

# Counseling in the Workplace

## Introduction

Employee counseling at the workplace is an activity that is being adopted by many organizations (Navare, 2010). This has been deemed necessary due to the constant pressures and the increased levels of stress in people's lives, especially the workforce (Cooper, 2000). In the workplace, employees have been pointed out to be in need of counseling due to the various challenges that they face.

Managers have decided to employ permanent counselors in their organizations in order to provide employees with an opportunity to air their views to the correct persons and get professional help. The human resource management team has even used counseling as a tool to attract potential employees and to retain the existing ones. Counseling has also been used by organizations to increase the quality of their employees.

There is hardly any company that has stress-employees. With the nature of today's corporate world, stresses are a common thing. The stresses come about with the daily activities undertaken by employees (Vartia, 2001).

They include issues to do with managing tight deadlines, meeting the organization's set goals and the lack of sufficient time to attend to personal issues or to cater for family needs. Another issue in the workplace that leads to the increase in stress levels in the employees and the need for professional help (counseling) is workplace bullying.

This paper will provide an analytic literature report that would report on the findings of the interview with the Human Resource manager. This would entail the issues of counseling in the workplace. It will also relate the findings of the interview with literature pertaining to counseling and specifically on workplace bullying. The gaps on the issue of counseling will also be looked into critically.

## Findings of the interview with the HR manager

For this assignment, we interviewed the human resource manager of DHS. The interview was very informative because we were able to understand how the organization armed itself with counseling as a weapon in order to combat any issue facing the employee in the workplace.

We were also informed of the various steps that are followed during counseling. We were also made to understand how the employees in the organization are informed of the availability of counseling sessions in the workplace.

DHS generally provides two types of counseling. The manager does the first session of counseling. This is where the manager hears out the issues of the employee and determines the seriousness it deserves. If the issue can be handled by the manager, it is solved and the case is closed.

However, if it is a serious case, then the Employee Assistance Program is provided. This involves three sessions. This is whereby the individual is allowed to access an external service in order to receive counseling from an independent counselor.

The corporate culture of the organization (DHS) encourages employees to use the assistance of professional counselors since the organization believes that the employees should be open and voice their concerns.

Since the organization requires that all employees understand about the counseling services, it informs them using various means. These include the passing of information to the employees through the intranet, through orientations, in the newsletters and during meetings. This ensures that all employees are conversant about the valuable services.

DHS provides its employees with three external service sessions. These sessions are usually fully paid for. However, if the employee feels the need to continue seeing the counselor, he or she will be required to pay for the services themselves. This will not be in the company's bills. The company also provides a free session with the manager, which is always the initial stage.

For the manager to allow the employee to seek the assistance of a professional counselor, the issue at hand must be a serious concern and that which cannot be handled effectively by the manager. Such issues, as proposed by the manager, include workplace bullying whereby the manager is the one bullying. An employee who is being bullied by a manager is allowed to approach another manager to discuss the issue.

On other occasions, the employees have extremely personal issues and are not willing to disclose them to the manager. In this case, the manager would permit the employees to seek professional help.

The major role of a counselor in DHS is to assess the issue being presented by the employee and to recommend the kind of help required. The counselor will determine the various ways the employee can get professional assistance.

In order to allow for follow-up assessments of the employee's state the company provides the three free sessions with the counselor. This will allow the employee to go back to the counselor and report on the progress. Any further help required after this would be in the employee's bill.

Since issues discussed during a counseling session are sensitive issues, the counselor is not allowed to disclose the issues of the client. However, the company provides only one condition that must be met for the counselor to disclose personal information. The counselor must receive a written consent from the client in order to have the power to disclose the information.

DHS does not have any problem with employees seeking external help other than from the organization itself. However, according to the policies of the organization, the employee must first have a session with the manager of the organization. After this first session, the manager will decide whether the issue being addressed requires professional help.

The manager of the company agreed that certain issues could influence decisions pertaining counseling. Such issues include power and friendships. However, where there are conflicts of interests, different managers or external counseling sessions may be required to bring fair judgment. The counselors do not organize group sessions for employees who may have workplace conflicts with each other. It only involves individuals.

The results of the counseling sessions are considered important because they are linked to performance reviews of the organization. The managers track performance and determine whether they are effective.

Counseling sessions are also important for the employees since they are linked with performance and they may lead to greater career opportunities. DHS appreciates counseling since it encourages employees to speak up and makes them feel equal. It is also important as it helps resolve conflicts and creates a better culture in the organization.

### **Analysis of findings with theory**

It is very shaking to discover that workforce bullying is such a common thing in the corporate world of today. Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts (2007) conducted a study to determine the prevalence of workforce bullying in organizations. Their area of study was in the U.S. During a period of between six and twelve months of the employee's tenure, up to thirteen percent of employees were bullied at the workplace.

This percentage increased to thirty percent when the cases of bullying in the entire work life were considered. This is why the DHS organization was prompted to encourage counseling of employees in order to combat this issue professionally. Namie (2003) encouraged that workforce should be interviewed in order to identify those most harmed. They would then be provided with counseling services.

This form of bullying has been defined as the repetitive mistreatment of the employees in the organizational setting (Vandekerckhove and Commers, 2003). This has been determined to have negative health effects. Workplace bullying may take several forms. One of the forms is verbal abuse. This is whereby the employee is abused verbally and repeatedly. Bullying may also be non-verbal.

This may be in form of offensive conduct and behaviors. In most cases, these behaviors and actions are issued in a threatening manner or in such a way as to intimidate or humiliate the worker.

According to the policies of the DHS organization, the employees are allowed to go to an external counselor in the event that such forms of bullying are done by a manager to the employee. Other forms of bullying may be in the form of sabotage or interfering with the normal activities of the worker. This always prevents the worker from working normally or accomplishing tasks.

Bullying of employees at the workplace cause trauma and stigmatizes the employees (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008b). This may cause issues like burnout, absenteeism. Researchers have determined that counseling may help to reduce such issues since they may increase costs to the organization. Counseling is also beneficial in that it improves performance of employees and increase productivity.

This interest in studying workplace bullying started long ago. One of the scientists who took interest in studying this phenomenon is Heinz Leymann. Leymann (1990) began by studying bullying by children in schools. This led him to think that the same thing could happen to adults.

After this topic became publicized, many people started to take interest in it (Hoel and Cooper, 2000). Various professionals including scholars from many countries started studying mobbing and bullying (Zapf and Gross, 2001).

Such cases of workforce bullying can only be handled appropriately through counseling. This way, the individual may learn how to cope with the situation or stressor (Kirk and Brown, 2003). Through counseling, the employee can also make better decisions.

## **Identified gaps**

Most organizations, such as DHS, usually look at workforce bullying from one perspective. They usually look at bullying as a top-down effect in that they believe that the superiors bully the subordinates (Zellars *et al.*, 2002). They are also accustomed to fellow workmates ganging up and bullying one employee. However, there are cases where superiors are bullied by subordinates (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003).

This is referred to as being bullied up. DHS and many other organizations have probably never thought about this. In this case, it is uncertain what such individuals would do.

Some superiors being bullied may feel embraced to face other managers concerning this issue. Therefore, it might be appropriate to provide counseling sessions for superiors in the organizations too. This will allow them to voice their concerns and get help.

## **Conclusion**

Counseling can be said to be a very important tool for every organization. This is because it helps to solve some of the issues such as workforce bullying that may reduce the employee performance and morale. Counseling would help increase productivity and hence make the organization successful.

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