

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



HRD CORP WEBINAR SERIES 3, 2021: POST-COVID RECOVERY: ADAPTING TO NEW MINDSETS

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted both the Malaysian and global economy. An increase in unemployment rates, financial instability due to the economic downturn, and restriction of mobility have subsequently resulted in a surge of calls to helplines requesting assistance for mental wellbeing. The government's psychosocial hotline recorded 37,709 calls between April and September 2020, half of them were related to emotional distress worsened by the pandemic and the Movement Control Order (MCO). The Royal Malaysian Force has also recently published an alarming figure of 468 suicide cases in Malaysia in just the first five months of 2021, which is a huge surge compared to the annual total of 631 cases in 2020 and 609 cases in 2019.

These factors are mostly related to the ongoing financial distress, anxiety, depression and stress arising from the long isolation brought on by the pandemic. This has also shed some light on the importance of mental health. Therefore, Human Resource Development Corporation (HRD Corp) has taken the initiative to host its third webinar series titled **"Post-Covid Recovery: Adapting to New Mindsets"** which focuses on the causes of mental health issues and how employers can play their roles in supporting their employees.

As listed below, three esteemed professionals were invited to give insights on the strategies and best practices in mitigating the issue, with a keynote address delivered by the Chief Executive of HRD Corp, Datuk Shahul Dawood.

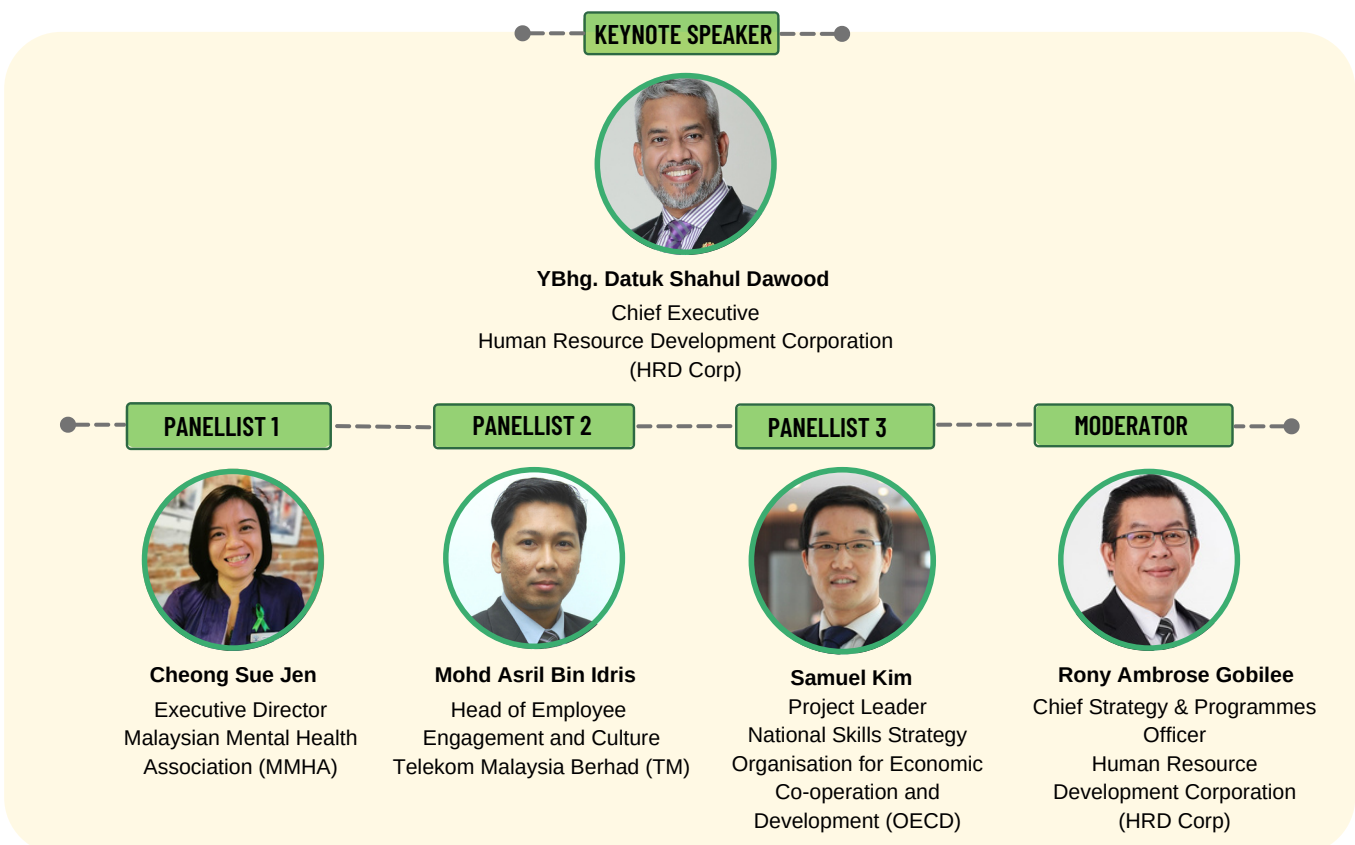


Figure 1: Keynote Speaker, Moderator and Panellist Line-up

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Keynote Address by
YBhg. Datuk Shahul Dawood

YBhg. Datuk Shahul Dawood addressed the importance of mental health among employees as it plays a major role in ensuring maximum productivity and workflow at the workplace. He highlighted that ever since the implementation of MCO in March last year, unemployment rates have increased from 4.8% last year to 4.9%. Many employees have been furloughed, while others were retrenched, leading to the higher unemployment rates.

MENTAL ILLNESS IN
30% OF INDIVIDUALS ABOVE
16 YEARS OLD WILL BE
THE SECOND LARGEST
HEALTH WORRY IN MALAYSIA.

ALMOST HALF A MILLION OF
MALAYSIANS WERE FOUND TO BE
DEPRESSED IN 2019

Source: National Health & Morbidity Survey 2019

**HIGHEST NUMBER
OF CALLS DUE
TO DISTRESS
AND SUICIDAL
FEELINGS WERE
RECORDED FROM JULY UNTIL
SEPTEMBER 2020**



Source: Befrienders Kuala Lumpur

465 SUICIDE ATTEMPTS
WERE RECORDED
BETWEEN JANUARY
TO JUNE 2020 AND THESE WERE
CLOSELY LINKED TO MENTAL
HEALTH ISSUES

Source: Ministry of Health Malaysia

With the rising concern on this issue, HRD Corp has been focusing on crafting initiatives that can help ease employees' transition to the new norm of working from home. Amongst the initiatives that the organisation has introduced included webinars on stress management while working remotely for HRD Corp employees. The government has also introduced a number of initiatives to address these issues.

Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development

Provide tele-counselling support
involving over 520 counsellors who are
registered under the Board of
Counsellors through the Talian Kasih
Hotline on Whatsapp

Ministry of Health

Established Pusat Kesihatan Mental
Masyarakat (MENTARI) in 2011, with more
than 20 outlets nationwide to treat early
discovery of mental illnesses and
psychological disorders

HRD Corp sees mental health deterioration among employees as a serious issue which may have an adverse effect on productivity in the long run.

More proactive actions are needed from all parties to improve employees' mental health in order to ensure their continued value and productivity.

IMPACTS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG EMPLOYEES

ABSENTEEISM	LOW MORALE
POOR JOB PERFORMANCE	HIGH TURNOVER
PHYSICAL INCAPABILITY	INCREASE IN HUMAN ERRORS
LOW LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENTS	LACK OF CONCENTRATION
FAILURE IN CARRYING OUT DAILY FUNCTIONS	POOR DECISION MAKING CAPABILITIES
INABILITY TO ENGAGE WITH CO- WORKERS	

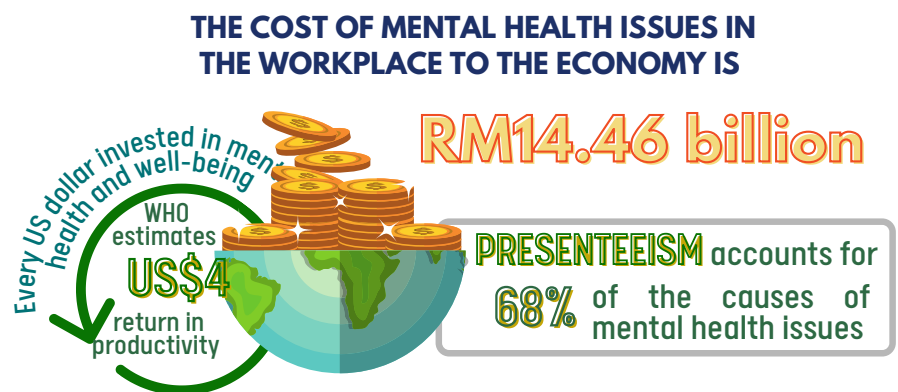
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Impact Analysis: Employees' Emotional and Psychological Decline



As the Executive Director of the Malaysian Mental Health Association, Ms Cheong Sue Jen highlighted that the COVID-19 outbreak has put a spotlight on mental health in the workplace and it will be one of the top agendas for the government and businesses in the near future. Many people are struggling with loneliness, overload from juggling home and work responsibilities while feeling anxious and uncertain about the future, due the economic turmoil as well as income and employment insecurity. Thus, the pandemic has elevated the sense of urgency for companies to take more proactive actions in safeguarding their employees' mental health.

In light of the pandemic, people are constantly working at breakneck speeds to meet deadlines, with some even taking leave to do even more work remotely. These are caused by the blurring of boundaries due to the new 'working-from-home' arrangement and the guilt associated with it as they feel the need to work extra hours to make up for the fact that they are not commuting to the office and being under the supervision of superiors.



Source: Relate Malaysia Report, 2020

Lack of employer support, from poor organisational budgeting and policies in making provisions for employees' psychological wellbeing are also among the factors that contribute to poor mental health.

With the virus outbreak taking a huge toll on employees, it is best for organisations to respond quickly in order to help workers improve their mental health. As such, MMHA provides mental health services to those affected. Some of the support provided include to stay in contact, check in with your employees and increase mental health literacy among employees. Employers may equip their employees with mental health literacy via the **Mental Health First Aid Programme** provided by the MMHA. Details of the programme are as follows:

OVERVIEW

A licensed evidence-based programme aimed at providing knowledge to help individuals cope with mental health problems or crises until the appropriate professional help is received

BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAMME

- Improve knowledge of mental illnesses & treatments
- Decrease stigmatising attitudes observed in the workplace
- Increase employees' confidence in providing first aid

It is clear that there should be some provision for employees' well-being and psychological support, and that mental health literacy could help in identifying mental health issues at the early level. Employers should take proactive steps in participating in early intervention in starting the conversation with regards to mental health problems.



To learn more on the programmes and services offered by MMHA, click [here](#)!

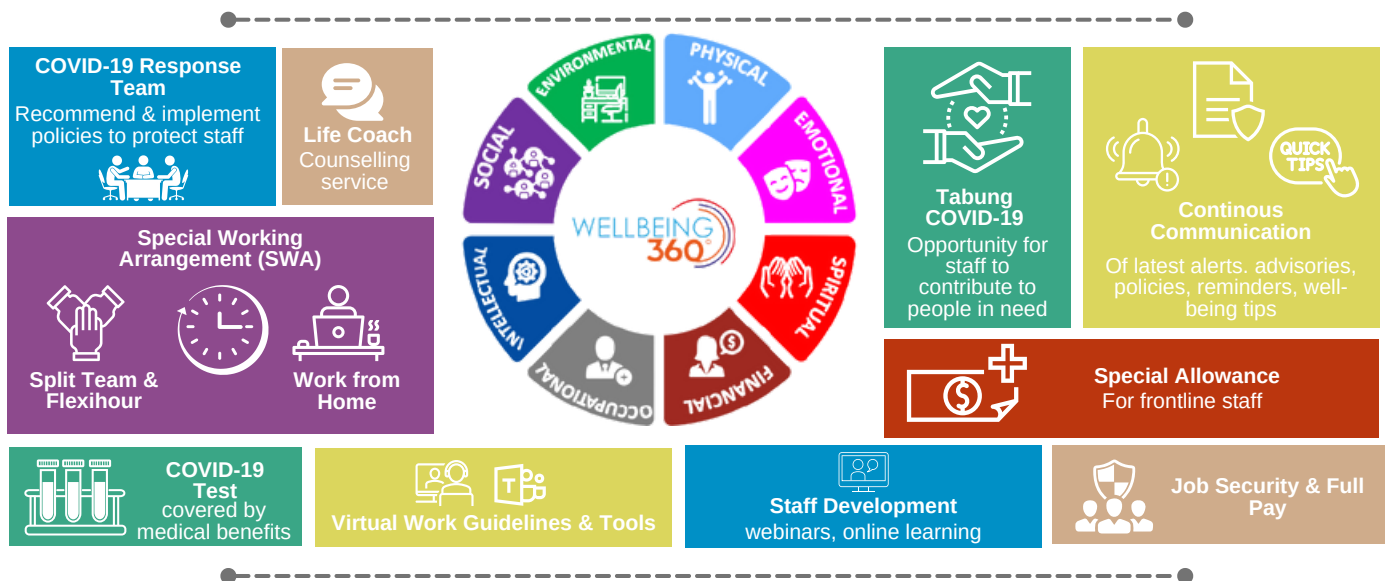
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Surviving in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Healthy Psychological Practices in the Workplace by Employers



Mr. Mohd Asril bin Idris, the Head of Employee Engagement and Culture of Telekom Malaysia Berhad (TM) echoed Ms. Cheong Sue Jen's view that employers should take proactive actions in supporting employees' physical and mental health well-being.

TM has taken a holistic approach in addressing the root cause of the problems associated with mental health issues affecting their employees. At the same time, they have also begun proactively promoting healthy mind, body and spirit by introducing their signature programme, WELLBEING 360, that focuses on eight (8) dimensions.



One of the most emphasised initiatives at TM is the TM Life Coach, an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) that allows employees to share issues that they are facing safely, privately and confidentially. The organisation provides services where employees can reach out via email, in-person or have virtual meetings with both certified in-house and third party counsellors, 24 hours everyday. TM has also created an app for their staff to report themselves if they have been in close contact with any COVID-19 affected individuals, track any possible exposure as well as ask questions to the COVID-19 Response Team. Additionally, they have a support system called the COVID-19 Buddy System, where the company assists staff who are tested positive with swab tests, delivering food to their households, home sanitisation, as well as providing emotional support and transportation, to and from the quarantine centre.

As a result, TM has received positive responses from their employees, expressing that they were reassured during the pandemic, despite the uncertainties, due to the proactive efforts of the senior leadership team in responding to their concerns and the connection between teammates and managers in safeguarding employees' wellness, health and safety. It is also reported that the productivity rate of their employees remains the same or even higher when they are working from home.

Among the strategies that can help cultivate mental health and wellbeing amongst employees, as highlighted by Mr. Asril are, employers need to at least give attention to their employees' mental state and actively initiate sessions to talk about issues affecting them.

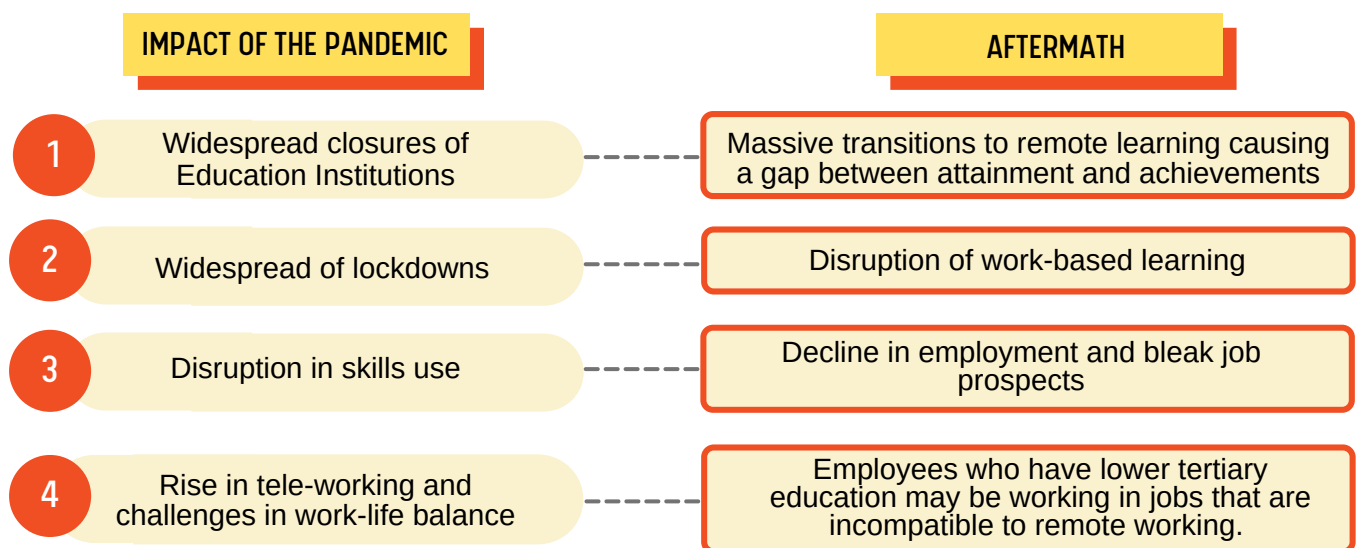
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Planning for Growth: Fulfilling Skills Requirements Towards Positive Mindsets and Maximum Productivity

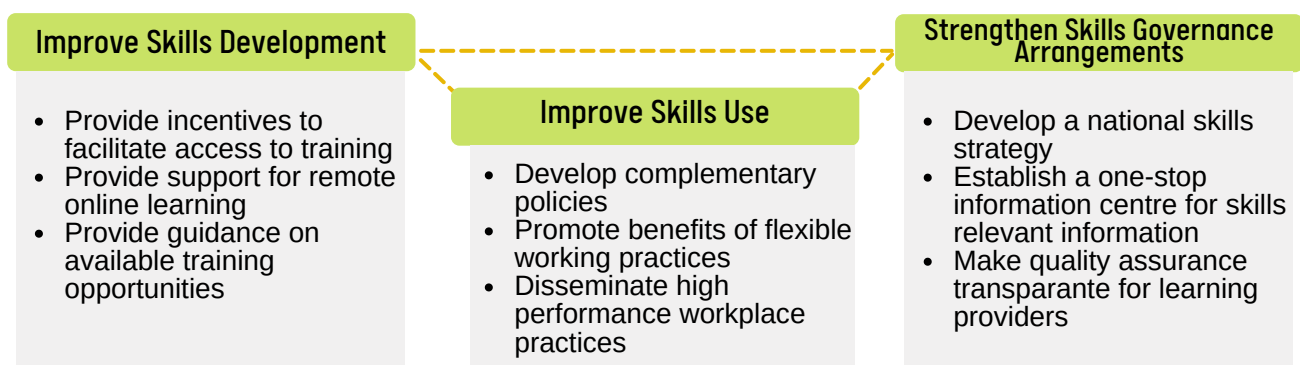


Mr. Samuel Kim, the Project Leader of the National Skills Strategy under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted several megatrends which have negatively impacted skills shaping as well as mental health well-being of workers. These included **automation** and **skills mismatch** between individuals and industries. These megatrends have resulted in employees having to be reskilled and upskilled for both existing and new jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also changed our lifestyles, from the way we communicate, work and learn. The major influences and effects of the pandemic are as follows:



With these in mind, Mr. Samuel emphasised on the importance of skills in building up an individual's well-being and positive mindset. According to the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), individuals who have higher skills and literacy, are 2.9 times more likely to report higher wages, and are 2.1 times more likely to have excellent health. Thus, having a high level of skill matters as it enables individuals to pivot and develop new ones when needed, through training classes, whilst simultaneously helping to instill a higher level of confidence in them. This also empowers them to take better control of their situation, thereby removing some of the variables and uncertainties that lead to poor mental health. There are **three interventions** that the public could focus on which could improve their skills whilst simultaneously extending the mental health well-being and productivity of the workforce.



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Conclusion and Review



The pandemic has not just impacted the economy and businesses, but also our day-to-day lives and viewpoints. As the nation undergoes economic recovery in the coming year, the Malaysian workforce needs to be strong both physically and mentally.



Mental health issues can lead to a heavy cost to not just the affected individual, but also their family, friends and even their organisation. According to the Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace Survey by AIA Vitality in 2019, 51% of Malaysians have at least one dimension of work-related stress. Sleep deprivation is also on the rise as over half of Malaysians are not getting a good seven hours of sleep at night and 14% report either poor or very poor quality of sleep. Having poor psychological states would seriously impact an employees' productivity leading to loss of concentration, having difficulties in meeting deadlines, as well as developing paranoia and poor decision-making capabilities.

The misconceptions about mental health are still apparent among Malaysians even though the social stigma towards these issues have reduced significantly throughout the years. In order to further remove the negative connotations around mental health from society, we can look at the following efforts:



Mental health issues are a serious concern and should not be taken lightly. Anyone could suffer from poor mental health at some point in their lives, thus, all parties should combine efforts in combating these issues. Ultimately, although employees may face challenges, employers need to play their role to support and continuously care about the inner needs of their employees. Simultaneously, while industries and businesses are recovering, the upskilling and reskilling of manpower needs to continue. This is because psychological support and improvement in skills competency go hand in hand in creating happy, well-rounded employees that can contribute significantly to their organisation and eventually be the driver of progress for the nation.

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