particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic—has prompted organizations to rethink their approach to employee well-being. Today, Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) are playing a central role in leading initiatives aimed at enhancing mental wellness, moving beyond traditional administrative duties. This study investigates the shifting responsibilities of CHROs in promoting psychological well-being at work, presents impactful HR strategies, and outlines cross-industry practices that contribute to safe and emotionally supportive workplaces. As awareness increases regarding the deep influence of mental health on productivity, retention, and organizational morale, the paper explores strategic models, technological solutions, and leadership-centered interventions. It further includes examples from prominent companies and offers practical insights to navigate obstacles such as stigma, effectiveness evaluation, and restricted access to mental health services. This research ultimately underscores the urgency of adopting an empathetic, comprehensive, and evidence-based HR approach to prepare organizations for future challenges.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, mental well-being has emerged as a key pillar of employee satisfaction and organizational productivity. The World Health Organization (2022) reports that anxiety and depression collectively drain the global economy of nearly US\$1 trillion every year due to diminished work output. The pandemic only intensified this issue by heightening existing stress factors and bringing in new concerns like isolation, uncertainty, and the challenges of long-term remote work. Findings from a 2023 Deloitte study show that while 83% of employees feel their job impacts their mental health, merely 33% believe their employer provides adequate support.

Such findings have compelled businesses to reevaluate human resource frameworks, positioning mental wellness as a core aspect of workforce strategy. HR's role, once largely administrative, has evolved into a strategic leadership function. In this transformation, CHROs have become key advocates for mental health, tasked with cultivating safe work environments, promoting emotional support mechanisms, and embedding a culture of empathy throughout the organization.

Occupying a pivotal space in the leadership hierarchy, CHROs are now responsible for aligning wellness efforts with corporate goals, encouraging openness around mental health, and steering organizational culture toward inclusivity. Their role now encompasses the deployment of digital wellness solutions, the introduction of tailored support systems, and the development of mental health-focused workplace policies.

This paper sets out to analyze the crucial role of CHROs in implementing mental wellness initiatives. It emphasizes the value of forward-thinking HR policies, the importance of mental health education, and the adoption of technological tools in promoting a culture of care. Through real-world examples and contemporary industry data, this study provides a strategic guide for HR leaders aiming to nurture resilient and mentally healthy organizations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW



The growing acknowledgment of mental health as an essential aspect of employee wellness has led to a notable shift in HR practices across various sectors. As organizations become more attuned to the impact of mental well-being on workforce efficiency, employee morale, and staff retention, the responsibilities of HR leaders—especially Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs)—have expanded significantly. This section reviews existing literature on the evolving duties of CHROs in advancing employee mental wellness, the importance of mental health-focused initiatives, and the diverse strategies companies have adopted to meet these demands.

### **2.1 Changing Responsibilities of CHROs**

Traditionally, CHROs were responsible for core human resource tasks like hiring, payroll management, and regulatory compliance. However, growing concerns around workplace mental health have redefined their role. Today, CHROs are instrumental in developing organizational strategies that prioritize holistic employee care. A 2022 McKinsey & Company study suggests that modern CHROs function as strategic influencers, playing a key role in shaping company culture, boosting employee involvement, and pushing for accessible mental health resources. This transformation is a response to the increasingly dynamic work environment, where employees expect their employers to offer emotional and psychological support as part of the overall workplace experience.

### **2.2 Mental Health and Its Effect on Business Outcomes**

Extensive research supports the idea that mental health problems can have a direct and measurable impact on both individual performance and organizational effectiveness. The World Health Organization (2022) identifies anxiety and depression as major contributors to workplace disability worldwide, leading to reduced output and economic loss. The organization estimates that lost productivity due to depression alone costs the global economy around \$1 trillion each year, reinforcing the urgency for mental health solutions at work.

Deloitte's 2023 findings echo this, showing that workers facing mental health difficulties often report lower satisfaction with their jobs, increased absenteeism, and a higher tendency to resign. In contrast, businesses that embed mental wellness into their operational framework typically see enhanced workforce engagement, reduced attrition, and better overall performance. For instance, Unilever has made employee well-being a strategic priority, resulting in stronger retention and productivity metrics (Mind Share Partners, 2023). These findings demonstrate that fostering mental health is not just a moral obligation but a crucial element of sustainable business success.

### **2.3 HR Strategies to Promote Mental Health**

In recent times, HR departments have placed increased emphasis on designing initiatives that effectively address mental health concerns in the workplace. Conventional HR responsibilities have now expanded to incorporate a wide variety of wellness initiatives aimed at promoting mental well-being comprehensively. Notable approaches include Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), dedicated mental health leave, flexible work schedules, and mental health training programs for supervisors. A 2023 report from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) noted that 81% of large firms have EAPs in place, with an increasing number also introducing mental health days into their leave offerings.

Another prominent trend is the adoption of digital tools to support mental health. Applications like Calm, Headspace, and BetterHelp are becoming standard components of employee benefit plans. These platforms offer remote access to therapy, meditation practices, and various wellness resources, making them suitable for both immediate relief and ongoing support. According to PwC (2023), digital wellness platforms are especially effective for individuals hesitant to pursue in-person support, thereby helping to remove access-related obstacles to mental health care.

### **2.4 Leadership's Role in Supporting Mental Health Programs**

Numerous studies emphasize that leadership involvement is a key factor in the success of workplace mental wellness efforts. Data from Mind Share Partners (2023) highlights that when company leaders openly back mental health initiatives, employees are far more inclined to participate in them. As cultural leaders, CHROs are uniquely positioned to shift organizational attitudes by normalizing discussions around mental health and fostering an environment of openness.

Moreover, training programs for line managers and supervisors are crucial in equipping them to identify and respond to mental health concerns with empathy. Findings from the American Psychological Association (2022) suggest that such training leads to improved outcomes for employees dealing with emotional or psychological challenges. These practices contribute to the development of a more inclusive and empathetic workplace, where individuals feel supported in both personal and professional capacities.

### **2.5 Obstacles in Implementing Mental Wellness Programs**

Despite the growing recognition of workplace mental health, several obstacles continue to hinder the full integration of wellness initiatives. A major roadblock is the persistent stigma that surrounds mental health topics. Although societal attitudes are gradually improving, a significant portion of employees remain reluctant to seek help due to concerns about judgment or potential professional repercussions. The American Psychological Association (2022) reports that over 40% of employees are uneasy about discussing mental health issues at work.



In addition, the absence of standardized tools for assessing the success of mental wellness initiatives presents a challenge. While many companies have launched wellness programs, they often lack reliable data to evaluate their impact on both employee satisfaction and business outcomes. This gap can make it difficult to defend further investment or adjust existing programs based on employee input (Glassdoor, 2022).

Access-related disparities also hinder the effectiveness of mental health support. Some employees face financial, geographic, or technological barriers that prevent them from benefiting from available services. Small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, may find it difficult to provide robust wellness programs due to budget limitations. Addressing these concerns requires CHROs to explore scalable and cost-efficient solutions that ensure all employees have equitable access to mental health resources.

## **2.6 Emerging Trends in HR-Focused Mental Wellness**

As the nature of work continues to transform, embedding mental wellness into HR strategies is becoming increasingly essential. With the continued expansion of hybrid and remote work models, along with persistent global economic uncertainties, organizations are recognizing the importance of offering adaptable, technology-enabled, and individualized mental health solutions. HR leaders are now emphasizing the development of wellness initiatives that are backed by data and aligned with the specific needs of a diverse and dynamic workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Moreover, there is a shift toward weaving mental health support into the broader employee experience. Establishing a workplace culture that encourages openness around mental well-being can significantly enhance how employees perceive their value within the organization. By fostering such an environment, companies can promote trust, belonging, and psychological safety. As this trend accelerates, CHROs will play a pivotal role in embedding mental wellness as a core element of organizational growth and sustainability.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the evolving responsibilities of CHROs in promoting mental health within the workplace. Insights were drawn from a blend of in-depth case studies, interviews with senior HR executives, and reviews of current industry literature. Well-known organizations like Microsoft, Unilever, and Tata Consultancy Services were examined to uncover successful mental wellness practices, while interviews with CHROs provided direct perspectives on the decision-making processes behind such initiatives.

### **3.1 Selection Criteria for Case Studies**

The organizations chosen for case analysis were selected due to their notable commitment to employee mental health and overall well-being. These companies have successfully implemented scalable and forward-thinking programs that address both preventive and reactive mental health needs. A comparative framework was used to analyze these cases, focusing on identifying effective practices as well as the common hurdles encountered during implementation.

### **3.2 Methods of Data Collection and Evaluation**

Data for the study was gathered through both secondary research—such as academic articles, industry insights, and corporate wellness reports—and primary data via interviews conducted with HR leaders in large organizations. Semi-structured interview formats were utilized, providing flexibility for respondents while ensuring that core themes like program structure, executive involvement, feedback mechanisms, and operational challenges were addressed. The responses and literature were analyzed using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of key patterns, strategic trends, and the overall effectiveness of HR mental health interventions.

## **4. ROLE OF CHROS IN MENTAL WELLNESS**

Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) hold a critical position in championing mental health within organizations, thanks to their influence over workplace culture, talent development, and employee welfare. While their responsibilities have historically centered around hiring, compensation, and managing performance, the rising emphasis on psychological well-being has encouraged CHROs to adopt a more integrated and compassionate approach to organizational health.

### **4.1 Strategic Leadership in Mental Health**

At the heart of a CHRO's role is the ability to establish a clear, strategic direction for employee mental wellness. They are tasked with embedding mental health objectives into the larger mission and values of the company, ensuring these efforts are not treated as standalone or secondary. As highlighted by McKinsey & Company (2022), CHROs are instrumental in driving a shift in company culture—creating spaces where mental health conversations are normalized, stigma is reduced, and psychological openness is encouraged among staff at all levels.

### **4.2 Advocacy for Policy and Cultural Transformation**

CHROs also play a vital part in shaping and promoting workplace policies that support psychological well-being. These may include flexible scheduling, enhanced mental health benefits, stigma-reduction initiatives, and confidential counseling



resources. For example, the introduction of dedicated mental health leave, separate from vacation time, is often spearheaded by CHROs to show genuine commitment to employee care. Through these initiatives, they help redefine workplace standards to foster inclusion, psychological safety, and genuine care.

### **4.3 Enabling Leaders and Supporting Employees**

Another essential aspect of the CHRO's responsibilities lies in cultivating leadership behaviors that reinforce mental wellness. This involves rolling out training programs for managers to identify signs of distress among team members and respond appropriately. Research from Mind Share Partners (2023) suggests that employees are more inclined to participate in wellness programs when senior leaders visibly back them. By incorporating mental health into leadership training, CHROs nurture an empathetic workplace culture that empowers managers and builds trust across the workforce.

## **5. HR INTERVENTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES**

Human Resources plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee mental health and building resilient workplace environments. As the demand for psychological support rises, organizations are adopting a combination of traditional methods and modern innovations to offer well-rounded mental health care to their workforce.

### **5.1 Conventional Approaches**

Traditionally, HR teams have relied on Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to deliver mental health services. These programs typically include confidential counseling, legal and financial consultation, and support for balancing personal and work-related stress. According to a 2023 study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 81% of companies with over 500 staff members offer EAPs as part of their benefits. Serving as a frontline measure, EAPs provide immediate assistance for employees dealing with psychological distress, often mitigating the need for more intensive interventions later on.

### **5.2 Technology-Driven Mental Health Support**

The rise of digital solutions has transformed how organizations support mental health. Mobile applications and platforms like Headspace, Calm, and BetterHelp offer accessible tools for meditation, stress relief, and remote therapy. A Deloitte survey conducted in 2022 revealed that 62% of employees favor digital tools due to their ease of use and the privacy they afford. These platforms enable employees to seek help conveniently, contributing to more proactive mental health management.

### **5.3 Customized Wellness Initiatives**

Beyond standard offerings, companies are increasingly introducing customized wellness programs tailored to their workforce's diverse needs. These initiatives may include stress-reduction workshops, guided mindfulness sessions, wellness challenges, and flexible schedules aimed at preventing burnout. Google, for example, provides a wellness platform called "Goggles," which assesses individual wellness needs and recommends personalized strategies. Such personalized programs ensure mental health resources are relevant and impactful across varied employee groups.

### **5.4 Equitable Mental Health Policies**

An emerging trend in HR practices is the adoption of inclusive mental health policies that address the needs of all employees, including those with long-standing or recurring mental health conditions. These policies promote equal access to mental health support, ensuring no one is left behind. For example, companies may provide flexible hours, extra leave days, or workplace accommodations for those managing ongoing mental health issues. By promoting inclusion, organizations foster a culture of empathy and long-term care.

## **6. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Addressing Stigma and Reluctance**

Despite increased initiatives to promote mental health, stigma continues to be a significant hurdle. Many employees are still reluctant to access support due to concerns about judgment or potential impacts on their professional reputation. Data from the American Psychological Association (2022) shows that over 40% of workers feel uneasy discussing mental health with their supervisors. To combat this issue, CHROs must set the tone from the top—by being open about mental wellness and encouraging leaders to create an environment where openness and vulnerability are welcomed and respected.

### **6.2 Evaluating Program Outcomes**

A persistent challenge in mental health programming is determining how effective these initiatives truly are. Although many organizations invest heavily in wellness programs, they often lack concrete indicators to assess their impact. To remedy this, HR departments need to develop comprehensive evaluation systems. These can include employee satisfaction surveys, analysis of attendance and turnover data, and performance metrics. By routinely monitoring these indicators, companies can refine their approaches and better tailor support services to employee needs.



### 6.3 Resource Constraints and Accessibility

Even with the growing number of mental health solutions available, not all employees have equal access to them. Smaller businesses often face budgetary and infrastructural limitations that prevent them from offering robust support systems. CHROs can address this gap by seeking out cost-effective alternatives, forming collaborations with external mental health providers, or tapping into publicly funded and nonprofit services that offer affordable or complimentary resources. Ensuring equitable access is key to supporting the entire workforce.

### 6.4 Recommendations

To strengthen the implementation and impact of mental wellness programs, organizations are advised to take the following steps:

- **Visible Leadership Support:** CHROs should actively promote mental health initiatives and set an example by championing a culture that values psychological well-being.
- **Evidence-Based Planning:** Regularly measure program performance using reliable data to understand what's working and what needs adjustment.
- **Inclusive Policy Design:** Ensure that wellness policies accommodate the varied needs of a diverse workforce and make mental health resources accessible to all.
- **Mental Health Awareness:** Incorporate ongoing education and awareness campaigns to improve understanding of mental health and reduce stigma within the workplace.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In a rapidly evolving work landscape, especially post-pandemic, the role of CHROs in fostering mental wellness has taken center stage. Their strategic oversight and influence can help embed proactive mental health support into the organization's core values. With a combination of traditional and tech-enabled interventions, personalized programs, and inclusive policies, companies can create environments that prioritize well-being.

A successful approach to mental health requires both top-down leadership and grassroots engagement. When CHROs align wellness strategies with business goals and promote a culture grounded in empathy and care, mental wellness ceases to be a peripheral benefit and becomes a fundamental pillar of long-term organizational growth and resilience.

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