



## **CMHA HK COVID-19 BULLETIN Q&A**

### **KIRSTY HILL, HEAD OF TALENT MANAGEMENT IN APR, OLIVER WYMAN**

#### **Can you speak a bit about the nature of your business and how your teams have been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak?**

Oliver Wyman is a global management consultancy with offices across Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Americas. Our clients are most of the largest global corporations, as well as working for governments and non-profits.

We rely on being able to move our experts around the globe to deliver projects for our clients. One of the biggest impacts for us is that given all the global restrictions now in place, it would not be safe for our employees or clients if we did that. Many of our clients are also working from home, and have their own struggles with that. We have needed to find new ways to collaborate globally to serve our clients while keeping our employees safe and also navigating the ever-changing regulations around what we can and can't do (social distancing, airports closing, work from home mandates, home schooling children etc).

#### **Please can you share with us what measures Oliver Wyman have put in place in light of COVID-19?**

At the heart of all our decisions has been putting the wellbeing of our people first. At the heart of that, we have ensured they are empowered to make decisions, within reason, that best manage their personal circumstances. Globally Oliver Wyman were quick to learn and leverage the things we put in place in Asia, so as COVID started to spread across the Middle East the HR teams worked together to share best practice and create new policies to help our people. We are generally a flexible firm and will do what is needed to make life easier for anyone, however in times like this we thought it was important to have things written down.

We quickly formalised a hardship policy for our consultants who were working away from

home and due to ever-changing regulations, government and client procedures were not able to return home as much as they would have liked. This meant that they could use that money to make their lives easier without needing to get approval for expenditure.

As the situation became widespread, we did impose a global travel ban for all business travel and the only people who are now travelling are those repatriating home. We also made an early commitment to all our employees globally that while the health crisis continues, their jobs will be safe.

We ramped up all our working from home support, allowing people to expense monitors/ keyboards etc. to make working more comfortable and set aside budget for people in need of emergency child care. We have also allowed all employees to flex their schedules

to suit all of the various new demands being placed on them.

From a mental health and wellbeing standpoint, we have done several things, most of which were in the pipeline but were re-prioritised given the urgency of the situation. Mental health at Oliver Wyman has been an Executive Committee level priority this year, led by our Global head of Financial Services and Global head of Human Capital. The team did a number of things, including:

- Creating content for our wellness hub located on our intranet, specifically around looking after your mental health while working from home, sharing stories of what others had found helpful.
- Training all Partners and HR teams on how to spot the signs of mental ill-health and what to do about it, conducted by Health and Life sciences partner team who are former medical practitioners.

- Setting up a mental health first responder team, and publishing the team members names and pictures, which allows people who may need to talk about mental health issues the opportunity to do so.

- By the end of April, each of our offices globally will have held a Mental Health and Wellness workshop, which is being led by our central wellness team and has the aim for everyone in every office to know that there is support and resources available to them and it's ok to have different feelings in situations like this.

We have also launched a 'Home Together' initiative, the aim of this is to ensure that each person in the firm speaks to someone about something non work-related each week. It's a nice way for people to feel connected to the business and for us to also spot if people are not doing so well.

## **We have heard that you have launched lots of engaging virtual initiatives in order to support your employees to stay mentally healthy during this time. Please could you share these with us?**

Oliver Wyman is a social company, we hold weekly happy hours and events, plus our teams on client sites will interact a lot socially. This is something we wanted to keep going.

We have encouraged people to move their voice only calls to video calls on Zoom, to build connectivity. As part of that we launched APR-wide challenges, such as capturing the full call smiling and waving for the camera, these were then circulated in real time around the region. Teams have also done many things: for example on my daily HR COVID stand up (Zoom call), we have a challenge each day, we have seen the team wear silly hats, have a coffee mug competition, display a background of their favourite cartoon character or eat breakfast together.

On an office wide scale, we have had various virtual 'social events', including an emoji film quiz, Pictionary and smaller hang outs. Zoom has been our saviour here and does have some cool technology allowing people to still socialise together. It's also made people more human, I have spoken to a lot of kids and spouses over the last few weeks, which has been nice.

On a firmwide scale, we have also seen virtual workout classes, daily coffee catch-ups and group mediation sessions. We have also seen an uptake in the number of non-work related Slack channels popping up, we now have channels dedicated to cooking during COVID, cats, dogs, and music playlists...

## **What would you say have been the biggest stress points from employees to date?**

I think the biggest one for us all is just not knowing how bad things might get and when they will end. Not knowing when this will end, not knowing the impact on our lives both personally and professionally when it does.

Also adjusting to the new normal, for example working virtually while trying to juggle home schooling and work, feeling guilty for being at home but not really being 100% present, not being able to switch off at the end of the working day are all things we have needed to help our people work through.

## **How is Oliver Wyman keeping employees up to date and who is the information coming from?**

This is coming from several sources and where possible is being centrally collated and checked to ensure that messages are complimentary and being cascaded well. We are seeing communications from our parent company weekly, global OW and APR leadership also on a weekly basis. We are also encouraging the office leaders to keep sharing information where possible and relevant about office specific issues. Much of the smaller group communication, especially more informal, happens on WeChat.

The info being shared ranges from how and where the business is being globally impacted and what we are doing about it, down to how a new expense policy is being interpreted by each office.

We have encouraged anyone sending wider communications out to do this constantly and to ensure that the format is varied: our CEO is recording videos which he is sharing via our internal system and also podcasts. Department leads are having virtual daily stand up meetings to keep employees up to speed on changes in real time and office leaders are sharing email and Slack updates and also holding virtual session on Fridays to engage the office and share key messages.

We have encouraged everyone to be open, vulnerable and generous with their personal info and anecdotes over the last few months, it's important to us that people see the leadership as human and approachable.

## **We have interviewed Peter Reynolds about his experience with COVID-19. Can you offer a perspective from being a colleague of his?**

It was a shock when he sent the message saying he was unwell as we had been at an all staff call earlier in the day which he was presenting part of. After Peter sent the email to the office, we tasked one of the other senior partners in the HK office to go and check in with those people still working from the office. We thought it was important that people could express their concerns in real time. Luckily Peter was clear in his communications around where he had and had not been so most people just wanted to ensure he was OK. We're just glad that Peter was one of the lucky ones and had been keeping us posted on his progress throughout his hospital stay.

## In relation to the above, what advice would you give to companies who have yet to go through an experience like this (from a supporting their and your mental health)?

To make sure people feel like they have some control over their working environment, giving them a sense of agency. They are not in control of very much at the moment so being able to have an honest conversation around any personal adjustments needed to allow them to be an engaged family member, friend and employee is important.

Continuing to stress that everyone at this time has things going on you don't know, and to cut them some slack. To not judge someone by how they are feeling or handling the situation, this is impacting people differently, so while we

all have policies and procedures in place for most things, flex them to allow for people to be individuals.

Keep talking to them - as long as you are clear and consistent in your communications, you can't provide people with too much good quality communication. If they feel that they are not getting the information from you, they will start to make this up and once rumours start, they are hard to stop.

Try and give people as much info around what happens next as you can, for example if you are not planning to lay people off, tell them. If you have won a new project/client, tell them. If you are planning on having an all office call next week, tell them why, what you will be covering and allow people to submit questions in advance.

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**City Mental Health  
Alliance HK**

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong is a collaborative venture founded by city businesses. Championed by senior leaders, the Alliance is business led and expert guided and aims to create a culture of good mental health for workers in the city of Hong Kong, share best practice and increase mental health understanding.

Visit [www.cmhahk.org](http://www.cmhahk.org) for further information.

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