



How can workplaces equip young people to thrive from the start in their early careers and beyond?

Moderator



Hannah McLeod
City Mental Health Alliance HK

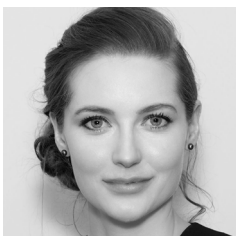
Panellists



Catherine Loui
Morgan Stanley



Winnie Tsien
JLL



Sofia Nordengren
DLA Piper



Jay Hou
Jardine Matheson

The Hong Kong Mental Health Conference organised by Mind HK (6-7 November 2020) brought together international and local youth mental health experts to share their knowledge on a range of topics with “Youth in Focus”.

One of the panels explored the challenges facing young people as they transition into the workforce and the impact on their mental health. The panel gathered HR experts from different industry sectors to share their perspectives, insights and what their organisations are doing to better support young people in their early careers. **Hannah McLeod, Head of Marketing and Strategy at City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK)**, moderated the panel.

Why is this topic important for workplaces?

Young people are navigating abrupt changes as they start afresh and adapt from a school environment to a workplace environment or sometimes even as they settle into a new country. Panellist **Catherine Loui, Co-Head of Asia Human Resources at Morgan Stanley**, shared that despite the reputation of Hong Kong being a high stress environment, the issue of stigma is still very much prevalent in Asia. Loui indicated that it is therefore crucial to provide young people with an environment where they are comfortable to discuss mental health issues in the workplace. From a business perspective, mental health affects longer-term retention of staff and “if you have happier employees, there will also be increased productivity”, said Loui.

Winnie Tsien, Head of Human Resources of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan at JLL, noted that youngsters may not have the language to express how they feel around mental health concerns. **Sofia Nordengren, Regional Learning Development Manager Asia at DLA Piper**, added that “young workers come into the workforce quite unprepared for what is reality” and that workplaces need to work to “provide a safe environment to ensure they have tools and resources they need”.

2020 has been a challenging year for everyone, and young adults in particular are subject to a lot of uncertainty, noted **Jay Hou, Head of Global Mobility & Benefits, Group Human Resources at Jardine Matheson**. Jay expressed that, given the uncertain environment, there is a heightened anxiety amongst youngsters to accept the first

job opportunity that comes along without fully assessing the options. Jay queried whether this may affect graduate dropouts from organisations in the long term. Additionally, Jay also noted that many students did not have the opportunity to celebrate higher education milestones in light of COVID, and that we cannot “underestimate the impact of that as they transition into the workplace”.

What is being done to support early career starters?

The panellists agreed that implementing an effective mental health strategy within organisations requires a constant, ongoing effort in order to normalise the topic and remove stigma. Loui shared that training resources are provided to managers at Morgan Stanley to guide conversations with employees around mental health. Youngsters joining the organisation are also made aware of the importance of an open mental health dialogue from the start.

Apart from providing activities, events and webinars with a wellness focus, organisations are working to embed health and wellbeing within the corporate culture, which is a key priority within the Jardine Group, shared Jay. This is supported by group-wide wellness programmes and resources, which need to be communicated regularly to employees to show availability and accessibility, said Tsien for JLL.

From a legal industry perspective, Nordengren shared that trainees are not guaranteed a job at

the end of their two-year training programme, which adds to the mental stress. DLA Piper provides resilience training and tools for trainees to recognise when they might be pushing themselves too far and how to seek support. More senior members of the organisation are encouraged to provide mentoring and support to trainees. It is also key to “ensure senior leaders are also willing to share their own experiences so that younger employees see that it is OK to speak up”, said Nordengren.

Tsien shared that training sessions provided by CMHA HK and Mind HK have been helpful in offering concrete practical actions on how to drive mental health strategy, and that training provided to senior leaders is an effective way to mobilise them to drive changes that cascade down an organisation. Additionally, infrastructure and policies cannot be “one size fits all”, and staff should be encouraged to share what support they need through different life events and circumstances.

Navigating uncertain times

Jay highlighted the impact of sustained stress and anxiety this year, and that everyone has a “COVID story” to tell; a cocktail of financial stresses, family challenges and job insecurities. A key takeaway is that “it is as important as ever to focus on our mental health and to take time to be kind to each other, to show empathy and to be compassionate”.

Tsien added that this period has taught us to be “more agile, flexible, not take things for granted” and to remain positive whilst drawing on reserves stored from previous experiences to navigate the storm.

Key tips for early career starters

“Take charge of your mental health. If you feel that you need flexibility, don’t be afraid to talk about it.” – Catherine Loui, Co-Head of Asia Human Resources at Morgan Stanley

“The Greek maxim - “know thyself”. Learn to know yourself, know what makes you stressed, what makes you happy and also learn to manage your own stress because what makes you stressed is not the same as what makes somebody else stressed. We are all different and mental health exists on a continuum, so we need to learn to manage our own stress and take care of ourselves.” – Sofia Nordengren, Regional Learning Development Manager Asia at DLA Piper

“Stop and take the time to reflect. Write down the things that are important to you. What are the things that make you happy, what do you do to unwind, relax and enjoy your life? Go back to your list often and don’t lose sight of those things. Put your hand up if you’re not feeling your best.” – Jay Hou, Head of Global Mobility & Benefits, Group Human Resources at Jardine Matheson

“Have hope in mind. I do believe that this kind of energy helps all of us, especially young people. We hope that we are able to support you in the journey that you are facing in the workplace.” – Winnie Tsien, Head of Human Resources of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan at JLL



The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong is a collaborative venture founded by city businesses. Championed by senior leaders, the Alliance is business led and expert guided and aims to create a culture of good mental health for workers in the city of Hong Kong, share best practice and increase mental health understanding.