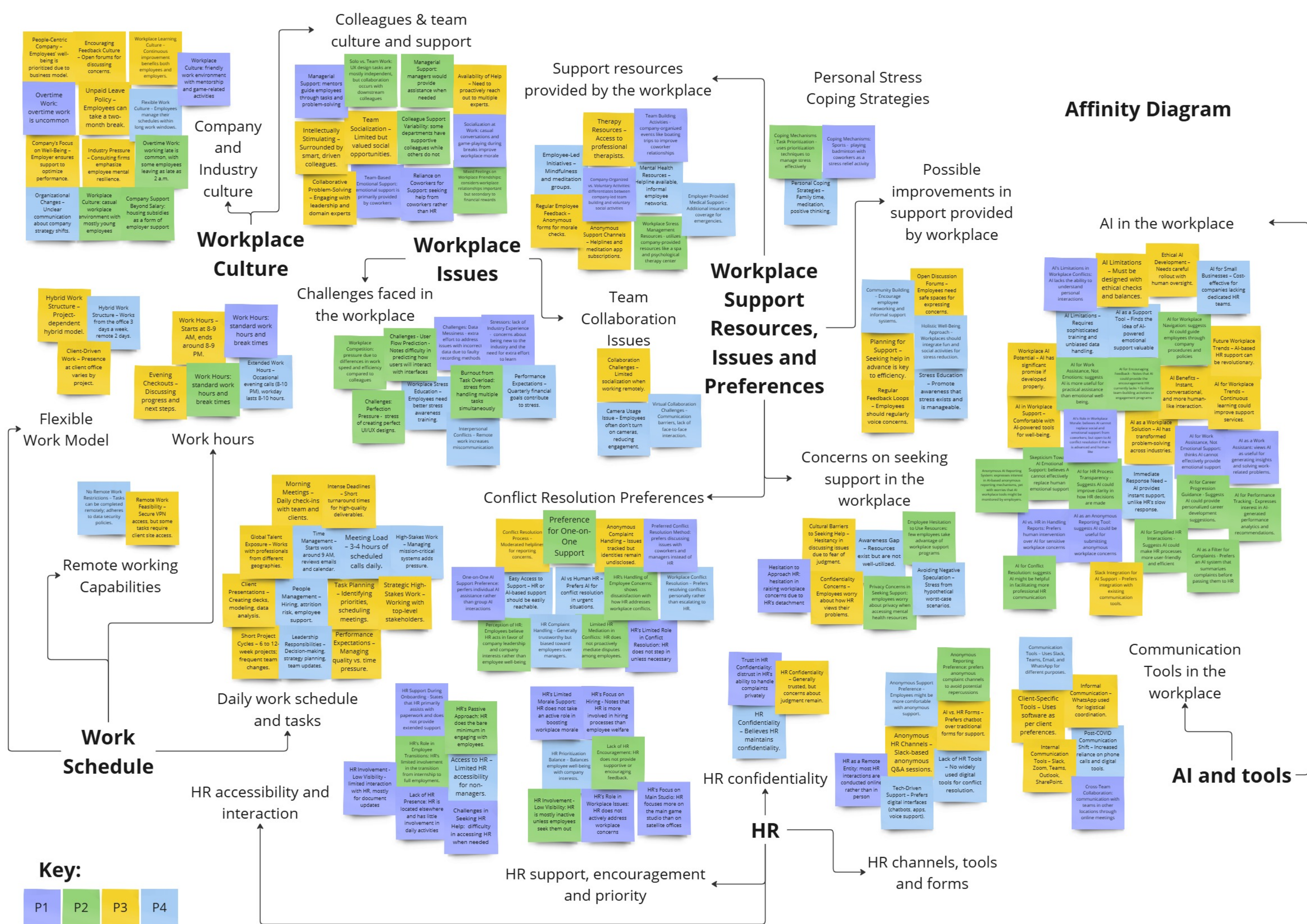


Step 7: Affinity Diagram

Participant Demographics Table

ID	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Job	Industry	YoE	Corp Size
P1	25	Female	East Asian	Data Analyst	Gaming	1	Mid-Sized
P2	23	Female	East Asian	Senior UX Designer	Gaming	1	Big
P3	27	Male	South Asian	Customer Experience consultant	Management Consulting	4	Big
P4	52	Male	South Asian	Associate Partner and Account executive	IT Consulting	25+	Big



Step 8: Detailed Findings

The study was conducted to gather insights into the workplace experiences, challenges, and potential emotional and HR support needs of employees within high-pressure corporate environments. The focus was on understanding how employees manage stress, workplace conflicts, and their interactions with HR, with the goal of refining our proposed AI-powered tool, WorkMate, designed to provide emotional support and assist with HR-related issues.

We used a semi-structured interview method, which allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to share insights that were not confined to predefined questions, while still covering key topics. We analyzed responses to identify common themes, challenges, and the potential role of AI-driven tools in alleviating workplace stress and supporting emotional and HR needs.

The study involved four participants from different corporate sectors:

- **P1:** A 25-year-old female Data Analyst in a mid-sized gaming company with 1 year of experience.
- **P2:** A 23-year-old female Senior UX Designer in a large gaming company with 1 year of experience.
- **P3:** A 27-year-old male Customer Experience Consultant in a large management consulting firm with 4 years of experience.
- **P4:** A 52-year-old male Associate Partner in a large IT consulting firm with over 25 years of experience.

Through our interviews with these four diverse participants, we gathered insights regarding their workplace experiences, emotional well-being, HR interactions, and perceptions about AI-powered workplace support. The following higher-level categories emerged from our research: Workplace Experience & Challenges, Workplace Morale & Emotional Support, Workplace Conflict & HR Interactions, and AI-Powered Workplace Support.

Workplace Experience & Challenges

In terms of workplace experience and challenges, participants shared their varied experiences navigating the demands of their respective jobs. **P1** highlighted the stress of being new to her role, where she struggled to keep up with more experienced colleagues. She explained, “I think that for me, the most stress comes from I’m new to this industry since I am the first year here and I have less experience than other people.” Both **P2** and **P3** identified stress linked to balancing workload and expectations in fast-paced industries. Meanwhile, **P4** provided a particularly detailed perspective on the challenges of coordinating across time zones with a diverse, global team. He emphasized stress related to organizational shifts and managing a global team: “Sometimes the information is not very fluidly moving, and it’s not very transparent about, where, how do you deal with that change... The second is... there are also intrapersonal conflicts... because you’re not meeting in person.” He further noted, “A lot of these interactions are happening over phone calls... so communication barriers could be a big challenge. And sometimes it brings its own stress that I’m not able to articulate myself very well.” This reflected

the general difficulty of working across vast geographic locations, which often leads to miscommunications and additional stress.

P4's stress over communication barriers in remote work shows that virtual communication, especially with long hours, contributed to intrapersonal communication challenges. This issue, beyond the global team setting he mentioned, could also be applied to the WFO trend in the current industry, where communication barriers can be introduced. This is one of the many niche gaps that WorkMate could fulfill. From his response, we could see how this challenge was compounded by the demands of coordinating with team members scattered across various regions. Virtual communication makes it more difficult to articulate and correct mistakes made during communication. Thus, WorkMate could assist with proofreading messages to help avoid such issues.

Workplace Morale & Emotional Support

Workplace morale and emotional support were central to the participants' experiences. Most recognized the value of personal support systems to cope with work-related stress but several pointed out gaps in how formal workplace support systems are structured. **P1** and **P2** shared that stress management was largely self-driven, with occasional support from their managers. They mostly rely on physical activities or self-managing tasks to handle workload pressures. **P2**, for example, explained, "I think the stress comes ultimately from the actions you are forced to make. So what I do is to... complete... the work I would like to do first... the stress is... objectively existing so ...I'm not dealing with it, I'm just... living with it." **P4**, on the other hand, emphasized the critical need for stress education within the workplace. He argued, "My view is that, first, we should acknowledge that there is workplace stress." While informal programs like mindfulness sessions existed, he felt there was a lack of promotion and widespread use of such resources. **P4** commented, "I don't think that our employer is not providing support when needed. It is... definitely available when you need it. My view is that there should be more education in the employees about what is stressful," reflecting his belief that organizations should proactively educate employees about stress management.

P1 and **P2's** responses serve as a perfect callback to **P4's** commentary on the importance of promoting stress education. As employees in the early stages of their careers, both experienced stress but mostly addressed it on their own. As **P4** pointed out, the gap in resource utilization suggests the need for better engagement strategies to encourage employees to use available stress-management tools. One interesting insight he provided is that, despite being stressful, people often do not recognize their stress as something that should be escalated to managers or HR. This could apply to **P1** and **P2**, where they do not view their stress as something to be addressed formally, and where such a gap could be filled by WorkMate as a less intimidating figure for people early in their careers. It could make them feel less humiliated if they need help and guide them to the most appropriate resources.

Workplace Conflict & HR Interactions

Regarding workplace conflict and HR interactions, the participants had mixed experiences and attitudes. **P1** presents a rather unique case regarding relationships with HR, as she works in an office away from the main studio, with little to no presence of HR in her work life. This results in her reliance on coworkers instead. She shared, “I don’t think there’s anything they can help. Since they are not in this office, HR’s help may not be so useful. That’s more about the co-workers in this office that I really need to interact with.” This sentiment was echoed by **P2**, who felt that HR took a rather passive role, doing only the minimum required by their job. She expressed a mistrust of HR’s competence in resolving workplace conflicts, which she believed was evident in many incidents involving her colleagues and herself, despite noting it could be an isolated case. **P3**, however, spoke positively about the HR resources in his organization, such as access to therapists and anonymous reporting systems, which he found helpful. He noted, “We have access to therapists on call that we can reach out to if needed. There’s also systems in place where you can talk to someone anonymously... There’s also subscriptions to meditation apps that can help us de-stress and clear the clutter in terms of... your headspace.” **P4** raised concerns about the limited HR accessibility for non-managers. He observed, “There is very, very less human HR support available today. And it is reducing it significantly more. So I can say, you can have only one HR person [physically]... for maybe 5 to 10 thousand employees.” **P4** emphasized that HR support was concentrated at the managerial level, leaving lower-level employees with limited access to the resources they needed. This highlighted a systemic gap in providing emotional and administrative support to large workforces.

The contrast in HR experiences was notable, but understandable. **P4**’s input highlighted how HR support is scarce for non-managerial employees, underscoring a critical flaw in providing sufficient emotional and administrative support for a large workforce. **P3**’s experiences, though positive, suggest a role for HR that is largely separate from the HR support we envision, which is mainly carried out by medical staff and therapists. This suggests one way to cope with the dilemma **P4** has mentioned, while also indicating the gap WorkMate could fulfill. WorkMate could also assist in **P1**’s scenario by remotely helping, given that HR resources are not available on-site.

AI-Powered Workplace Support

When discussing AI-powered workplace support tools, most participants recognized their potential but voiced concerns about their limitations. **P1** was skeptical of AI’s ability to understand emotions and suggested that AI could be more useful for work-related tasks. She said, “I don’t think the AI knows more about personal interaction than a real person does. So sometimes, the AI only sees the problem itself but doesn’t see the personal interaction behind the problem.” Such sentiment was shared by **P2**, although she was slightly more optimistic due to her loss of trust in HR support. She commented, “It might help to make them speak some proper words with caution.” Nevertheless, she expressed concerns about privacy if such an application were monitored by the company. **P4** was particularly enthusiastic about AI tools, especially for conflict resolution and stress management. He said, “I think it will be very unbiased. It will be taking decisions based on the facts. It could be a first level of conflict resolution tool.” Furthermore, he rated his comfort level with AI for emotional support as “9 out of 10,” explaining that AI could provide immediate responses to stress, unlike HR, which often has slow response times. He elaborated, “The larger corporations have a huge support system and

they can invest money in all of this, but the smaller organization may not have... power to deploy these kinds of things... So for them, these technology enabled options would be a very cost effective solution for them.”

This is particularly insightful, underscoring the value of AI tools not only in large organizations but also in smaller companies that struggle to provide the same level of HR support. This is something we overlooked in the initial product concept statement, where we mainly focused on the possibility of large corporations integrating WorkMate into their current systems. This leads us to rethink the proposed features and how much WorkMate should engage with HR-related roles, how much autonomy it should have, and the ratio of human HR involvement in decision-making.

In conclusion, through these interviews, we gained valuable insights into the challenges faced by employees in high-pressure work environments and their perceptions of both human and AI-driven support. The participants overwhelmingly recognized the value of emotional support systems but noted gaps in existing workplace resources, especially when it came to HR accessibility and responsiveness. AI was seen as a potential game-changer, particularly for providing immediate support in times of stress and conflict, as well as for offering an anonymous channel. However, there remains a need for AI tools to be sophisticated, unbiased, and seamlessly integrated with human support to truly be effective in helping employees manage workplace challenges.