Step 4: Conducting Your Interviews

Participant #1:

Interviewee: 25 yrs, woman, asian, gaming industry, mid-sized, data analyst, 1 yoe, in-office, based in China

- DingDing (external) for work + WeChat (personal)
- Small office (<10 people) Vs. head office far away > team works remotely with other offices
- Category #1:
    - Routine:
        - 10am - arrive in office
        - Daily work: check BI board, build new board, performance prediction, data test
        - ~2pm - back to work (1.5hrs lunch break)
        - 7pm - end
    - Do not work overtime or bring work outside office
    - Small office > close knit, friendly atmosphere + collaborate with other offices remotely via DingDing
    - Challenges related to work itself
    - Stress from the need to keep up with experienced colleagues
        - Cope through playing badminton/ sports w/ colleagues (voluntary)
    - Occasional team building events organized by department (not company or HR) to help strengthen relationship (does help with atmosphere), ^no company resource for stress management
    - Limited HR interaction: no HR in office < far away from head office, communicate online; help centered administrative work
- Category #2:
    - Value team-bonding, strong relationships with colleagues promote morale > relies more on coworkers (emotional support), feels no need for HR intervention
    - Little presence of HR in work environment > detached from work, mainly focuses on hiring > better support from coworkers, does not anticipate any change in HR
- Category #3:
    - Low visibility of HR > less approachable > less trust > coworkers first
    - HR attention given to other jobs and other offices
- Category #4:
    - Skeptical over emotional support > consider AI as personal assistant specifically for work-related insights (help w/ data analysis) > need to be more personalized
    - Need anonymity when reporting to HR, ^AI cannot understand interpersonal conflicts well enough

Participant #2:

Interviewee: 23 yrs, woman, asian, gaming industry, large corp, senior ux designer, 1 yoe, in-office, based in China

- Popo (in-house) for work + WeChat & QQ (personal w/ colleagues)
- Category #1:
    - Routine:
        - 9:30-10:00 - enter office
        - 10am-12pm - meeting + develop interfaces
        - 12pm-2pm - lunch break
        - 2pm-6pm - talk w/ game directors, pass documentations to downstream colleagues, and develop interfaces
        - 18:30-19:30 - dinner break
        - 8pm-2am - leave work (unstable)
    - Mostly young employees > casual atmosphere
    - Tasked-based collaboration, collaborate w/ downstream devs > limited company cultural emphasis on collab
    - Challenge related to work
    - High workload > 1/ pressure on efficiency, in comparison to more experienced employees; 2/ pressure on finishing all tasks
    - Cope using better time management techniques or talk to manager to redistribute work
    - Company resources (all one on one): 1/ robotic SPA; 2/ psychological therapy center (^rarely used)
        - No active HR outreach
    - Minimal HR interaction, mostly involved in administrative work
- Category #2:
    - Financial incentives, and peer recognition / tangible compliment, promote morale
    - Prefers to handle stress alone, sometimes utilize robotic SPA
    - HR would align with company > ^little experience w/ HR
- Category #3:
    - Did not report issues personally, but witnessed a colleague left due to conflicts
    - No trust due to prior experience where HR disclosed a verbal harassment complaint + proof incompetence of HR in past experiences (harassment)
    - HR's handling of conflicts is passive and ineffective
    - Would prefer an anonymous channel for privacy concerns
- Category #4:
    - Does not rely on emotional AI support but would use AI assistants for work tasks
    - AI chatbots for anonymous reporting of workplace issues > Quick, pre-programmed reporting options for efficiency.
    - Prefers AI over HR if AI is more polite and responsive.Anonymous
    - Strong preference for anonymous reporting due to privacy concerns.

Interviewee: 27, male, Indian, Management Consultant at McKinsey (4 years, based in the Middle East).

Work Mode: Hybrid, depends on client requirements; mostly on-site, some remote days.

Company Size: Large corporation (~6,000-7,000 employees, 100+ offices globally).

Communication Tools:

- Slack, Zoom, Teams, Outlook, SharePoint (internal tools).
- WhatsApp (used for logistics, not content-related discussions).

Work Routine:

- Starts 8-9 AM, ends 8-9 PM (~12-hour workdays).
- Daily check-ins, client meetings, expert consultations, data analysis, presentations.
- Frequent high-level stakeholder meetings (CXOs, leadership).

Workplace Culture:

- Fast-paced, highly driven, high-pressure environment.
- Collaborative, talented peers from diverse backgrounds.
- Short project cycles (4-12 weeks) = constant change in teams.

Workplace Challenges:

- High expectations & tight deadlines.
- Balancing quality & speed under pressure.
- Reaching out for help is tough—people are busy, response rate varies.

Stress & Emotional Support:

- Work is intellectually demanding → Need better relaxation time.
- Available support: Therapists on call, anonymous helplines, meditation app subscriptions.
- Prefers 1-on-1 support over group sessions for mental well-being.

HR & Workplace Policies:

- Company is employee-focused (since employees = the product in consulting).
- HR is approachable & transparent in policy explanations.
- Prefers anonymous channels for sensitive concerns (Slack Q&A, anonymous surveys).
- Hesitant to seek emotional support → Fear of judgment, even if anonymous.

AI-Powered Support Tool Feedback:

- Comfortable (9/10) using an AI chatbot for emotional support.

- Prefers chatbot over HR forms—feels more conversational, real-time responses.
- Confidentiality & real-world testing are key for AI success.

HR Policy Reform Suggestions:

- More open forums for discussion & feedback loops to leadership.
- Regular employee input collection → Should influence company decisions.

Participant #4:

Interviewee background:, 52, Associate Partner & Account Executive in IT Consulting, 25+ years experience, based in Hyderabad, India.
- Work Mode: Hybrid (3 days in office, 2 remote).
- No major restrictions when working from home.
- Uses VPN & company-provided laptops for security.
- Company Size: Multinational (~100,000 employees in India, presence in 170 countries).
- Communication Tools:
- Slack (internal use), Teams (client interactions), Email, Phone calls, WhatsApp groups (for non-confidential logistics).

Work Routine:
- Starts at 9 AM, ends at 5 PM (sometimes 8-10 PM due to international clients).
- 4+ hours of meetings daily (team calls, client calls, decision-making, strategy discussions).
- People management focus (hiring, attrition risk, resolving issues).
- Flexible work schedule, but some hectic days.

Workplace Culture & Challenges:
- Culture: Open, transparent, flexible.
- Teams self-manage office attendance.
- Collaboration is mostly virtual, limited face-to-face interaction.
- Major challenge: People keep cameras off in virtual calls → Hard to build relationships.

Biggest Workplace Stressors:
- Frequent organizational changes (unclear communication).
- Global collaboration challenges (miscommunication due to remote work).
- High-pressure deadlines, client expectations.
- Work shifts & late-night meetings for international clients.
- Long commute times in India (1-2 hours one way).
- Handling Stress & Emotional Well-Being

Coping Mechanisms:
- Spending time with family & friends.

- Positive mindset—avoiding worst-case thinking.
- Meditation, mindfulness activities.

Company Support:
- Mental health helplines available.
- Some employee-led wellness initiatives (meditation, mindfulness groups).
- Not well-promoted or structured.
- Feels stress management should be better integrated into company culture.
- HR & Workplace Policies

HR Accessibility Issues:
- Direct HR access is limited. Employees must go through managers.
- HR staff-to-employee ratio is too low (~1 HR per 5,000-10,000 employees).

HR Support & Trust:
- Trusts HR to handle issues fairly, believes they favor employees over management.
- Feels workplace conflicts should be handled informally first.
- Anonymous reporting would be beneficial for serious conflicts.

AI-Powered Workplace Support Feedback:
- Excited about an AI-powered emotional support tool (Rates 9-10/10).
- Prefers chatbot over HR forms—wants immediate, real-time support instead of long HR processes.
- AI should act as a first-level resolution tool for stress & conflicts.
- Believes AI is unbiased and could improve workplace mental well-being.
- Suggests adding voice-based support for a more human interaction.

HR & Workplace Policy Reform Suggestions:
- Educate employees about workplace stress & mental health.
- Create more informal networking communities for employees to talk & de-stress.
- Improve HR accessibility—easier ways to reach out (more direct support instead of managers).
- Promote flexible work hours & reduce commute stress.

Step 5: Analysis and Conclusion

After speaking with the four participants, some clear patterns stood out. Stress and workload pressure were common across all roles, though the causes varied. Younger employees struggled with keeping up with experienced colleagues and managing workload expectations, while more senior professionals faced challenges like managing global teams, company changes, and long work hours. Workplace culture also varied—some companies encouraged team bonding, while others had a more task-oriented, high-pressure environment.

HR was a consistent weak point in all interviews. Most participants saw HR as distant, mainly focused on hiring and administrative tasks rather than employee well-being. Trust in HR was low, especially regarding conflict resolution and confidentiality. Several participants mentioned the need for an anonymous reporting system, as they didn't feel comfortable bringing up issues directly.

AI-powered support was met with mixed reactions. Most participants weren't looking for emotional support from AI, but they saw value in AI-driven emotional and conflict support over the current HR reporting tools and processes. Quick, real-time responses and anonymity were the most appealing aspects.

One surprising takeaway was that even when companies offered wellness resources like counseling or monthly meditation sessions, they weren't widely used. This suggests that stress management needs to be better integrated into workplace culture. A tool like WorkMate could help bridge this gap by providing discreet, accessible support in real-time.