

ANALYSIS OF COUNSELING AT WORKPLACE: A STUDY ON SAMPLE OF UNIVERSITY

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Original Article

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ABSTRACT

In today's unstable economy, insecurity becomes the main problem for employees. Workplace counseling is providing a brief mental therapy for employees in any organization, especially Pakistan counseling service has not received sufficient consideration in most organizations. The reason for this is not isolated from the low level of response to counseling services, usually in the country. In this study, the focus group method was used. Fourteen staff members from the University of Swat, KP-Pakistan were selected for the sample of the study. The main aim of this study is to make a base for advance qualitative studies by determining the viewpoints of employees towards counseling at the workplace. The current study highlights the importance, concept of workplace counseling and provides advanced quantitative studies by determining the viewpoints of staff of university towards counseling at work different programs. Diverse types of programs are discussed in this paper and are discussed that employees might advantage from presenting such programs. Employees Assistance Programs are used in this study, which is job-related job relate programs designed to assist and identify worried personnel.

Keywords: Organization stress, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) Workplace Counseling, Social support

1. Introduction

In life, everybody encounters problems, but there are many complex problems to understand. To solve these problems, we need help to adopt many essential strategies; like to provide help is called the counselor and the whole process is called counseling. Many researchers frequently present a similar view of counseling. For example, a person helps another person through meaningful dialogue is the best counseling (Burnard, 2002). Counseling

is one of the important services that can help peoples seek to accomplish themselves. This discussion is helpful when another person will be in trouble, so it means that the situation will automatically invite another person to help and solved his problem (McLeod, 2007, Khan, *et al.*, 2014).

By focusing more on its aim, both Macleod and Burnard explained the concept of counseling in the best way. A team of researchers (Reddy, 1987; Hopson, 1984) also suggested that counseling as a skill and

technique which help peoples to manage their problems. It is concluded from the views that counseling is a non-directing process that motivates direct meetings between counselor and client. The main aim of the meeting is to discuss different problems as well as their solutions (IPD Guide, 1997). The whole process included the counselor's effort to see what other person's point of view, as the first step to listen to the client carefully and how he discusses the situation. After that, the counselor should manipulate or criticized the view of the client, but the counselor must know the emotion as well as the feeling of the client and approaching the situation (Megranahan, 2000).

2. Counseling at Work Place

Counseling has different kinds like family counseling, workplace counseling, personal counseling and couple counseling. Workplace counseling holds a vital role among these kinds for workers in any organization of the world. Employee assistant program (EAP) or workplace counseling helps workers to solve work-related issues faced by employees, employers, administrators and managers. Workplace counseling is a new field in the field of the business world, and this seems to solve a lot of problems of employees in the workplace. The problems may be associated with their colleagues, employees or managers; so these problems led negative emotion and feeling in the shape of tension, anger, self-put down or stress, illness etc. so all these issues led to slow down the organizational performance, which indicates a bad sign for any company or business management organization.

According to (Reddy 1987) and Khan *et al.* (2017), for organization successes where the business field is the most important place, where employees are worked satisfactorily because they are the backbone of the organization. In an organization, Human resource practices can be enhanced by different methods like training and development, counseling, coaching and mentoring, which may play growth and development of an organization.

Counseling can be a continuing growth process for employees (Stone, 1999). The

author also suggested more than counseling is a non-punitive process in which the most necessary step is creating employees and sensitize him about the difference between the real and expected performance, so this means the aim of counseling at the place of work is to reduce the actual performance and predictable performance. Though it clutches some more functions also which is described by Summerfield and Oudshoorn (1995) that it creates a good interpersonal relationship and gives us advice on financial, medical ground and legal. The distinction between therapeutic counseling and workplace counseling was explained by Yeager (1983). He explains that the eligibility of workplace counseling must be a focus on productivity and performance. At the same time, the counselor has to get a ready client for work and fix the performance problems.

On the other hand, McLeod (2003) suggested that workplace counseling acts like psychological therapy for employees in organizations; he also suggests that "attempts to alleviate distress within a reasonably short period of time." Although McLeod does not see convincing as dealing with disorders and increasing productivity are two different targets. The main aim at the workplace is to boost up productivity with efficiency, so in the guide of IPD (1997), it is suggested that employee assistant is a more appropriate word while counseling is not an appropriate word for workplace context.

Counseling is just about the problem and its solution or sickness, but workplace counseling is an indicator of corporate health and encouragement of employees to confront and resolve problems rather than hiding and denying them. Board (1983) categories staff problems at the workplace in three groups; the first group consists of personality issues; in this group, those people are mentioned who are depressed and worried due to less confidence. Similarly, the second group includes organizational problems caused by overwork, authority issues, uncertain future and technology. The second group revolves around the personal problems; for example, issues related to children and family. These are not

technical issues, but they are humanistic behavior that needs little care and counseling as compared to prior discussions notion called 'Assistant,' which leads to making employees discuss their problems and feelings to find the problem solution.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Workplace counseling significance in the organization

In the 21st century, organizations are generating counseling services for a lot of necessary reasons. One important reason is to cope with the aspect and change. The change should be any type but not so easy to accept wither it is leadership or of technological; to change the system, organization spend very important resources, but sometimes faces resistance to that change. Employees seem reluctant because they know that this time consuming and difficult. This ultimately creates performance problems and loses interest. But if this change is embedded and should proper sensitization, then it works. The employee in an organization needs a favor to accept any change as well as different dilemmas that creates during the change process (Caroll, 1996). In organizational change, counseling acts like an agent. It opens a lot of ways that can lead to higher performances.

According to Hayes (1996), the organization fails to know low productivity loss, which is caused by social problems and the psychological of their staff, which can be solved through counseling. For example, negative relations between stressed manager, team members and leader and alcoholic addict workers and a lot of problems when accounted at large employees level would cost immeasurable loss; but this problem can be reduced giving counseling services, which is part of the performance management system. According to Randall (1984), manager's important duty is to supervise duties and also know their problems and assure them to solve it as well as to make them aware of their strength and positive qualities. To gain knowledge of employees' strengths and weaknesses, counseling can help the organization. To

minimize the impact of the weakness on productivity as well as enhances their strength, all this work will be done by a counselor through proper procedures. Board (1983) suggested that counseling always concludes in human development and growth. This relationship is base on integrity and mutual trust, but it is also bad that someone dependent on the counselor. Employees should give full authority to share their problems and to think about the best solution to their problems.

Counseling is not about used only for crisis point but also uses it as a preventive measure for mental sickness. Harrison (1994) contradictory Felltham (1997) does not agree with Harrison what he concluded. He suggested in positive arguments that the main work of counselors is to help their employees in organizational structure to reduce mental illness.

2.2. Counseling applications at Workplace

Several researchers especially Megranahan, (2000), Burnard, (2000), and McLeod, (2008) suggested a lot of personal and issues related to work, which needs either or counseling or guidance. Here we discuss those areas which need quick counseling, steps by steps.

2.3 Stress Counseling

Stress means anxiety in the workplace. It is a serious issue in this modern world. We feel stress at the workplace, wither it is about challenges, achievements of targets, the performance of daily work and meeting due dates. To get the best performance from employees, stress may be positive or negative in organizations; both positive and negative stress is useful for the employee as well as the organization. Many factors lead workers to motivational or performance problems.

Philips (2004) suggested poor job description creates role conflict; they impose it on many levels in the organization when employees don't have any job description then it will create the potential for misunderstanding, a sense of unfairness, waste of effort and general anxiety

where employees always uncertain about his role. However, Redman (1995) believes poor interpersonal relations with employees of employers are the main cause of stress. It is argue that stressful relationships as the second main factor of stress.

It was also suggested that sometimes stress arises in a complex working environment with bosses and colleagues as well as managers. According to Megrana (1989), when a manager is unpredictable, then it will cause anxiety to the employees, while all employees are wasting their time pleasing their boss and not concentrating on their work. Another type of conflict which is most common in the workplace is working relationship among employees. Employees have a rough attitude; many exhaust other employees with a bad attitude. Competitive employees can add fatigue and insecurity. The other type of colleagues spends much time spending gossiping and waste time with their friends and put them down in front of the boss (Phillips, 2004). According to Carroll (1996), workplace counseling focus is stress management.

According to Megrana (2000), the manager is trying and taking participation in seeking, giving and receiving information through a lot of channels. For good communication, counseling skills are very important. It gives strength to employee's conflicts, problems, personality's expectation's and perceptions of the counselor. This competitive environment permits them to identify organizational goals and inform them how their contribution to goals and tasks link with their job stability and promotions.

2.4 Conflict counseling

Conflict counseling is another important area that emerges between person to person, one to one and employees to manager on the performance issues. Mostly it is often said that when conflict is positive in teamwork, it creates positivity in teamwork, but when it turns into gossips and rumor or exclusion from the team, it can cause low performance and motivation of both individual and team. Those employees who are task-oriented may be sad about the reward

culture and punishment of their organization. He got frustrated and fell in the feeling of 'does not fit' in this condition. Felltham (1997) suggested that good communication between counselor and management enables the counselor to work with employees and clarify the dissatisfactory aspect regarding the consequent factors and change.

Conflicts can be between the groups and teams also. Often employees do not fit in group settings because of working styles problem and age conflict. Campbell *et al.* (1991) assert that in this type of conflict, both the group seeks a neutral person or non-judgmental to explain in detail their problems. It sometimes helps the client and counselor to express and discuss differences and similarities between explores and behaviors alternative ways of doing things; when the counselor asks questions about the different problems of conflicts. According to Felltham (1997), in any situation counselor should not impose the decisions, but his responsibilities are to develop and explore the conflict and understanding and realization of what is to be achieved and what can be tolerated.

2.5 Workplace Bullying

When a person improperly uses his authority to impress someone adversely, that is called bullying. The characteristics of bullies including give offensive remarks on employee performance, threatening employees about the dismissal, give unachievable targets or deadlines, badly rating the employees, over domination and taking other's credit, creating hurdles in the promotion and refusing to allow them to go on training or further development. Bullying occurs typically when employees are badgered, teased and insulted and when employees perceive that he or she has little option to retaliate in kind. Universally it is said and agreed that bullying leads employees towards demotivation and lower morale.

The employees do not know when and why his seniors and management will target him. This situation becomes very critical for a counselor because it relates to attitude and behaviors. Normally the employees react, which

can be the initial step towards convincing him and counseling; that's why he has been select for his behaviors. The counselor suggests the employees analyze the situation and keep the record of every moment with yourself. When a person uses the wrong power in an organization for this purpose, counseling is needed. It can be done by discussing the reasons and their connections with peoples and realizing him that his behavior is not elastic for the organization (Felltham, 1997).

2.6 Accept changes in the education sector

Permanent changes have thoughtful associations for both proper educational activities in universities or companies. According to Delors (1996), the International Commission on Education for Twenty-first Century children and youngsters joining school globally, there is a relative increase in the number and also considerable growth in demand for higher education. In particular developed countries, like Japan and Sweden for instance, about 50 percent of the inhabitants are presently engaged in higher education, which can take many methods, like elementary education in a non-formal setting, part-time admission in higher education, training, vocational, distance learning and other educational related courses. The discussed commission also describes this that the educational setting is becoming more diverse and crossing over the bounds of the formal systems in universities. This suggests many numbers of options and opportunities in terms of educational pathways and, ultimately, a greater number of people seeking alignment in their decision making procedure. The gap inside universities, there has been an increase in knowledge and skills developed in both general and vocational education systems, and the afresh formed demands for skills and knowledge of the place of work (Brandsma and Nijhof, 1999). Amongst these systems, distance education and vocational education are more affected. Simultaneously, its position has grown significantly.

Streumer and Bjorkquist (1998) suggested that distance education and

vocational education are now progressively being measured as an equal substitute for general education. Amongst the reforms being carried out in the higher education systems in many states, the modularization of the structure, by decreasing the number of closed specialization paths and offering an increasing the amount of sovereign learning units, remains at the top of the mission. But a modernized course details subjects. (Otes, 1998) claimed lacking proper counseling makes it probable for students to select a random combination of units leading to a disjointed qualification.

2.7 Accepting changes for Counseling

Change is a big issue for an organization because sometimes it is resistible; it may be positive or negative in their impacts. This change may affect the job description and position. It raises a lot of dilemmas within employees' thinking and can affect his performance in the job role. In managing change, counseling plays an important role because employees are convened through counseling and assure the employee that this change is good for them in all aspects. Change can be managed by an effective partnership between management and counselor. However, Hayes (1996) suggested different views that managing change is a problem where the boss should acquire the role of counselor. According to Megranahan (2000), behind various changes, the manager knows the basic idea. Managing change effective communication through counseling is the best way. Managers should provide such a friendly environment for employees to arrange a counseling session on any issue and assure employees that this session while not affect their performance report. The main role of the manager is to give time to employees and it is a basic principle of counseling.

Retirement and redundancy are also associated with the problem of accepting change. Redundancy by itself is not news which the manager gives through counselor to employee's self-esteem, explaining the circumstances of redundancy and finding the alternative. Retirement is another most important issue, where counseling plays an important role.

Peoples feel fear because that after retirement, they have not any work, so this fear led employees low performance during the work period. Counseling can be helpful for these employees to manage their issues and accept change.

3. Research Methodology

A convenient sample technique was used and selected as a sample of 14 employees working at the University of Swat, KP-Pakistan. In-depth interviews were conducted. The study contains two diverse focus groups. The first focus group contains 7 Academics Staff (Research Assistants), and the second focus group also contains 7 (Administrative Staff) of the targeted university. The data tool used for data collection consists of an interview guide and demographic profile form—the interview guide comprised questions about the judgment of personnel about counseling at the workplace. The purposes of the questions are to determine the viewpoint of employees toward workplace counseling.

Workplace counseling was defined as the focus groups to understand the issue. Employees were interviewed at a place of work, and every interview was almost half an hour. During interviews, notes were kept with the consent of the respondents. Two sessions were done on the same day. One researcher recorded the questions while the other research asked questions to the respondents. The conversations of participants were kept confidential and were conversant that it would be used for research aim only. Questions were about:

- Attitude and Perceptions about workplace counseling's overview.
- Privacy
- Individual(emotive) / work-related problems enclosed by counseling services
- Snags, avoidance and question mark.

3.1 Sample

The study sample contains of 14 employees who were from both academic staff and administrative staff of the Public sector

university of Swat. Both groups have the same respondents. In the first study, the interview was taking from 7 males in a total of 14 research assistants from the altered staff of the university. The age of respondents were between 25 and 45 (Mean: 35, 5). The education level of the respondents is either Master or M.Phil level. Most of the respondents were married. The average working years of the sample is 4.75 years, and it varies between 1 to 9 years.

In the second study, the interview was conducted with 7 males in a total of 14 administrative staff. The age of respondents were lies between 30 to 55 (Means: 35, 89). The education level of all the participants was above the master level. The entire participants were married. The average working years of the sample are 5.75 years, and this varies between 1 to 16 years.

4. Results

To comprehend the results of the study, findings were classified into four topics:

4.1 Attitude and Perceptions about workplace counseling's overview:

Employees are already conscious of this kind of service; the respondent of the academic staff show that this kind of service is more helpful for academic staff than administrative staff. All respondents of the Academic group proposed that if they get information from counselors during a hard time in university, they will handle this issue more easily. Also, discussing their problems with the counselor affects their productivity and performance at the place of work.

The respondents of Administrative staff also show interest in this kind of service from their organization. So, it means workplace counseling is not more known to administrative staff. However, they were given a short description of the idea they had to remember the information. Positive attitudes were observed in both studies. An important cause for a positive attitude was "being considered" by the university.

4.2 Privacy

The respondents of the academic group want the counselor to share their difficulties about the workplace with their juniors because they consider by doing this, their subordinates will be aware of their problems and provide solutions to the problems. Contrarily, their problems they do not share with their subordinates. Similarly, administrative staffs also want the counselor, but they don't want to share their problems with the administrator. They want all of their problems should be kept confidential to maintain privacy concept.

4.3 Individual (emotive) / work-related problems enclosed by counseling services

For both studies, stress and depression were recorded as the most important issues that could be covered by counseling service. Family issues and private problems were other issues followed by them. The judgment of academic staff about getting consultancy service is more beneficial than the administrative staff's perceptions.

4.4 Snags, avoidance and question mark

The judgment of the academic staff towards applying to get consultancy services is more optimistic than the administrative staff's view. None of the employees thinks that they will be observed as psychologically unhealthy if they get proper consultancy. The main problem for the administrative staff was about confidentiality.

5. Conclusion

Workplace counseling is one of the important organizational remedies if it is properly directed at the workplace. Counseling also helps peoples to respond quickly and differently. According to Leong (1996), the training of counselors would advantageous from a case-based or problem-based learning method. Counseling has a vital role to play as a part of the biggest approach to deal with workplace stress. But it offers treatment, not prevention. To enhance employee competence and performance, counseling can prove a very productive activity. Sometimes employees face problems like professional and personal. The

administration and manager must facilitate his employees as well as to motivate them to solve his problem inefficiently way. For this purpose, professional counseling and proper guidance can help workers more in eradicating their problems. However, counseling should be done with the consent of employees while not deteriorating their self-esteem and prestige. There is also a need to make employees flexible, adaptable and accommodation in every sense. They must ready always to bring changes and innovations by themselves as well as an accept novelty at their place of work. This attitude will not be beneficial for their professional growth but the progress of the organization as well.

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