

## Step 1: Initial Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in our interview about workplace experiences, morale, and HR interactions. We are currently developing a product to support employees in managing workplace challenges. Your insights will help us better understand the struggles employees face and how we can address them. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. May I have your consent to record this interview?

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
  - Age, gender, ethnicity, job title, industry, years of experience
- Do you work remotely, in-office, or in a hybrid environment?
- What size is your company, small startup, mid-size, or large corporation?
- What kind of workplace communication tools do you use? (Slack, Teams, email, etc.)
  - Do you have an in-house workplace communication tool at your workplace? If so, what's it like? How does it compare to other tools you've used?
- Category #1: Workplace Experience & Challenges
  - [if time permits go in detail] Can you walk me through a typical workday for you?
  - How would you describe the culture of your workplace?
  - What are the biggest challenges you face in your work environment?
    - Can you share an example when you felt particularly stressed, overwhelmed, or frustrated at work?
    - What aspects of your job contribute the most to workplace stress?
  - Do you feel that your workplace provides enough resources to help employees manage stress? Why or why not?
    - How do you personally cope with workplace stress or conflicts?
  - Have you ever considered leaving a job due to workplace challenges? If so, what were the main reasons?
    - Have you witnessed or experienced workplace burnout? What were the key signs?
  - What types of support do you wish were available to help manage workplace challenges?
- Category #2: Workplace Morale & Emotional Support
  - What factors do you think contribute to high or low morale in your workplace?
  - Can you describe a time when you felt truly supported by your company during a difficult period?
  - Do you feel that your company prioritizes employee well-being? Why or why not?
    - What resources, if any, does your company offer for emotional support? Have you used them?
    - Have you ever felt hesitant to seek emotional support at work? If so, why?
    - How do you think HR could play a more active role in boosting workplace morale?
    - What kinds of workplace policies or practices do you think could improve employee morale and emotional well-being?

- How do you think technology could play a role in improving workplace emotional support?
  - If you could design the ideal emotional support system in your workplace, what would it include?
- Category #3: Workplace Communication & HR Interactions:
  - Have you ever reported a workplace issue or concern? If so, how was the experience?
    - How comfortable do you feel discussing workplace concerns with HR? What influences your level of comfort?
    - How confident are you that HR takes employee concerns seriously and takes appropriate action?
    - What challenges, if any, have you faced when communicating concerns at work?
    - Do you believe your company has an effective system for handling workplace conflicts and concerns? Why or why not?
    - In what ways could HR be more approachable or effective in supporting employees?
    - Have you ever felt that HR was more aligned with management than with employees? If so, how did that impact your trust in HR?
  - If an AI-powered tool could assist with emotional support and HR interactions, what would make you feel comfortable using it?
  - What concerns, if any, do you have about AI handling sensitive workplace issues?
  - What features would be most useful to you in an AI-driven workplace support tool?
- If you could change one thing about how workplace emotional support is handled, what would it be?
- What reforms would you like to see in HR policies or workplace culture to improve employee well-being?
- Do you have any additional thoughts or insights that you'd like to share?

## **Step 2: Conduct Pilot interview**

Notes taken during pilot interview:

- Judgment-free virtual support for workplace stress, conflicts, and HR interactions.
- Targeted at high-pressure industries (investment banking, healthcare, etc.).
- Helps employees hesitant to communicate with HR.
- 25, Indian, Male, Site Reliability Engineer, 4 years of experience.
- Works mostly in-office due to access restrictions.
- Uses Teams & email for workplace communication.
- Good collaborative culture, team is supportive.

- Stress-relief resources exist (yoga, stress portals) but not well-advertised.
- Prefers one-on-one emotional support over group sessions.
- Takes time off or seeks help from teammates.
- Company provided flexibility during personal crises (WFH option, workload management).
- Has not contacted HR for emotional support—redirected to generic HR articles instead of tailored help.
- Would prefer an anonymous outreach option to HR.
- Avoids official complaints due to fear of ostracization.
- Trained on conflict resolution tools, but never seen them in use.
- Feels official complaint forms are too intimidating—a chatbot format would be better.
- Could help raise issues in a stress-free way.
- Needs strict confidentiality & natural conversation flow.
- Prefer chat-based reporting over forms.
- Working hours regulation—key cause of stress.
- Ensure HR policies focus on employees, not just company interests.

### **Step 3: Update interview protocol based on insights from Pilot interview**

#### **Introduction & Consent**

Thank you for participating in our interview about workplace experiences, morale, and HR interactions. We are currently developing a product to support employees in managing workplace challenges. Your insights will help us better understand the struggles employees face and how we can address them. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. May I have your consent to record this interview?

#### **Demographic Questions**

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
  - (Age, gender, ethnicity, job title, industry, years of experience)
- Do you work remotely, in-office, or hybrid?
  - If hybrid, any restrictions on WFH?
- What is the size of your company? (Startup, mid-size, large corporation)
- What workplace communication tools do you use? (Slack, Teams, email, etc.)
- Any in-house communication tools? How do they compare to external ones?

#### **Category #1: Workplace Experience & Challenges**

- Can you walk me through a typical workday?
- How would you describe your workplace culture and team collaboration?
- What are the biggest challenges you face at work?
- What aspects of your job contribute the most to workplace stress?
- Have you ever considered leaving due to workplace challenges? If so, why?

- How do you personally cope with workplace stress or conflicts?
- Does your company offer resources for managing stress? Are they effective?
  - Do you feel workplace stress support is adequately promoted?
  - Do you prefer one-on-one support or group sessions? Why?
- How do working hours policies in your country impact employee well-being?

#### Category #2: Workplace Morale & Emotional Support

- What factors influence workplace morale in your company?
- Can you describe a time when you felt truly supported by your employer?
- Have you ever hesitated to seek emotional support at work? Why?
  - Do you think HR prioritizes employee well-being or the company's interests more?
- If HR could improve morale & emotional support, what changes would you suggest?
- Would you be more comfortable reaching HR through anonymous channels?

#### Category #3: Workplace Conflict & HR Interactions

- Have you ever reported a workplace issue? How was the experience?
- Do you trust HR to handle complaints confidentially? Why or why not?
- What challenges have you faced when raising concerns at work?
- Do you feel HR is more aligned with employees or management?
- Would you be more likely to report workplace conflicts if done anonymously?
- Have you witnessed others use HR conflict resolution tools? Did they help?

#### Category #4: AI-Powered Workplace Support (Workmate Tool)

- Would you feel comfortable using an AI-powered emotional support tool?
- How do you feel about AI handling sensitive workplace concerns?
- What features would you want in an AI-driven support tool?
- Would you prefer AI chatbot-based conflict resolution over HR forms?

#### Final Wrap-Up

- If you could change one thing about workplace emotional support, what would it be?
- What reforms would you suggest for HR policies to better support employees?
- Any additional thoughts or suggestions?

#### Changes Implemented Based on Pilot Interview Feedback

- Expanded probing questions to individual questions
  - This gives more significance to such questions, and allows for more detailed responses. For example, we now directly ask about personal experiences with

workplace burnout, leaving a position, rather than addressing it as a follow-up probe.

- Added questions related to working hours
  - We recognize that varying work schedules and expectations can be significant sources of workplace stress..
- Enhanced focus on HR's roles
  - Workplace morale is closely tied to HR's roles, so we aim to understand how our product can support HR departments' work while maintaining a strong employee-centric focus. For example, we add questions about anonymous reporting options to address concerns about retaliation when raising workplace issues.
- Refined AI-powered tool questions
  - We include specific questions such as chatbot interfaces versus traditional forms, and addressing data confidentiality concerns.
- Strengthened one-on-one vs. group support question
  - We add one probing question on form of company support, helping to understand how employees prefer to receive company assistance and communicate about workplace challenges.