

## **Counselling For Effective Work Performance: A Way for Service Improvement**

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**Abstract:** *Some of the poor performance problems in a work organization are caused by personal issues faced by employees. These issues which often affect the employees' personal lives often lead to performance decline, directly affecting the organizational productivity. For organizational productivity to be attained, the workers must be efficient in their job performance. This is because the production process and services delivery that leads to high productivity depends on them. In a situation where employees fail to be productive as a result of personal problem, counselling service is a tool to improve their performance. In this paper, the notion of counselling for effective work performance as a way for service improvement in work organization was examined. The paper assessed the reasons for poor performance, strategies for managing poor work performance, benefits of counselling to organizational work performance, counselling as a way forward for service improvement and modalities for counselling employees. The paper concluded that for work organizations to be productive, work place counselling should be organized for employees whose work performances have declined as a result of personal problems.*

**Keywords:** *Counselling, effective, work-performance, service, improvement.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Effective work performance is the production of valid results in a work organization. It is when employees produce the expected results that may lead to productivity in the work organization (Clark, 2000). On the other hand, Strebler (2004) defined poor performance as a situation 'where an employee's behaviour or performance might fall below the required standard'.

Poor performance is an issue to managers and employees in a work organization. It is of concern to senior managers because it is a measure of how effective the organisation is led. It is an emotive issue, which according to Strebler (2004) can be quite personal, since productivity and the working climate are affected. Poor performance can be exhibited by way of: failure to perform the duties of the position or to perform them to the standard required; non-compliance with workplace policies, rules or procedures; unacceptable behaviour in the workplace; and disruptive or negative behaviour that impacts on co-workers.

In different work organization today, job performance of workers seems to be declining in a geometrical progression. This is because most workers exhibit negative attitude towards their jobs. The result of a study reported by Zetlin (2013) showed that forty-seven percent (47%) of employees admitted that personal problems sometimes affect their work performance. More than 16 percent of employees used for the study reported that their personal challenges resulted in absenteeism, while about half the respondents admitted that it makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their jobs.

In a situation where employees' job performance is declining, organizational productivity is often seriously affected. In spite of this awareness, many organizations still suffer lack of organizational productivity as a result of employee job performance. In this paper, the notion of counselling for effective work performance as a way for service improvement in work organization would be examined.

### **Reasons for Poor Performance**

There are many reasons why employees may perform poorly. Several scholars, theories and authors have highlighted reasons for employees' underperformance. In his book, "The Human Side of Enterprise", Douglass McGregor (1960) formulated the theory explaining why employees underperform. According to McGregor's (1960) theory X:

- The average human being is inherently lazy by nature and desires to work as little as possible. He dislikes the work and will like to avoid it, if he can.
- He avoids accepting responsibility and prefers to be led or directed by some other.
- He is self-centred and indifferent to organizational needs.
- He has little ambition, dislikes responsibility, prefers to be led but wants security.

- He is not very intelligent and lacks creativity in solving organizational problems.
- He by nature is resistant to change of any type.

Some of the common reasons for poor performance as enumerated by the Australian Government (2013a) include:

- an employee doesn't know what is expected because goals and/or standards or workplace policies and consequences are not clear (or have not been set)
- interpersonal differences
- there is a mismatch between an employee's capabilities and the job they are required to undertake, or the employee does not have the knowledge or skills to do the job expected of them
- an employee does not know whether they are doing a good job because there is no counselling or feedback on their performance
- lack of personal motivation, low morale in the workplace and/or poor work environment
- personal issues such as family stress, physical and/or mental health problems or problems with drugs or alcohol
- cultural misunderstandings
- workplace bullying.

### **Strategies for Managing Poor Work performance**

Managing the problem of poor work performance is a task that must be accomplished in a work organization. Although it can be challenging and confronting to employers, supervisor or managers, there is need to address underperformance, if the human organization must attain its set goals and objectives. Managers, employers and supervisors need clear procedures, organizational support, courage and willingness to manage the issue.

Whenever performance problems arise in a work organization, it is important to resolve such issues early. The longer the problem is allowed to continue, the more difficult a satisfactory resolution becomes, and the more the overall credibility of the system may suffer. McGregor's (1960) theory Y provides a way forward for managing employees' underperformance. According to McGregor's (1960) theory Y:

- The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest.
- Control and punishment are not the only ways to make people work, man will direct himself if he is committed to the aims of the organization.
- If a job is satisfying, then the result will be commitment to the organization.
- The average man learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but to seek responsibility.
- Imagination, creativity, and ingenuity can be used to solve work problems by a large number of employees.
- Under the conditions of modern industrial life, the intellectual potentialities of the average man are only partially utilized.

Douglas McGregor's Theory Y assumes that people are not by nature, lazy and unreliable. They can be self-directed and creative at work, if properly motivated. It is for the management to unleash this potential in individuals (employees). Theory Y emphasizes creating opportunities, removing obstacles, providing guidance and encouraging growth. By using these tools, the management can integrate individual goals of employees with those of the Organisation. Theory Y is optimistic, dynamic, flexible and progressive. It suggests self direction and the integration of individual needs with organizational needs.

There are different ways to manage the problem of poor performance. According to Australian Government (2013b), it is not every underperformance issue that requires a structured process. Employees' managers and supervisors need to explore other options for improving performance, such as the use of continuous feedback. This is because for performance management to be successful, the culture of the work organization must encourage ongoing feedback and discussion about performance issues in open and supportive environments.

The proponents of the human relations theory - Elton Mayo, Fritz J. Roethlisberger, William J. Dickson, and T. North (1932), maintained that employees must be treated humanely in the work place. They postulate that:

- i. Work is a group activity;
- ii. A worker is a person whose attitude and effectiveness are conditioned by social attitude of individual worker;
- iii. The social world of the workers is primarily patterned about work activity;
- iv. The need for recognition in man, for security and a sense of belonging is more important in determining workers' productivity than the physical condition under which they work.

Where an employee's performance is suffering due to the employee's personal behavior, situation or circumstances, the employee need to be referred to professional help or counseling. Work organization is not just a techno-economic system, but a social system where employees' feelings, emotions and attitudes could be

influenced through training and counselling. In order to achieve employees' productivity, effective two-way communication network (Counselling for effective work performance) becomes an essential instrument in human organizations for service improvement.

According to Chester Barnard Irvin (1938), an early advocate of organizational behaviour (OB), organizational efficiency is the degree to which that organization is able to satisfy the motives of the individuals. He assumed that if an organization satisfies the motives of its employees, and attains its explicit goals, cooperation and productivity among them will last.

### **Counselling as a Way Forward for Service Improvement: What Counselling is all about**

Counseling is the act of assisting a client to have a positive perception about things. It aims to assist the client to possibly perceive things from a different point of view from what the initially perceive it, to enable the client function effectively. Counseling can enable a client to develop positive feelings, experiences and behaviours that would facilitate positive change. In the opinion of Roy (2011), counselling services are offered to the person that is undergoing a problem and deserves professional assistance to enable him overcome such problem. She maintained that such a problem could keep the individual disturbed and under tension; unless resolved, the development of this individual will continue to be hampered. Counseling therefore is a specialized service carried out by professionals or trained personnel in personality development and in the act of handling exceptional individuals or groups.

As explained by Willey and Andrew cited in Roy (2011), counseling is a process involving two individuals, one seeking assistance and the other a professionally trained person helped solved problems to orient and direct him towards a goal, which leads to his maximum development and growth. Counseling services are therefore required for individuals having developmental problems because of the handicap they suffer in any area of emotional either because of hereditary factors or environment conditions.

Historically the term counselling was associated with serious personal problems such as alcohol dependency and marital breakdown (Tony, 2005). In recent years the term has been widely used in management literature to the extent that some writers have suggested that managers cannot avoid acting as counsellors'. However, the term is used in a vague way and often this employee "counseling" bears little relationship to psychotherapy or other forms of professional counseling (Tony, 2005). When an employee's performance or that of the work group is affected by personal problems, the employer, supervisor or manager must intervene. According to Tony (2005) referral to professional counselling may be appropriate.

### **Benefits of Counselling to Organizational Work Performance**

When an organization pays less attention to the welfare of her employees, the organization is bound to suffer reduced productivity. This is because many employees are often affected by personal problems, which result in decreased job performance. Counselling is one of the instruments that can help improve work performance in any human organization. There are different kinds of counseling in work organizations. This part of the service is largely delivered by Atos Origin, and is used by staff needing that further level of support to help them return to work or to help them deal with issues that would otherwise have impacted on their attendance or performance.

Performance counselling is designed to help non performing workers identify the causes of work-related problems that result in poor performance. The employer or manager should not personally try to identify and solve the causes of personal problems such as depression, alcoholism or marital problems for an employee. If personal problems become apparent and persistent, employers should refer the employee to experts in performance counselling to identify and solve the causes of such personal problems (New South Wales Government, 2013). The confidential counselling service is designed to help employees deal with personal problems, some of which may be affecting performance at work. Within the business, most people are fairly well balanced. Occasionally, however, employees may need additional support, which is provided by counselors.

### **Modalities for Counselling Employees**

Counselling may be offered internally by a professional counsellor or externally, perhaps by an EAP. Some organizations try to get around this by using local community services from a company referral directory. However this requires the manager to diagnose the employee's problems (e.g. is this employee drug dependent or do they have marital problems?), something they are neither qualified nor entitled to do. In addition trying to keep such a directory updated is difficult and time consuming.

Counselling and psychological support for employees is the basis of any human organization. Modalities of counseling services include telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling, psychological debriefing, group support and legal and debt advice. The key element is to support staff through any difficulties

that impact on their working lives. Core to the service is the ability to work with organizations and their staff at all levels (Hughes & Kinder, 2007).

Performance counselling is an indispensable part of job supervision in any organization if employees must be efficient in their performance. According to an employee relations document of the Government of New York State (2004), performance counsellor should:

- Explain the nature of the situation to the client dates/facts about poor performance.
- Allow employee the opportunity to express his or her view about the situation.
- Discuss modalities to overcome the performance shortcoming with the employee.
- Ensure that whatever the cause of the poor performance is, it should not persist.
- Arrive at a conclusion on corrective action and set a definite follow-up date.
- Never coordinate the counselling session as if it is a disciplinary measure.
- Remember to explain to the employee during the session if the counselling session will be followed with a counselling memo since not all counselling sessions require a memo.

The New South Wales Government (2013) proposed the following as modalities for performance counselling.

- The counsellor should give the employee recognition and not assume the role of a parent scolding a child.
  - He or she should ensure that the counselling atmosphere is warm and conducive for communication.
  - The counsellor should encourage the employee to gain insight into the problem, in so doing avoiding cutting of employee's comments.
  - He or she should suggest positive steps that would lead to solving the problem or improve performance, avoiding giving the employee false hope.
  - He or she should create a desire for change in the employee by giving support that could lead to efficiency, not expecting a dramatic change in the employee's performance because of a single counselling session.
- Heathfield (2014) enumerated the following modalities for effective counselling to improve employees' work performance:

- The counsellor should show confidence in the employee's ability and willingness to solve the problem.
- He or she should focus on the problem or behaviour that needs improvement, not the employee.
- The counsellor should determine whether there are issues affecting the employee's ability to perform or accomplish the task, bearing in mind the four common barriers - time, training, tools, and temperament.
- The counsellor should discuss possible solutions to the problem with the employee by asking the employee for ideas on how to correct or prevent the problem from future occurrence.
- A written action plan that enumerates what the employee, the supervisor, and possibly, the HR professional, will do to improve the situation should be agreed on.
- The counsellor should schedule a date and time for follow-up in order to determine how the employee is progressing.
- The counsellor should encourage the employee by expressing confidence in his or her ability to improve.

### **Impact of Counselling on Employees Work Performance**

An analysis of counselling at work and its associated activities has found a range of benefits to individual employees and the organization. Research by McLeod (2001) reported a positive correlation between the provision of counselling and net workplace benefits. Research findings reported by Hughes and Kinder (2007) showed that counselling support can have a significant positive impact on employees' job performance. Similarly, Sutherland and Hatton (2002) found out that an organization that provides 'confidential help' (counseling services) to employees is likely to be highly productive.

Chan (2011) conducted a study on the effectiveness of workplace counselling in improving employee well-being (workplace stress, burnout and depression) and performance. The result of the study indicated that workplace counselling improves employee well-being; the intervention helps employees in alleviating symptoms of workplace stress, burnout and depression. However, workplace counselling seems to have neutral effect on employee performance. The researcher concluded that workplace counselling should be used as a tool to restore employees and potentially improve employees' and organisational performance.

Izzat (2014) carried out a study on significance of workplace counselling on increasing job performance in an organization. The results of the study revealed a significant effect of workplace counselling on employee job performance. Similarly the result of a study on evaluating the workplace effects of counseling by David, John and Richard (2012) revealed that workplace counselling resulted in a positive impact on the workplace as measured using the scales of the Workplace Outcome Suite.

## II. Conclusion

Some of the decline experienced by work organization results from individual performances of employees. It is an indisputable fact that for a work organization to be very productive, her employees must live up to the work expectation of the organization. If the employees are facing personal issues that have affected their performances, the employer, supervisor or manager should organize work place counselling for them. This is because work place counselling is a way forward for service delivery in work organizations.

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