

LEADERSHIP DIGEST

Asia | November 2021

INTRODUCTION

Previous editions of Leadership Digest over the past two years have explored the impact of Covid-19 on leadership teams, operating models and longer-term strategic business ambitions. We have highlighted how businesses have been forced to rapidly adopt new ways of doing things and, in many cases, drive meaningful organisational change.

For much of 2021 there has been a significant focus on the pace of execution against innovation, digital and transformation agendas. In this edition we consider the impact that this ongoing uncertainty and intensity has had on employee wellbeing.

As many organisations look to embrace more flexible and remote working practices, so we have seen increased debate and receptiveness among leadership teams in acknowledging and prioritising employee wellbeing and mindfulness. There is recognition that leaders and organisations can play a significant role in their employees' ability to manage stress and beat burnout and that this is not simply good for individuals, it also supports the goals of talent management functions to increase engagement, improve retention and ultimately, enhance organisational performance. However, building resilience into organisational DNA is something which takes time, requires support and advocacy at a leadership level and requires consistency. In a competitive talent environment, this is something candidates are themselves asking of prospective employers.

In collaboration with **Rachel Austen of Austen Advisory** who specialises in stress measurement and resilience building, here we share some insights and practical tips into what companies could be doing.

Why should businesses be concerned?

Austen Advisory's data since January 2021 points to a 10% drop in resilience levels in APAC employees. This places the average employee in the 'denying' zone - the void between burnout & depression and thriving. This manifests itself in low motivation to work, a low sense of purpose and cynicism, for example around new company initiatives. In discussing this, Rachel comments that "in the psychological literature, it is also called 'languishing'. Employers should take note - having large proportions of employees in this state presents significant risk through low productivity, presenteeism, disengagement and, often, toxic environments. Attitudes tend to be infectious and can easily influence and bring down others".

A standard for measuring resilience

A deeper dive into the data indicates three primary causes as follows:

Telepressure and urgency - **58%** of employees are fixated on checking messages at all times of day and report feeling a constant sense of urgency. This constant high level of demand is taking its toll.

The gap between what leaders say and do – in spite of a large proportion of employees reporting that leadership figures have articulated that it is ok to make mistakes and learn from them, **56%** still feel corporate pressure to be perfect. They take feedback/ criticism personally and agonise over what they should have done differently.

Avoidance of difficult conversations - **53%** of employees report not feeling comfortable talking about issues and asking for help, perhaps fearing the consequences if they do so. To add to this issue, **71%** of middle managers report avoiding tackling difficult issues head on, hoping problems will go away.

What can organisations do?

Despite well-meaning efforts, many organisations are still taking a reactive and 'one size fits all' approach to tackling employee stress and mental health issues. Many employees, including senior managers, lack awareness of the degree of impact stress is having on their wellbeing or the language to specifically describe their feelings. Moreover, whilst there has

been some improvement, there is still a great stigma attached to cries for help and admitting struggling to cope.

More progressive employers are tackling stress head on utilising a data driven approach and embedding resilience management into their existing management systems. There is an emerging trend in using scientific tools, like AURA (Austen Advisory's proprietary tool), to measure stress and provide proper insight into the symptoms with personal, team and management reporting.

This approach allows for accurate issue identification across teams and geographies and, most importantly, it enables a proactive and preventative approach to managing risk from stress – it is far easier to address issues early before they become more complex problems.

Conclusion

Stress is something being faced by individuals across the corporate hierarchy – no one is immune, and businesses are increasingly recognising the need to identify areas of concern early, offer channels for safe disclosure to their workforce and take action.

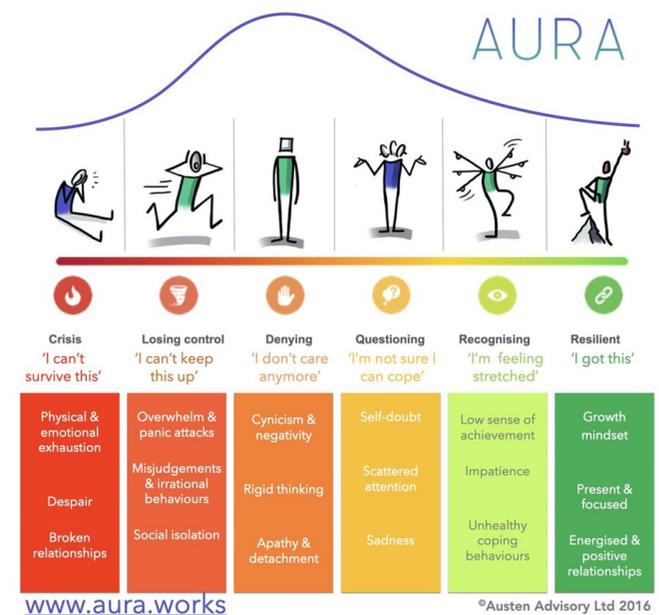
Scientific data indicates many APAC employees are feeling depleted and demoralised, lacking passion and drive, which places organisational resilience at risk.

The recruitment and retention of the best people and the desire to be an 'employer of choice' is a major competitive frontier. Progressive employers should

tackle stress head on, deploy a preventative and data driven approach, and embed resilience management as part of their normal management systems.

AURA Model: The Burnout-Resilience Continuum

AURA is a tool to measure resilience and provide data-driven insights into stress. AURA ranks resilience levels on a well-defined continuum ranging from fully resilient to crisis. The curved line represents the benchmark - the average APAC employee is currently in the 'Denying' zone





Rachel Austen is a chartered occupational psychologist with over 16 years of experience working for two leading consultancies in the field, SHL and Mercer, providing advice to many large organisations in addressing their people issues. She is a specialist in psychometric assessment, leadership development and resilience. Having spent 10 years working in Singapore and Hong Kong, she has a wide variety of experience and insight into different cultures.

She now runs her own consultancy with a focus on stress management and resilience, using a proprietary tool entitled AURA.

She has delivered programmes for many multinational organisations in Asia Pacific and Europe including BBC Studios, Booking.com, Citibank, Standard Chartered, Morgan Stanley, Prudential, DLA Piper, Deloitte, International Hotels Group, KPMG, Kuehne Nagel, M&S, JEB Group, John Lewis, Moët Hennessy, Vodafone, the UK Prison Service and the NHS.

Leathwaite are hosting a virtual roundtable with Rachel in **November** - If you would like to find out more about the event: [Beating Burn-out a Data Driven Approach, click here.](#)

LEATHWAITE

Leathwaite is an award-winning executive search and leadership talent advisory firm, delivering an interconnected range of executive search, executive interim and data & insight services.

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The Global HR Survey is back for 2022

HR in 2021 has been almost unrecognizable. [Click here to have your say in Leathwaite's latest Global HR Survey for 2022.](#)

67%

...of HR leaders accurately forecast in our 2021 report that 2 - 3 days in the office per week would be the new normal.

