

SOCIAL DIALOGUE FORUM

EDITION 2

Compassionate Workplaces: Normalizing Mental Health, Building Resilient Organizations.

REPORT

Thursday, May 29th, 2025

"To all those who participated—not only with their presence, but with intention and commitment, thank you. Your contributions, reflections, and engagement made this forum a space of meaningful dialogue, shared learning, and collective vision. Together, we are not just imagining better workplaces, we are building them."

Solid Minds Counselling Clinic Team.

1. Introduction

Solid Minds Counselling Clinic convened the second edition of the Social Dialogue Forum to mark International Labour Day and to further elevate awareness around mental health and mental well-being—essential yet often overlooked aspects of our lives. The forum brought together leaders from public institutions, human resource professionals, mental health experts, civil society, and development partners to reflect on the urgent need to embed compassion and wellness in the fabric of workplace culture. It aimed to challenge conventional norms, shift the focus toward resilience over dependency, and foster workplaces where all individuals are empowered to thrive together.

"Resilient organizations are not built on systems or outputs. They are built on people. People who are human, who have limits, and who thrive when they feel seen, supported, and safe."— **Sam Munderere**,
CEO and Co-Founder, Solid Minds
Counselling Clinic



2. Mental Health and the Workplace: A Global and Local Perspective

Mental health has become a defining concern for modern workplaces globally. According to the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work), over 15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder. Depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy over \$1 trillion in lost productivity annually.

In Rwanda, data from the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC) shows that Gasabo District records the highest prevalence of mental health conditions in the country. One in eight people in Rwanda are estimated to be living with a mental illness, yet access to structured support in workplaces remains limited. Long working hours, stigma, limited mental health literacy, and minimal HR policies addressing psychological well-being are key contributors.

The Social Dialogue Forum arose from the recognition that thriving economies must prioritize the emotional resilience and psychological safety of their workforce.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work>

3. Objectives of the Forum

- Demystify mental health and reduce stigma within the workplace.
- Unpack what compassionate workplaces require in practice.
- Highlight the human and economic costs of ignoring mental health.
- Share practical models for wellness integration across sectors.
- Advocate for policy reform and mental health insurance coverage.



4. Highlights and Key Moments

4.1 Opening Remarks – Sam Munderere, CEO and Co-founder of Solid Minds

Mr. Munderere shared a deeply personal journey of emotional exhaustion and healing that inspired the founding of Solid Minds. His story underscored a powerful message:

"Mental health is not a hidden conversation. It is the foundation of how we live and work."

He challenged participants to build cultures where kindness is institutionalized—not just expressed in words but embedded in policies, leadership, and peer support.

4.2 Understanding and Reimagining Mental Health in the Workplace

Speaker



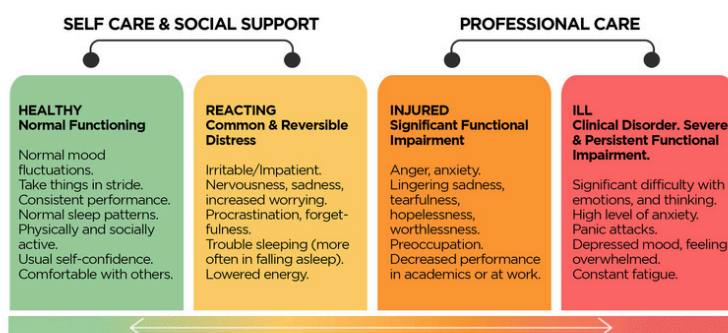
Freya Zaninka De Clercq

Clinical Psychologist,
Solid Minds



This session explored the **mental health continuum**, addressing the spectrum from wellness to crisis, and distinguishing resilience from dependency. Participants reflected on these concepts through **experiential exchanges**, where they acted out common workplace dynamics.

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM



STATES OF MENTAL HEALTH

Thriving

Feeling mentally strong, engaged, and resilient.

Managing

Coping well but experiencing some stress or fatigue

Struggling

Persistent stress, difficulty concentrating, or disrupted sleep

In Crisis

Overwhelming distress, anxiety, or burnout affecting daily function

Insights from exchanges:

- Employees fear that vulnerability may jeopardize their professional reputation.
- Supervisors feel ill-equipped and unsupported when responding to mental health concerns.
- Compassionate dialogue fosters psychological safety and collaborative problem solving.



*“A human being is not a machine.
Let’s work it out together.”*



You can find the Presentation of this session [here](#).

4.3 Framing the Dialogue: The Rise of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Mental Health in Rwanda’s Workplaces

Speaker



Dr. Jean Damascene Iyamuremye,
Director of Psychiatric Care
Unit, RBC



This session emphasized the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and their intersection with mental health in Rwandan workplaces. The following key insights were highlighted:

- 1 in 8 people globally lives with a mental illness.
- Rwandan workplaces face rising stress, burnout, and cases of NCDs like hypertension and diabetes.
- Mental health challenges cause absenteeism, presenteeism, and increased risk of accidents.

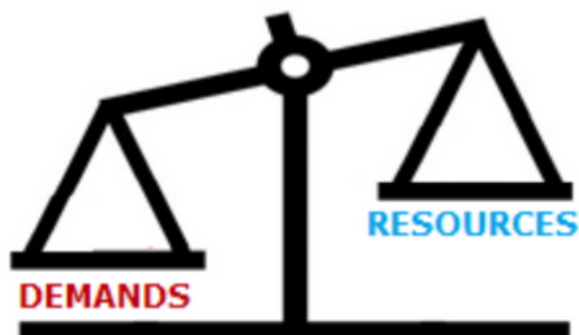
Stress in the workplace also was a focal point of Dr. Iyamuremye’s presentation. He explained that stress arises when pressure outweighs the resources available to cope. Without early support, this imbalance can lead to burnout and disengagement.

Dr. Iyamuremye closed by urging institutions to prioritize stress management as a core responsibility. He emphasized that employees need practical tools, responsive systems, and compassionate leadership to navigate daily demands and truly thrive in the modern workplace.

Stress-Definition

$$S = P > R$$

Stress occurs when the **pressure (demands)** is greater than the resource



Recommendations

- Promote flexible work models to reduce pressure and accommodate varying needs.
- Integrate wellness into institutional strategic planning and daily operations.
- Train leaders and managers to recognize early signs of stress and mental health challenges

By taking these steps, organizations can create environments that reduce stress, support recovery, and empower employees to thrive even in high-demand settings.

You can find the Presentation of this session [here](#).



4.4 Human and Economic Costs of Ignoring Mental Health in the Workplace

Speaker

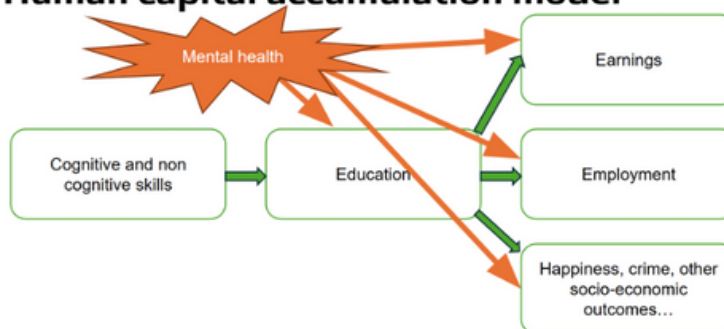


Dr. Marinella Leone
University of Pavia / LEAP Bocconi



Mental health is not just a well-being issue; it has measurable consequences for productivity, inclusion, and economic resilience. Dr. Leone opened her presentation with a strong reminder that untreated mental health conditions lead to significant economic losses, including reduced workplace performance, absenteeism, and long-term unemployment.

Human capital accumulation model



She drew from development economics and LEAP Bocconi's global research to demonstrate that investing in mental health yields powerful returns by improving labor market stability, reducing poverty risks, and enhancing organizational cohesion.

Dr. Leone presented compelling data from development economics research, which highlights that:

- Poor mental health reduces income levels and long-term employment.
- It negatively affects social inclusion and workplace trust.
- Economically, inaction on mental health creates avoidable strain on productivity.

"Mental health is not only about kindness. It's about sustainability, equity, and national progress."

Dr. Leone concluded by urging institutions to embed mental wellness into strategic planning, not as a side benefit but as a core driver of social and economic development.

You can find the Presentation of this session [here](#).

4.5 Introducing Solid Minds Vision for Compassionate Spaces

Speaker



Nadiya Tucker

Clinical Social Worker, Solid Minds

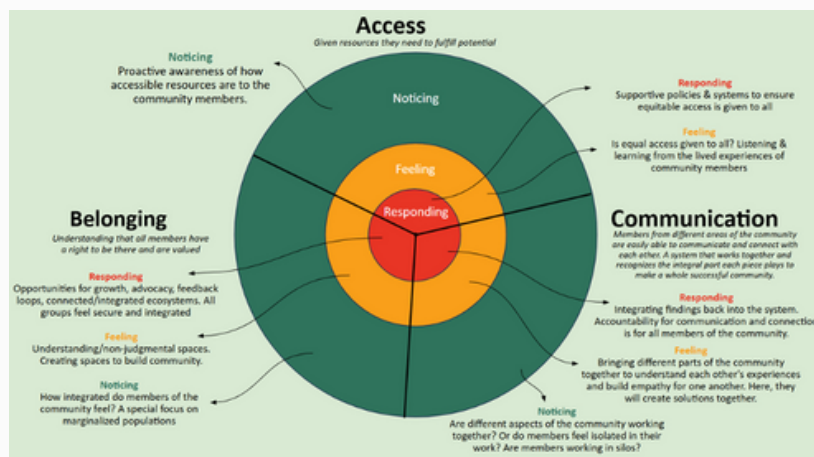


This session introduced the Solid Minds Model for Compassionate Spaces, grounded in the ABCs: Access, Belonging, and Communication & Connection.

Strengthening Compassionate Spaces		
The Solid Minds Compassionate Model (The ABCs)		
Access	Belonging	Communication & Connection
Providing resources needed to fulfil potential for all community members	Understanding that all members have a right to be there and are valued	Entities within the ecosystem understand the experience of other members and feel interconnected/ integrated
Notice: Proactively asking questions to understand the experience of community members - becoming aware and/or recognizing.		
Feel: Joining with community members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listening and learning - Solutions generated 		
Respond: Integrating learnings and feedback into the ecosystem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each community member holds a piece of responsibility - Shared responsibility vs the responsibility of a few individuals 		

The model highlights the importance of:

- Ensuring everyone has access to the resources needed to fulfill their potential.
- Creating spaces where all individuals feel they belong and are valued.
- Strengthening communication and connection across departments to foster mutual understanding, alignment, and collaboration.



Nadiya emphasized that compassion must be systemic, moving beyond individual goodwill toward institutional structures that proactively notice needs, feel with empathy, and respond with integrated solutions. The model promotes shared responsibility for mental wellness and stresses that truly compassionate spaces support growth, healing, and productivity for all.

You can find the Presentation of this session [here](#).



5. Panel Discussion Recap: From Policy to Practice – Cultivating Compassion and Peer Support at Work

The panel brought together professionals from different sectors to explore what compassion looks like beyond policies. Moderated by Dr. Jean Pierre Ndagijimana (Solid Minds), the panel featured Patrick Kananga (Chief Labour and Decent Work Administrator at MIFOTRA), Lucy Moindi (Chief Operating Officer at Harambee Rwanda), and Salim Wangabi (Solid Minds).

Key insights:

- **Compassion is action.** It's how we listen, support, and respond in moments of need, not just how we feel.
- **Peer support matters.** Colleagues play a vital role in noticing distress early and offering informal but impactful help.
- **Institutionalize care.** Supporting mental health is not a favor; it's a responsibility. It must be built into organizational systems.
- **Leadership sets the tone.** When leaders show empathy, it creates a ripple effect across teams.
- **Prevention is powerful.** Healthy workplaces focus on anticipating stressors, not just reacting to burnout.

“Let's move from goodwill to institutional responsibility. Mental health must be part of how we operate—every day, for everyone.”

Key messages from panelists:



Lucy Moindi

“When employees feel supported, they stay committed and go the extra mile.”

“Mental health is a constitutional right. Let's embed wellness structurally: prevention, protection, promotion, and support must live in our workplace culture”.



Patrick Kananga



Salim Wangabi

“A compassionate workplace is not an event, it's a daily commitment to listen and lead with care”.



“The gap between awareness and action is still too wide. So, what will we do differently tomorrow?”

Dr. Jean Pierre Ndagijimana

The moderator concluded the panel discussion with a reflection question and a call to action:

6. Key Takeaways

The forum offered a wide range of insights drawn from lived experiences, expert research, and open discussions. These takeaways highlight what truly matters in creating workplaces that are not only productive, but compassionate and sustainable:

- Mental health is foundational to organizational performance.
- Compassion improves team cohesion, retention, and loyalty.
- Psychological safety begins with trust and communication.
- Ignoring mental wellness has measurable economic costs.
- Leadership, structure, and peer support are crucial to institutional change.

These insights are not just reflections; they serve as a practical compass for designing healthier, more human-centered work environments.

7. Actionable Points

While the takeaways provided insights and principles, this section focuses on what institutions and individuals can start doing right away. These actionable points reflect the forum's call for real change:

- **Conduct a mental wellness audit** to identify current gaps in policy, communication, and access to support.
- **Establish peer support structures** within teams or departments to normalize daily check-ins and build emotional safety.
- **Develop compassionate leadership trainings** for managers to lead with empathy and foster inclusive team cultures.
- **Allocate time for reflection and debriefing**, especially after high-pressure tasks or emotionally heavy work.
- **Review leave and workload policies** to accommodate mental health days and prevent burnout.
- **Invest in internal awareness campaigns** that destigmatize mental health conversations at all levels.

Creating compassionate workplaces doesn't start with a perfect system—it starts with practical, intentional steps that affirm care, dignity, and humanity at work.



8. Call to Action

The conversations sparked in this forum are a beginning, not a conclusion. The responsibility now lies with all of us to translate insight into intention, and intention into action.

Let us be bold enough to reimagine leadership, courageous enough to listen deeply, and committed enough to embed compassion at the core of our systems. Because the future of work belongs to those who choose to lead with care. To every leader, partner, and professional who joined the forum:

Let us not stop here. Let us advocate for workplaces that reflect who we are and what we value—dignity, care, and shared humanity. Let's move beyond inspiration and into implementation.



"The organizations that will thrive in the future are the ones brave enough to care today." —**Samuel Munderere, CEO and Co-Founder, Solid Minds Counselling Clinic**

9. Conclusion

In his closing remarks, Dr. Gishoma offered a message of appreciation and national resolve. He recognized the growing multi-sector commitment to mental wellness and reaffirmed the Government of Rwanda's dedication to advancing healthier, more compassionate workplaces. This vision, he noted, is embedded in Rwanda's national development agenda and reflected in Vision 2050.


Dr. Gishoma expressed sincere gratitude to Solid Minds Counselling Clinic and all participating partners for their collaborative efforts. Their contributions, he emphasized, are key to shaping a resilient and mentally healthier society.



"This journey is one we walk together. The government alone cannot build mentally healthier workplaces. We commend Solid Minds and all partners for standing with us in this national mission."

Dr. Darius Gishoma,
Mental Health Division Manager,
Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC)



A photograph showing a group of people in a meeting. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair is speaking into a microphone. To her left, another woman is looking towards her. In the background, a woman in a blue top is standing. The setting appears to be a professional meeting or conference.

The Social Dialogue Forum – Edition 2 served not just as a platform for conversation, but as a space for learning and unlearning. Solid Minds Counselling Clinic remains committed to walking this journey with institutions ready to lead with empathy and create spaces where every individual is empowered to live out their potential.

10. Glossary of Key Terms

1. **Mental Health Continuum** – A model showing mental health as a spectrum from well-being to illness.
2. **Psychological Safety** – A climate where individuals feel safe to express themselves without fear of negative consequences.
3. **Compassionate Workplace** – An environment where emotional well-being is valued and supported.
4. **Resilience** – The ability to recover from setbacks and adapt positively to challenges.
5. **Presenteeism** – Being physically present at work but unable to function productively due to mental distress.
6. **Burnout** – A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.
7. **Peer Support** – Mutual support provided by colleagues to help each other cope with challenges.
8. **NCDs** – Non-Communicable Diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, often linked with lifestyle and stress.
9. **Wellness Integration** – Embedding mental health into organizational strategies and practices.
10. **Empathetic Leadership** – Leadership characterized by understanding, care, and supportive engagement.

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www.solidminds.rw | info@solidminds.rw | +250 788 503 528

