

South Africans ranked as most distressed population

It's no secret that constant workplace stress can be a severe issue, and lead to poor employee morale or mental health. The third annual *Mental State of the World* report, by Sapien Labs, assessed the wellbeing of nearly 500,000 people across 64 countries.



Source: [Pexels](#)

Among the countries studied, South Africans were ranked with the highest percentage (35.8%) of the population who were distressed or struggling with their mental health.

As we near the end of year, which can typically be a stressful period in the workplace, and the conclusion of Mental Health Awareness Month in South Africa it's the perfect time for company leaders to assess how they can foster a better work environment and support staff wellbeing.

There are various tangible ways to improve employee wellbeing. Here industry leaders unpack their suggestions.

Creating safe work environments

It's encouraging that mental health appears to finally be getting the attention it deserves, particularly by employers across various sectors. However, according to Sadag one in six people in the working population are affected by anxiety and depression every year, yet two out of three of those struggling won't disclose this.

“It’s good that more companies are offering their employees mental-health support in the form of benefits and programmes, such as additional leave days and free counselling sessions. But we need to ensure that we’re also creating an environment - and indeed a culture - of wellness and wellbeing.

“On a practical level this means creating work spaces where people feel safe, where they are treated fairly and with respect, where a level of job security can be expected and where there is a guarantee that issues - specifically pertaining to mental health - will be treated with the necessary discretion and empathy,” says Linda Saunders, director of solution engineering at Salesforce.

Offer support to staff and lead by example

In the hospitality industry and travel sector most employees have roles that are customer-facing. These can be very stressful at times in terms of factors like handling multiple customer needs at once and working seamlessly across different departments to meet customer requirements.

To ensure their teams are equipped to handle the daily stressors of their jobs, the Radisson Hotel Group has implemented dedicated wellbeing support for staff.

“We know that a hotel cannot be defined by its physical building or location alone. It’s our team members, who deliver world-class service and breathe life into each guest experience, that make our hotels more than just brick and mortar, so looking after their wellbeing is key,” says Tim Cordon, chief operating officer of the Middle East and Africa for Radisson Hotel Group.

“To help people find fulfillment in growing their careers, we’ve implemented Radisson Academy certifications, which help teams upskill on functional and strategic capabilities that can accelerate their careers.



The productivity vs employee well-being conundrum

Norah Sehunoe 26 Oct 2023



“We believe that it’s imperative to the success of our business to have opportunities like these in place to provide support where needed. We also ensure that our teams know they can reach out if any other support is needed.

“Furthermore, it’s paramount in any industry for business leaders to lead by example. I encourage people to cultivate passions outside of their careers that will impact their wellbeing positively.

“For me that is about staying consistent with road cycling, which allows me to disconnect from work, get some exercise in, and be present in the moment of enjoying the scenery of the ride route,” Cordon concludes.

The power of nature in rejuvenating teams

It takes approximately 120 minutes of weekly exposure to natural settings, such as woodlands or coastlines, to boost wellbeing and a healthier mindset.

A 2019 study of 20,000 people by the European Centre for Environment & Human Health at the University of Exeter, revealed that the two hours of time spent in nature could be spread out over the course of a week or done in one go.

Being immersed in nature within urban spaces is just one way to achieve benefits; companies can reinvigorate teams through team building, think tanks and conferences in more tranquil environments.

"In today's fast-paced corporate culture, we are seeing a growing trend of executives and corporate teams wanting to explore company getaways in relaxing wild terrains, such as the Kruger National Park.

"The world-famous beauty of the park provides teams with a serene backdrop to take a break from the traditional confines of inner-city work conferences and events. This awe-inspiring untouched landscape inspires innovative conversation, encourages adventure, fosters a deeper sense of team unity and provides a one-of-a-kind environment for team-building activities," explains Anton Gillis, chief executive officer at Kruger Gate Hotel.



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25 Oct 2023



Technology innovation in aiding mental support

Over the last few years, VR technologies has been making significant inroads into the health and wellbeing space to enhance health training and patient care, and of course, to support mental health.

Sea Monster Entertainment has seen first-hand how these incredible VR innovations can create powerful tools to effectively address issues like stress in the workplace and PTSD as they have delivered their own VR solution in this space in collaboration with Maestro games.

"The level of sensory immersion that VR offers is truly unmatched by any other technology that we have at our disposal, so there is no doubt that we will see a great deal more innovation in VR over the next few years as its potential is currently far from fully realised.

"While it is absolutely essential to explore the opportunities presented by VR to effectively intervene in the health sector to aid matters relating to health and mental health, it's equally vital to consider more accessible and scalable solutions that can reach a broader audience.

"Mobile solutions offer an avenue to achieve this which would ensure that the benefits of mental-health support are accessible to everyone, regardless of their geographical location or their level of access to specialised equipment," says Amy Duncan, Sea Monster Entertainment's sales manager.

Foster productivity boosting that aids stress relief

Working more efficiently using tech can help relieve workers of the mental load caused as a result of weekly deadlines and tasks. These tools could include productivity boosters such as weekly planners, grammar or writing tools and workplace software. Some employers even believe that using technology to monitor employee productivity can aid in getting more work done.



Panda's mental health rewards programme is here

22 Sep 2023



But Andrew Bourne, regional Manager - Africa, of workplace software firm Zoho warns, "While the rise of employee monitoring software is understandable, particularly in a post-pandemic world where remote and hybrid working have become the norm, all too often it monitors the wrong things.

"Good task-management software, for instance, will easily allow you to manage and track the lifecycle of whatever projects

you're working on. Even better ones won't just monitor performance against set tasks but will also make it easier for employees to be productive by converting emails into tasks, for instance.”

What's important is that any productivity tools used, allow employers to filter out employees who are overburdened and distribute work evenly and also keep track of important key performance indicators (KPIs) to reduce stress, relieve mental loads and boost performance.

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