

# **WORKPLACE COUNSELLING IN INDONESIA**

**Verina Halim Secapramana  
Artiawati Mawardi**

**Faculty of Psychology  
University of Surabaya**

## ***Abstract***

*Workplace counselling is aimed at providing support for the physical and mental welfare of employees. This effort will have impact on increasing productivity and work performance of employees so that as the end result the company will get a better profit. Good impressions for the company will also be gathered because workplace counselling can be seen as the manifestation of company responsibilities, legally and ethically. Employees will respect the company when employees are viewed as potential assets that need to be developed optimally. In practice, the concepts mentioned previously seem different. A survey conducted on 26 small-and-middle-size companies in Java, which handle various fields, found that most of the companies have not provided optimal efforts on workplace counselling. Some reasons identified were related to the time and cost efficiencies, and employees' suspicion to the division in the company, which handles workplace counselling, will function as the company's tool for making pressures on employees. The culture of Indonesian people and current situation in Indonesia, which coloured by 'distrustful' apparently influence this phenomena. Some companies, which have started to provide facilities for workplace counselling, mostly a middle-size company, have not been functioning the facilities due to the lack of publicity and popularity regarding workplace counselling. Suggestions made for the companies in regards to providing workplace counselling.*

***Keywords :*** *welfare of employees, productivities, company responsibilities.*

The basic philosophy of Counselling Psychology is a determination to improve the quality of individual life. Counselling Psychology views an individual as an existential creature, who is always in effort to make self-adjustment with their environment. Basically, Counselling Psychology contains of such activities on how people can help themselves to develop their own potential and personalities.

Counselling in the organizational setting is different from counselling in individual setting or in other contexts. Problems on value differences between the ideal purpose of counselling and business purposes, multiple roles hold by counsellor that might end on role conflicts, are such reasons for why specific qualifications are required for a workplace counsellor.

Workplace counseling is a kind of attention towards employees physical and mental welfare, which can support for high organizational productivities. Workplace counselling has run through a long history. In the beginning, workplace counselling only focused on handling interpersonal problems among individuals in organizations. Nowadays, workplace counselling is growing broader becoming an educational institution with aims at supporting employees in handling mental and physical welfare of employees. Workplace counselling recently is known as part of Employee Assistance Program (EAP), in which such activities as supervisory training or training for managing change also could be found. (Carroll, 1996). Furthermore, workplace counselling also play an important role in performance management systems. A changing paradigm in viewing workplace counselling now happens, in which workplace counselling can be seen as a preventive action.

In Indonesia, not only workplace counselling, but also counselling

in general has not been popular. A study conducted by Verina, Rumondang and Andayani (1995) found that counselling and psychotherapy were not popular in Java due to lack of knowledge about the counselling and psychotherapy, limited number of professionals in this field, and also because of stigmatization of being insane for people who come to the counsellor. Therefore, people are reluctant to come to the counsellor in order to keep good reputations in society.

Based on some issues provided previously, this study have come up with some issues whether those conditions have also happened in the field of organizations, or some changes have occurred considering the impact of globalization. This study was aimed at investigating how far the existence of workplace counseling in Indonesia.

### **Method**

The research design used was basically descriptive. The survey involved a total of twenty-six-small-and-middle-size companies in Java. This study utilized interviews for gathering data more completely regarding workplace counselling activities, including common problems of employees, constraints in conducting workplace counselling, and how counselling processes run.

This study is actually part of continuing research on performance appraisal and workplace counselling in seventy-five companies in Java and surrounding places.

### **Results**

From the 26 companies being studied, there were identified 5 companies, which have established with the workplace counselling. The rest of 20 companies have not had workplace counselling services. One company previously held workplace counselling, but for some reasons

they stopped doing this service. More information about the companies, which have and do not have the workplace counseling service could be found in the Appendix A and B.

## **DESCRIPTIONS**

### **A. ORGANIZATION WITH WORKPLACE COUNSELLING**

1. The types of counselling models being used are:

a. Brief-Therapy Model

This model is the most common model in employee conselling.

The choice of brief therapy is guided by the economical reasons, so that the client does not spend too much time away from work.

b. Problem focused model

The problem-focused model of counselling views the role of counsellor is for helping individuals to work with the immediate problem they bring. The counsellor only functions when there are problems with self-adjustment or personal problems faced by employees, which are caused by the organizational structure and/or design changing. Due to focusing on problems related to the worklife, this model become efficient considering the limitation of organizations in time and money consuming.

c. Manager-based models

Managers are viewed as quasi-counsellors for their staff. Employees can come to their managers due to close relationships built, so that employees feel free to express their feelings and problems to the managers. Managers are expected to play the role of a professional counsellor. This model often came up with the role conflict of manager.

d. Internally based model

A part-time or full-time counsellor, or in some instances a team of counsellors, is employed to work with employees. From the organization's point of view, this model is more convenient because the counsellor is in touch with the culture of the company, so he or she can adapt the counselling work into organizational needs as well as to develop methods that are more appropriate with the needs of employees. They can provide multiple roles either.

e. Work-orientated models

The counselling centred solely on issues blocking an individual in his or her work. The emphasis here is on work performance and a minimalist approach to getting the employee back to work as quickly as possible. This is an attractive counselling model for managers who want value for money and want to think that time spent in counselling is for the welfare of the organization through the individual. However, it is not always easy, in practice, to differentiate between what is a workplace problem and what is a personal problem not related to work.

2. Constraints arised in Practicing Workplace Counseling:

- a. If an external counselor employed, the employee feel uncomfortable in communicating problems with him/her. Employees prefer to express their feelings or problems to people inside the company, their co-worker(s) or superior(s).
- b. Employees distrust the counsellor(s) so that they can not be frankly discussing their problems with the counsellor(s). The employees feel anxious of their problems being known by top managers (decision makers), which may end up with problems in career promotions, even laid off.

- c. Some employees just do not want to use the workplace counselling service.

3. Common problems occurred in organizations

- a. Ambiguous information on job descriptions that make employees feel confused
- b. Inconsistency and unfairness in making policies by the management, for instance in problems of providing bonus or having employees promoted. These problems make employees feel uncomfortable in working.
- c. Strong competition in getting promotion and higher salaries.
- d. Family, personal and work related problems.
- e. Fears (unmotivated) in facing organizational changes and challenges.
- f. Teamwork and leadership problems
- g. Absenteeism

4. Additional information

- a. The company has the counselling division, which is handled by six officers and one supervisor graduated from overseas. The location of this division is in a strategic area as well as comfortable for conducting counselling. It is a free charge service for all employees and they are invited to discuss any problems related to their personal, family and work problems. However, apparently this division has not been used optimally by employees.
- b. Workplace counselling is handled by the Department of Human Resources Development and General Affairs. Some employees come to this department on their own initiatives, and some other employees are called by the counsellor in this department referred to the information given by their co-workers.

- c. Most problems came from personal lives of employees, which have impact on their performances.
- d. Counsellors are in effort to follow new perspectives and development, and keep advancing their skills and knowledges.
- e. The roles of counsellor :
  - Handling the 'gap' between the superior and the subordinate in performance appraisal
  - Reducing employees' weaknesses
  - Creating better and healthier environment
  - Building friendly, good, and warm interpersonal relationships among employees
  - Increasing employees' performances
- e. Workplace counselling is held in conjunction with outsourcing. A counsellor from Boston provides consultation annually, in the field of performance appraisal and assessment of job satisfaction.

#### ***B. ORGANIZATION WITHOUT WORKPLACE COUNSELING***

- 1. Reasons for having no workplace counselling activities
  - a. Workplace counseling is considered as unimportant with a belief that the organization advancement is entirely in the director-board's arm.
  - b. Work environment has already been comfortable, harmonious and all relationships are good.
  - c. Employees do not know and do not care about career development or workplace counselling due to submissive behaviors. Employees only concern of having salary, and think that all policies are concern of the management.

- d. The organization sees that individual problems can be handled individually without the organization's involvement.
  - e. The organization found that there was no serious problems in employees.
  - f. The organization feel unfamiliar with the workplace counselling
  - g. Most problems are merely job related ones in which managers only need to provide advises for job accomplishment.
  - h. Purposefully not to create the division of counseling because the company feels worried about the image created by the employees in which they think the division of counselling is only the 'tool' for the company for abusing information gathered
2. Counselling is conducted by:
- a. Branch manager(s) and co-worker(s) as the most trusted people
  - b. A counsellor (not psychologist) who also works as the Head of personnel division and logistic division
  - c. Immediate superior(s)
  - d. Psychiatrist
  - e. The highest level manager
  - f. Departement of Personnel or Human Resources
  - g. External consultant for the problem with job description. For personal problems are handled by internal counsellor.
3. Common problems faced by the employees:
- a. Fear and feel depressed to achieve high performance due to performance appraisal.
  - b. Personal, family and work related problems
4. Additional information
- a. One company previously held workplace counselling, but they

stopped doing this service for some reasons :

- High financial cost
- The severe problems could be found only in middle-up level managers
- Some problems couldn't be handled sufficiently

The problems facing up recently are managed by supervisor or manager of each department. It will be hand over to the Human Resource Departement if they can not find any solution.

- b. There is revisit training and evening training system where the supervisor guided their staff while doing their job (similar as on the job training). They can support their staff as well as building better communication between them. In this way the subordinate assumed to feel free in communicating their problems.

## **DISCUSSION**

Work can provide intense feelings of satisfaction and achievement, but it can also cause a number of problems which make people feel sad and miserable; and, for some, it can create anxiety and stress.

Most people find ways of coping with their bad times, and this usually involves talking to someone, often their marriage partner, a close friend or a sympathetic doctor or clergyman.

One way of anticipating risk and providing relief from work-related stress is offered by counselling services. Counselling services within the workplace are being viewed not just as 'crisis' points or for severely disturbed individuals, but also as a preventive service. More employers are providing facilities to help employees increase their level of physical fitness and reduce instances of physical illness (colds, back injuries,

coronary heart disease). Health education organized in the workplace is increasing. More and more employers realize that illness and productivity do not go well together. Workshops, short training sessions, and days on specific topic, including stress management, taking care of your heart etc., are all ways of helping employees to manage their physical and mental well-being. Counselling can be seen as a way of improving mental health. Employees do not leave their problems aside as they turn to face their working day. Egan (1994) has noted the financial cost to organizations of psychological and social problems, and lists the kind of everyday problems that can be costly to the organization : a poor relationship between two key members of a production team, a middle manager who is becoming dependent on drugs, a high-level manager distracted by an impending divorce who loses a significant account, a secretary grieving for a dead relative. When these individual problems are seen in the context of a large workforce, and when they go unnoticed and undealt with, then, collectively, the cost can be immeasureable.

Counselling can function also as one way of supporting employees as they cope with organizational change. Change is never easy: it disrupts, disorientates, causes grieving and takes time. Support is needed for individuals and teams as transition in organization are managed. Counselling can itself be a source of organization change. Rather than being just an appendage to a company, counselling can bring the values, the energy of change, the vitality of acceptance, a realization of who we are and what we can be, to the very dynamics of workplace life. Counselling can influence organizational culture to work towards the ideal strong and adaptive culture that serves the company. Having counselling available in the workplace means that problems can be dealt with fairly quickly and can be worked through in the very environment from which

the often emerge (Carroll, 1996, p. 5).

Counselling also highlights the value of people as organizational assets. Pfeffer's (1994) research into successful organizations showed clearly that the most important ingredient was the way they cared for their employees.

From the 26 small-and-middle-size companies being studied, there were identified 5 companies, which have established with the workplace counselling. The counselling is handled by various part of the company, formally or informally. The counselling division, the Department of Human Resources Development and General Affairs are the common people doing this services. The rest of 20 companies have not had that kind of services.

The models used in the organization with workplace counselling are brief-therapy models, problem-focused models, manager-based models, and internally-based models. There is no doubt that *brief-therapy models* is the norm in employee counselling. This model is used based on economical principle, so that the client not spending too much time away from work. However, as Thorne points out, brief therapy is not suitable for all clients. Some managers have the feelings of fear that large amount of time will be spent in personal counselling that neither benefits the organization nor the department. Keeping it short term allays this fear. The *problem-focused models* of counselling views the role of counsellor is for helping individuals to work with the immediate problem they bring. This approach is practical and applicable. It is adopted by the counsellors because of its immediacy to the issue and its aim of helping employees be more effective as quickly as possible. Since much managerial time and many of their tasks involve working with and managing people (Lane, 1990; Income Data Services, 1992 in Carroll 1996), there is a tendency

in some organizations to view managers as quasi-counsellors for their staff. *Manager-based models* is then being applied. In this way counselling is regarded as part of everyday life. Employees prefer to express their feeling or problems to people inside the company, their co-worker (s) or superior (s). Since much managerial time and many of their tasks involve working with and managing people (Lane, 1990; Income Data Services, 1992), it is actually a short step to propel them into the counselling role. Most of the managers do not have the counselling skills, and the solution usually come up as technical advice and not as an insightful solution. Although there will be role conflicts arised and actually the managers use only generic relationship skills rather than counselling skills, it seems that this model is viewed as being more appropriate with their organizational condition. Another organization sees the *internally based models* as an effective approach for the reason that consellor is in touch with the culture of the company. Indonesian culture which views relationships and maintaining confidentiality as the important things makes this models be able to build up great credibility for the counselling service. If an external counsellor employed, the employee feel uncomfortable in communicating problems and distrusts the counsellors so that they can not be frankly discussing their problems with him/her. Fear of getting fired because of having that kind of problem also arising. As the result the counselling services has not been used optimally by employees. Normally self referral is needed, because not all superior (s) realize about their subordinate's need of counselling. Waiting for other's referral means the employees can not be handled as quickly as possible. But fears, anxieties, insecurities and embarrassment arising as constraints. So referral by others become of an effective way under some conditions like confidentiality, otherwise the employees will not trust other people

related to strong competitive condition in getting promotion and higher salaries. *Work-orientated model* is used based on the assumption that the aim of workplace counselling is to facilitate the individual to overcome workplace problems and move back to work as soon as possible.

In general people-problems can be grouped into (at least) three categories (Robert de Board, 1983) :

a. Personality problems

Some people may be worried and depressed by lack of confidence or feelings of unworthiness. Poor self-image and a high opinion of others, over-estimation of own ability, and poor self-image and low opinion of others may arise not from the organization, but from the individual.

Absenteeism and motivation are part of this category.

b. Organizational problem

Hawthorne experiments (Dickson and Roethlisberger, 1966 in Robert de Board, 1983) reports that there were five concerns of employees : 1) keeping and losing a job; 2) unsatisfactory work relations; 3) felt injustices; 4) unsatisfactory relations with authority; and 5) job development. Based on his experience Robert de Board (1983) classifies the causes of anxiety within organizations as technical incompetence, role underload, role overload, uncertain future, and relationships. Management mal-function or weakness, ambiguous job description, inconsistence and unfairnes in providing salary, bonus, or having employees promoted become problems that make empolyees feel unfair and uncomfortable in working.

c. External problems

For every employee in organization, at whatever level, work is only one part of life. The three major parts of life are work, family and leisure. Each of these parts of life have a profound effect on the total

person and his behavior, wherever he is and whatever he is doing. Marriage, bereavement (death of a partner, of a close friend or relative) are problems which will generate emotions and feelings that influenced person at work.

The multiple roles of workplace counsellors become another result of this study. It is rare that employee counsellors have one single role with clients; rather, they have multiple functions such as training, administration, , human and resources department staff, or managerial responsibilities. It seems that economical principle become one of the important consideration, especially due to our economical problem.

The reasons for having no workplace counselling activities in some organizations are considerations that counselling in unimportant with a belief that the organization advancement is entirely in the director-board's arm. Employees do not know and do not care about career development and only concern of having salary are phenomenon due to lack of education and low socio-economic level. The employers see that they have not need counselling services yet due to economic consideration and unfamiliarity with the workplace counselling. They found that there was no serious problems in employees, and that individual problems can be handled individually without the organization's involvement. In our opinion the fact should be the counsellor's responsibility as professional. Communication and information should be given continually to the companies and organization in order to build understanding of counselling services and its function in the workplace. Workplace counsellors can provide education for the employees, including those who have low-level of education.

More employers are providing facilities to help employees increase their level of physical fitness and reduce instances of physical illness. But they do not see it is necessary to provide facilities for mental and psychological fitness or health education for helping employees to manage their physical and mental well-being.

In general it should be admitted that providing workplace counselling services in Indonesia still viewed as inefficiency, especially under the economic crisis. Time, financial cost, and man-power become some of our constraints, although it begins to be realized that mental welfare is also important. We still need more time to providing this kind of facilities in the organization in order to achieve what Presnall saw (1985 in Carroll, 1996) :

- a. To do more about problems in the workplace
- b. To act upon the realization that the workplace is both a human-problem breeder, and a problem-resolver
- c. To humanize the workplace
- d. To develop new work practices based on the awareness that areas are interrelated in the workplace, i.e. health, wholeness, work, relationships, etc.

## **SUGGESTION**

1. Delivering a basic counselling training for supervisors, managers, or special officers. With the introduction of counselling training for personnel officers, human resource officers, managers, and a host of other individuals in industry and public services, we can help them to recognize signs of problems or disturbance in employees and no doubt provides valuable aids in their managerial

and personal roles (Martin, 1994 in Carroll, 1995). Training in counselling skills can be a way of helping them to recognize what is happening as well as understanding the limitations of what they can offer within the counselling role.

2. Organizations having no workplace counselling activities can choose the external professionals as one of some alternatives in keeping their employees mental health. Overall, counselling can be cost-effective. Although it is difficult to ascertain what financial investments are made and what money is saved, it is possible to work out the economic cost to industry if the mental health of individuals is not sustained. We know the cost of industry of absenteeism, of stress : we have never costed the effects of depression of broken relationships, never mind the day-by-day emotional and mental problems faced by most individuals.
3. If possible preparing an established Employees Assistance Program is recommended, especially to face organizational rapid changing in the globalization. EAP can provide various services, including personal couples and family counselling, legal and financial services, information and advice.
4. Setting up and maintaining a counselling service in the workplace needs careful planning. Needs analysing should be made before it is decided to provide the service or not. It should be carefully evaluated whether counselling is the most effective way to fulfill their needs. A haphazard effort may result in the wrong kind of provision for the organization.
5. Professional (i.e. counsellors) need to publicize workplace counselling and their benefit for the organization and human being

in order to build understanding of the employers and the employees. Superiors and managers can be approached to help them delivering this information to the members of organization due to submissive role of subordinate.