



Proceeding of International Conference

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HUMAN LIFE:

Multidisciplinary Approach on Strategic Relevance for Urban Issues

September 6-7, 2007
JW Marriott Hotel Surabaya, Indonesia

Acknowledgments

We are truly indebted to our invited plenary speakers for their willingness to share their expertise and experience before the conference audience. It is partly from their contribution that this conference turns to big success. We would like in this opportunity to thank those people:

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Department of Management, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash
University, Australia*
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We also thank to all presenters who participate in this conference.

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The Obstacles Faced by EAP in Indonesian Workplace

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An employee assistance programme (EAP) is a work-based intervention program which aims to early-identify and resolve of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect performance. These problems may include, but are not limited to, health, marital relationships, family, financial, substance abuse, or emotional concerns. Quality of work life is the context that EAP fit most comfortably. Confidentiality and ethics should be considered as administrative services. In addition to promoting the health, morale, and productivity of employees, EAPs also aim to strengthen the relationship between groups of employees, management, labor unions, and local community groups. Beside all the good things the EAP will deliver in the workplace, it will also face some obstacles especially related to the organizational culture and policy, as well as the stage of development of the organization. Criticism and criteria of an effective EAP should be considered from the very beginning. Some alternatives to start with this helping program in Indonesia should be found out, otherwise Indonesia will never have some courage to change.

Key words : Quality of work life, agriculture country, effective EAP

Urban life in the global era is characterized by new technologies, particularly the Internet. Since their discovery, computers and other advanced technologies have been seen as the revolutionization of the workplace. High technology affects what workers do, the skills and training they need, and the duration and nature of their work lives. "The Internet is a tool, and the biggest impact of that tool is speed," says Andrew S. Grove, chairman of Intel Corporation (Cascio; 2003, p.4). Information technology drives improvements in productivity. The current revolution could appear on the one hand as a "disaster" which will lead to unemployment, poverty, and dehumanization, but on the other hand could also produce possibilities for job enrichment, increased skill and diversity, and more humanistic management styles (Stern in Holosko; 1988, p. 12). The last issue concerning humanistic movement is the quality-of-work-life (QWL).

There are two ways of looking at what quality of work life means. One way equates QWL with a set of objective organizational conditions and practices (e.g., promotion-from-within policies, democratic supervision, employee involvement, safe working conditions). The other way equates QWL with employees' perceptions that they are safe, relatively well satisfied, and able to grow and develop as human beings. This way relates QWL to the degree to which the full range of human needs is met. (Cascio; 2003). Workers who like their organizations and the ways their jobs are structured will feel that their work fulfills them. Quality of the work lives of employees is the context that EAPs fit most comfortably.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

EAP is a formal employer program for providing employees with counseling and/or treatment programs for problems such as alcoholism, gambling, or stress (Dessler; 2005). According to Mondy, et al. (2002) an employee assistance program is a comprehensive approach that many organizations have taken to deal with numerous problem areas, including marital or family difficulties, job performance problems, stress, emotional or mental health issues, financial troubles, alcohol and drug abuse, and other emotional disturbances (Mondy, et al., 2002). While some of these may originate “outside” the work context, they most certainly will have spillover effects to the work context. Most programs are created to control substance abuse or mental health costs. Some have also become concerned with HIV and AIDS, eldercare, workplace violence, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and tornadoes.

There are various reasons why employers are turning to counseling as one method, among others, of caring for their workforce. (Carroll, 1996). Employers’ responsibility for the welfare of their employees is one reason. The fact that employees are taking legal action and counseling services as one way of helping to manage the anticipating risk of changes taking place in organizations are another reasons. Counseling is one way of supporting employees as they cope with organizational change. Counseling can be seen as a way of improving mental health. Counseling 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. Counseling services within the workplace are being viewed not just as ‘crisis’ points or for severely disturbed individuals, but also as a preventive service. In the long run, preventive measures are more cost-effective. Workplace counseling makes sense when it is realized that employees spend about one-quarter of their lives in work settings; that, for many, key relationships are part of their work; that personal identity is often bound up with jobs; and that almost all people integrate personal and professional lives to a great extent. Having counseling available in the workplace means that problems can be dealt with fairly quickly and can be worked through in the very environment from which they often emerge.

Counseling in the workplace, specifically, has existed since the early 1900s though in quite different formats from those we understand by workplace counseling today. There is some evidence that the first counseling program in industry was initiated by the Ford Motor Company in 1914. Two companies, Metropolitan Life Insurance (in 1922) and R.H. Macey (in 1924) employed full-time psychiatrists. The term ‘employee assistance programme’ (EAP) was coined by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism as a way of widening provision to include problems other than alcohol. The 1940s witnessed the beginning of the EAP era of workplace counseling with such provision centred principally on alcohol issues in industry.

In the UK in 1971 the British Institute of Management, from its survey of 200 firms, discovered that 5 % offered some form of personal counseling to employees. In 1983 Orlans and Shipley (Carroll, 1996) surveyed 35 large UK organizations and discovered that all but three had occupational health facilities and, whereas nurses employed within these departments had undergone short-term counseling training, there

was not a single case where extensive counseling training had been provided. EAP programmes in Britain are now well-established.

The Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988 requires federal employees and employees of firms under government contract to have access to employee assistance program services. EAPs grew rapidly in number following that act. However, many firms have determined that there are other advantages to be derived from EAPs and have implemented them voluntarily. In 1958, fewer than 50 American firms offered employee assistance counseling. In 2000, a study by SHRM indicated that 97 % of responding firms with over 5,000 employees had an employee assistance program. Even in small firms fewer than 100 employees, 49 % had EAPs. These programs are being set up primarily to increase worker productivity and reduce cost (Mondy, et al., 2002)

EAPs are increasingly popular, with more than 60% of larger firms offering such programs. One study found that personal mental health was the most common problem addressed by employee assistance programs, followed by family problems. For the company, programs like these produce advantages, not just cost. For example, sick family members and health problems such as depressions account for many of the sick leave days employees take. These absences can be reduced with employee assistance programs that provide advice on issues like elder care referrals and disease management (Dessler; 2005). In addition to promoting the health, morale, and productivity of employees, EAPs also aim to strengthen the relationship between groups of employees, management, labor unions, and local community groups.

Ingredients of An Effective EAP

Dickman (1985 p. 39-52 in Holosko; 1988 p. 98) suggest the following 11 “ingredients” of an effective EAP :

1. Management Endorsement – Management endorsement and active involvement from the highest level of the corporate structure is necessary if an EAP is to be successful.
2. Labor Endorsement – Labor endorsement is crucial when the industry involved is union organized.
3. Policy Statement – Every industry utilizing an EAP needs a clear policy statement of the intentions and philosophy of that program
4. Confidentiality – All employees have the right to ask for help for their problems and to know that their problems will be kept in strict confidence
5. Supervisor and Labor Steward Training – It is recommended that training occur at least once per year, and some of the suggested content for such training are : alcoholism awareness; family and other problems; drug abuse; referral procedures; importance of early interventions; and enabling behavior
6. Financial Aspects and Insurance Coverage – When employees are clear that participating in the EAP may cost them something but that it won't break them, they will be more apt to accept a referral or to refer themselves. Therefore, company insurance coverage is an essential part of the program.
7. Professional Personnel – The EAP coordinator requires knowledge and expertise in many areas, as well as the needed access to competent resources. Some of these areas are : alcoholism and substance abuse; marriage and family counseling;

- general emotional problems; financial and legal problems; and basic interviewing and counseling techniques.
8. Broad Service Components – The EAP must be able to help fully respond to a wide variety of employees' problem and needs.
 9. Accessibility – Employees need to be able to access EAP sites quickly, conveniently, and in a confidential manner.
 10. EAP Awareness – To be effective, the EAP needs constant marketing at all levels of the organization.
 11. Program Evaluation – It is crucial for the organization and the EAP to know if the program is working and if it is doing what it purports to do.

Criticism of Workplace Counseling

Despite its many advantages for the workplace, criticism have been levelled at introducing counseling as part of workplace life. Some sees it becoming part of the politics of the organization and used by factions for their own ends. It can be also too easily used by an organization to shelve its responsibilities towards employees, especially regarding stress (“we have installed a counseling service to help people deal with stress.”) It can also become a tool of management. In some organizatios, there is great anxiety that going for counseling will be seen as a weakness that will take its toll on career and promotion. The final criticism is that counseling is not integrated into the organization but remains on the outside. If inadequately introduced, the counseling service itself can become dysfunctional. On the other hand, over-involvement of the organization in its counseling service can lead to its becoming a form of social control.

The Impact of Organizations on Workplace Counseling

“Our thesisis that in order to fully understand the development of a therapeutic relationship one must pay attention to the organisational contex in which the helping occurs”. (R.Crandell and R.D. Allen in Carroll, 1996). “As every organization is an entirely unique system (there is no pure type), it follows that no two will have exactly the same needs. If counseling is to make a positive impact on the culture and performance of an organization, it needs to out of, and respond effectively to, these special needs.”(J. Summerfield and L. van Oudtshoorn in Carroll, 1996). The organizational context make significant impact on the counseling relationships within them. Our understanding of organization help us to make sense of what happens within them, particularly how they affect individuals who are employed by them.(Carroll, 1996). These are far from simple concepts and the whole relationship between individuals and the organizations in which they work is complex. Other factors need to be considered : the stage of development of the organization (is it just established, well established?); the effects of the wider community on the organization (economic and political forces); and the state of the external environment within which the organization is operating. All of these come together in what is termed ‘organizational culture’.

Organizational culture is about the ecology, the ethos, the personality, the atmosphere of a company or institution. It reflected in ‘the way we do things around here’ and encompasses values, beliefs and attitudes that are shared by members of the organization. Understanding the culture of an organization, institution or even a group, gives valuable insights into why individuals within these groups act the way they do, the

norms that dictate behaviour, and also help us devise interventions to help people who become ill, mentally or physically.

Indonesia as An Agriculture Country

As we have discussed above, the organizational context make significant impact on the counseling relationship within them. Knowing the organizational culture will help us to make an effective counseling or an effective EAP. If we want to start with the EAP service in Indonesia, we should better understand about the macro environment of Indonesia.

Using measurement of standard metropolitan areas Indonesia has more rural than urban areas. Only some areas can be classified as metropolitan cities or urban areas. The largest part is rural areas, which mean that most of the employee come from rural areas. Numerous literature have been written on the culture of urban based companies and corporations, but rarely can we find such an information about rural areas. So our discussion later on will tend to be related to rural communities.

There are several characteristics attributed to rural residents and communities. The occupational perception usually focuses on rural areas as basically agrarian, though farm families are decreasing due to increased economic difficulties. Thus, many of the farm populations are confronted with problems of economic loss, depression, various familial problems and underemployment (Johnson, 1980 in Holosko, 1988). The ecological perception focuses on density of population and closeness to a metropolitan area. The social/cultural perspective views rural in terms of life-style and relationships. The rural community is generally perceived as having traditional life-style, homogeneity of values, close personal relationships, fundamental religious heritage, strong family orientation, and resistance to outside influence. Other factors cited in the literature include : reliance upon informal systems; limited health, mental health, and social services; poor public transportation; skewed population of the very young and very old. Development, particularly in rural areas, is hindered by limited unionization, adversarial relationships between labor and management, cheap and abundant labor supply, a depressed economy, and general slowness to change.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it becomes very clear that rural communities might be somewhat reluctant to readily engage in pursuing EAPs due to traditionalism, provincialism, and general limited exposure to social service programs.

Obstacles and Solutions

EAP is still something new or has not been developed yet in Indonesia. Despite the unique culture and different life style we have, we are also confronted with problems of mental health, education, leisure, the family, discrimination, crime, unemployment, and other stresses as real for people in other communities. The development of EAP in the workplace has witnessed rapid growth during the last 30 years in other part of the world. Agencies and corporations in many countries have accepted a more humanistic approach to the resolution of problems confronting employees. The advancement of information technology has stimulated a globally competitive business environment in the 21st-century. As part of the world we cannot isolate ourselves from the global movement. We need EAP service in order to increase the quality of work life in our community. The trends to humanize the workplace are not illusions. EAPs respond to

problems by taking into account both the productivity and financial effects on the company and also the human cost factors on the employee, such as job, dignity, and sense of well-being. Therefore, it is not surprising that both the worker and the company many benefit from early identification and remediation of problems (Balgopal and Patchner in Holosko, 1988). We believe that EAP can work in Indonesia, but there are some very essential factors that must be considered in the planning process.

Some obstacles faced by EAP in Indonesian workplace might be :

1. Limited amount of companies which are influenced by humanistic school of thought. EAP service is available in some multinational corporations that have EAPs in the parent organization, which has accepted the humanistic approach to employees care.
2. Several companies might give statement that there was no need for EAP. If problems evolved interfering with job performance, the employee would be asked to solve the problems by himself or searching for external helping service under his own cost.
3. The use of cheap labor and abundant labor supply. Small or medium scale companies do not have to invest in employee services, since they can fire an employee and have a replacement available the next day.
4. It is typically the larger unionized companies that tend to have EAP. The smaller companies frequently do not invest in such programs due to concern related to additional cost for providing such services.
5. Blue collar workers might not perceive EAP service as a priority. Since they are still in struggle with poverty and economic problems, higher level of needs might not evolve.
6. There might be great anxiety that going for counseling will be seen as a weakness or they might have some stigma, that will take away the employee's job.
7. Concerning the issue of confidentiality and employee privacy. Because of societal values about many problems such as drug abuse, marital and family conflicts, emotional problems, employees are hesitant to seek assistance from EAPs. Employee reluctance is further compounded if they are not guaranteed that the data shared by them will be kept completely confidential. Such preservation of confidentiality is absolutely essential for not only client protection, but also mandated by the code of ethics of many helping professions. (Balgopal & Patchner in Holosko, 1988).
8. The socio/cultural of agrarian life-styles might be somewhat reluctant to readily engage in pursuing EAPs due to traditionalism and general limited exposure to social service programs

Some strategies and solutions have to be found out. Confidentiality and accessibility seems to be the prior strategies to convince the employees so that they will not hesitate to seek assistance from EAPs. Constant marketing at all levels of the organization is needed to inform the employees about the benefit they will get from EAPs service. The humanistic approach to employees care and long term benefit that companies will get from preventive service should be campaigned. Criteria of an effective EAP and criticism of EAP should be considered from the very beginning. It is obvious that EAPs existence is needed. However, problems caused by the economic

constraint of small companies will frequently arise. Therefore the EAPs service need to be modified in such a way so it will cover cost efficiency. Not only the troubled employee has to be handled but also the 'normal' one need to be cared. Training, for example, could become an alternative to increase the skill or knowledge of the employees. The emphasis is on wellness and the healthier workers rather than just on problem or troubled employees. In case of cost efficiency employee counselors could have multiple roles that fit well together. The aim to humanize the workplace is not illusions. We can find many other alternatives to start with this helping program in Indonesia. Otherwise we will never have some courage to change.

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