

**EMPLOYEE COUNSELING @ WORKPLACE:
PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE**

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Abstract:

Today's competitive world is becoming complex as never before and the stress in the lives of people is becoming a very common issue especially at the workplaces of the employees, so counseling for employees has emerged as the latest HR tool to retain its best employees and also to increase the worth of the workforce.

Thus, there is virtually no organization which is free from stress or stress-free employees. In most of the cases the employees may feel stressed, depressed and high level of anxiety due to various work related issues like managing deadlines, achieving the targets, lack of time and other resources to fulfill personal and family commitments, and work-life imbalance etc.

Organizations have started realizing the importance of having a motivated, stress-free and competent employee. Therefore, many companies have introduced the counseling services in their organizations and inculcating the same in work culture.

This paper focuses on the evolution, role, importance, guidelines and emerging trend in the field of counseling for the well being of employees in different organizations and the ways through which it can be introduced in different Indian organizations whether small or large, manufacturing or service organization.

Key words: *Employee Counseling, Counselor, Stress, employee well being, workplace*

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1. Introduction:

Many firms today realize the importance of attracting and retaining highly skilled, quality employees as a necessary component of their competitive advantage.

Previously, a firm's success was attributed by emphasizing on product and process technology, access to financial markets, developing economies of scale & learning curves, patents, protected and regulated markets & individual attractiveness. Recently, however, some scholars have noted that these traditional sources of success are less important than in the past and emphasize that the selection and management of a quality workforce has become an increasingly critical factor to organizational success. Today, HR practitioners are busy developing new and innovative tools to attract and retain quality workforce.

One such important tool that is gaining popularity in the corporate world is Employee Counseling.

Counseling has been defined as “ a process which takes place in a one-to-one relationship between an individual beset by problems with which he cannot cope alone and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties” (Hahn and MacLean, 1955).

Pepinsky and Pepinsky (1954) state that counseling is that interaction which (1) occurs between two individuals called counselor and client, (2) takes place in a professional setting, and (3) is initiated and maintained to facilitate changes in the behavior of a client.

Keith Davis has defined Employee counseling as a discussion of an emotional problem with an employee, with the general objective of decreasing it. This definition in itself has three implications: firstly, counseling deals with emotional problems.

Secondly, counseling involves discussion, meaning that it is an act of communication. Successful counseling depends on communication skills, primary oral, by which a person's emotions can be shared with another.

Thirdly, the general objective of counseling is to understand and/or decrease an employee's emotional disorder.

For counseling to exist, an employee must be seeking an understanding or help and/or the other (known as counselor) must be offering it.

In total, work place counseling refers to the process of advising an employee or preferably in most cases, listening to the statement of his problem and enabling him to find from his own

thinking and talking a solution which is satisfactory to him. It relates to a method of understanding and helping people who are upset emotionally.

1. Evolution of Counseling in India

1.1. Counseling and guidance movement in India

Counseling is not a novel institution in the Indian context. This term had shown its presence in our ancient mythology and the first counselor was Lord Krishna himself and the Bhagavad Gita embodies the finest principles of counseling for people of all lands, all ages and of all times. The Gita or the song celestial explains how Arjuna, whose mind was in a great conflict, was helped to overcome this conflict through an insight into him. Arjuna's conflict was one of "mine and thine", that is, between *sva* and *para*.

The conflict was resolved through self understanding or through self realization. One has to act in accordance with his *swadharma*. man should act in accordance with the demands of his station and his duties in life. Man has to realize his inner naturalize, his spirituality which reveals oneness with the ultimate. This helps to overcome the illusory distinction between *Atma* and *Paramatma*.

1.2. Counseling movement in Modern India

The origin of counseling movement in India should be naturally traced to the beginnings of psychology in India.

The most important reason why the status of counseling in India is popular is the lack of employment opportunities. Now days in Indian society, career counseling, family counseling, marriage counseling & industrial/employee counseling are becoming very popular.

It was at the Mysore University in south India that has first chair in psychology been endowed. Slowly most of the good universities of India such as Calcutta university, Patna University, Banaras Hindu University, Luck now university and Agra university started a department of psychology.

During 1970's, the important areas of counseling have been organized. The family planning association of India (FPAI) offers counseling for family welfare at its New Delhi and Bombay centers. A number of private counseling centers have sprung up in recent times in metropolitan cities like Bombay and New Delhi. This brings us face to face with all important questions regarding the professional requirements of the counselors. The University of Baroda, St. Xavier's college, Bombay and other such institutions offered courses for training of counselors.

Students were offered post graduate degrees in psychology with emphasis on the modern experimental approach.

Largely, Counseling has been a 'remedial approach'. But recently there has been a slight change in emphasis, from remedial to 'preventive'.

2. Counseling @ work place

According to a recent survey published in All India News (2013) it was found that 43 % of the private sector had lifestyle disease followed by chronicle disease (38%) and remaining privately employed having acute ailments. Although private employees earn more than public sector employees, but more than 84% of the private employee are stressed and prone to acute and chronic ailments than public sector employees (15%). As per the survey conducted on 18 different private sectors, the IT industry employee suffered the most with highest stress. Mumbai ranked the top for the (maximum stress) for employees worked in private followed by Delhi (second), (third) Ahmadabad, fourth (Chandigarh), fifth (Hyderabad), sixth (Kolkata) and last Chennai in seventh place.

Among varied reasons of stress work pressure is the one which is more positively associated with sleep disorders. Approximately 45 % of private employees working in corporate sector encounter sleep disorders due to work pressure, which further leads to low performance, high stress, physical discomfort, back pain and health related issues (V. Krishnan, 2013, All India News).

Chairman of Asssocham (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) health Committee Dr.B.K Rao opines that out of all the significant contributors in creating the workplace stress, the increasing cases of marital and mistrust in relationships are important reason of working staff which ultimately lead their serious health hazards. As various health care schemes are facilitated by government to their employees along with pension and good family relationship, this result in better health compared to private sector employees.

All these stats calls for an effective step to be taken by the organization to preserve the well being of their human assets and workplace counseling is one such emerging concept which is concerned with developing employee competence in order to get relieved from the workplace

pressure and stress specially in private sector in order to give best efforts to lead high performances. This concept is an integral part of human resource management and is:

- An exchange of ideas and feelings between manager and his employees.
- Tries to improve organizational performance by helping the employee to cope with their problems.
- May be performed by both professionals (Industrial psychologist) and non professionals (Line or personnel managers).
- Usually it is confidential in order to have free talk and discussion.

3.1. Employee counseling: effective during-

1. **Interpersonal conflict in organizations:** Interpersonal conflicts may arise due to differences in perception, values and goals of two individuals. Intergroup conflicts may arise because of differences in values, goals and aspiration of two groups. Whatever may be the type and cause of conflict, it creates emotional problems for the affected individuals. Some people are able to resolve such conflicts while others need counseling to come out of the situation.

2. **Frustration at work:** it is a result of motivation drive being blocked to prevent one from reaching the desired goal. Reactions of frustrated behavior are aggression, apathy, withdrawal, resignation, physical disorders, substitute goals and compromise. These reactions are in no way favorable to the individual or the organization; so it is desirable to reduce the frustrating conditions in the organizations. Frustrated individuals also require counseling to help them to overcome frustration.

Counseling can help reduce frustrations by helping employees choose mature courses of action to overcome blockages preventing goal accomplishment. The counselor can also advise management regarding blockages so that it may try to reduce or remove them.

3. **Work stress:** stress is a major contributor to employee emotional disorders and also to physical disorders, because the internal body system changes to try to cope with stress. Some physical disorders are short-range, such as an upset stomach. Others are long-range, such as a stomach ulcer. Stress over a prolonged time may also contribute to degenerative diseases of the heart, kidneys, blood vessels, and other parts of body. For these reasons, it is important to find

causes of stress and take steps to remove them. Counseling canals play great role in dealing with emotional disorders and reducing the level of prevailing stress.

3. Forms of Counseling

3.1. *Disciplinary counseling*

This kind of counseling is usually a one-off interview dealing with lower standards of behavior or performance than are expected at work. Often there are reasons why this is happening and the counseling interview should aim to find out what they are and how to deal with them. For example, being absent from work may be the result of bullying.

Disciplinary counseling tries to bring an end to poor performance without taking disciplinary action. It deals with:

- Disciplinary issues at work
- Bullying in the workplace

3.2. *Personal counseling*

This happens when an employee have a personal problem and need advice or support. The problem may be affecting their physical or mental health.

The main problems for which people ask for or are offered personal counseling at work are:

- stress
- bullying and harassment
- depression
- alcohol abuse
- drug abuse



Figure: Target of counseling

4. Role & importance of counseling at workplace

Apart from their personal problems, there are various reasons which can create stress for the employees at the workplace like unrealistic targets or work-load, constant pressure to meet the deadlines, career problems, responsibility and accountability, conflicts or bad inter-personal relations with superiors and subordinates, problems in adjusting to the organizational culture. Counseling helps the employee to share and look at his problems from a new perspective, help oneself to face and deal with the problems in a better way. Counseling at workplace is a way of the organization to care about its employees.

5. Stumbling block in the way of Workplace counseling

The biggest bottleneck in employee counseling at the workplace is the lack of trust on the employee's part to believe in the organization or his superior to share and understand his problems. Also, the confidentiality that the counselor won't disclose his personal problems or issues to others in the organization. Time, effort and resources required on the part of the organization are also sometime act as a big constraint.

7. Who can be the Counselors @ workplace?

In a formal organization where employer is the representative, counseling may be done by three major groups-supervisors, specialists (such as personnel experts, social welfare experts, legal experts, doctors, etc.) and professional counselors (such as trained psychologists, or psychiatrics)

➤ **Line manager's role in counseling**

- listen to problems/Address issues,
- provide feedback and help counselee to see a different view point,
- Investigate problems/ matters,
- Avoid word of mouth and see root cause with evidence,
- Suggest/Recommend solutions,
- Observe behavior and clarify expectations,
- Determine right course of action and reach conclusion,
- Draft plan of action and follow up.

➤ **HR's role in Counseling**

- Need for counseling can be identified by HR as well as Supervisor,
- HR discusses the issue with the relevant supervisor and continuously asks for feedback,
- Discuss and agree a plan of action with supervisor,
- Schedule and jointly conduct the counseling session,
- Conclude the counseling session with warning (If required)
- Follow-up the action plan and feedback to the supervisor,
- Monitor developments

8. 5-D Model of Counseling

This model describes the counseling process in five phases.

Phase 1: focus on developing friendly relationship with client. This stage is characterized by an interactive, two-way and open communication with the concerned employee.

Phase 2: The second stage is characterized by listening carefully the client problems.

Phase 3: This stage emphasis on making the client self-dependent and enhancing their self-esteem.

Phase 4: in this stage counselor advice various alternative solutions to the client problem.

Phase 5: The client meets again with the counselor a week/days later to discuss the progress so far.

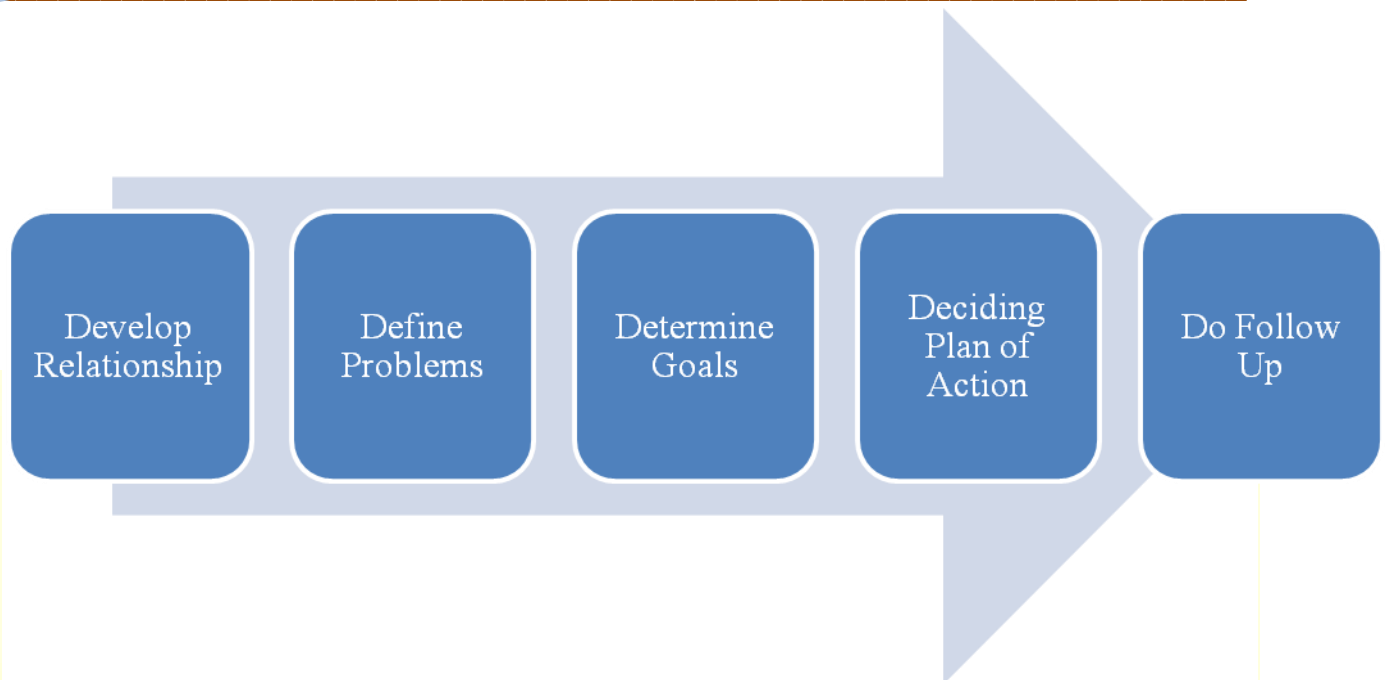


Figure. 5-D MODEL OF COUNSELING

9. Guidelines for effective employee counseling

- **Build morale and boost motivation:** At times, due to unforeseen reasons, employees exhibit dipping morale, effecting performance and productivity. Do not fret - proper counseling, can help motivate employees again.
- **Listen and show confidence:** Do not ignore the employee problems as trivial and listen to them. Believe in their abilities, show confidence in their work and tell them that the organization has a lot of expectations from them. Such trust and confidence motivates the employees to resolve issues and perform better.
- **Focus on the problem and not the person:** However big or small the problem is, it is affecting performance and needs to be discussed. But remember the real culprit is the problem and not the person. So, instead of focusing on the employee, try to focus on understanding the problem.
- **Give suggestions and solutions:** After understanding the problem, try to help the person solve it. Take the employee's opinion about the ways the issue can be resolved. Analyze the various solutions and give suggestions. A discussion about the solutions may actually help you figure out and eliminate the pain point.
- **Create an action plan:** Some problems may warrant a series of tasks to be performed over a period of time to be resolved. Create action plans for yourself and the colleague. Clearly note

down the actions that each party has to perform. Show active involvement to make the team member feel comfortable with your initiatives and motivate him/her to perform to the best of his/her abilities.

- **Follow up:** Follow up after regular intervals to see if the counseling has helped. It not only shows your genuine interest in the well being and performance of the team mate but also helps you identify gaps and other issues. Moreover, following up helps you evaluate the success of the action plan.

10. Emerging trend in counseling

Now most of the MNCs operating around the world have recognized the importance of counseling for improving the physical and psychological health of their man power. That's why they had introduced the counseling services to improve the overall functioning and work culture of the organization. Many IT companies started this counseling job not in physical formats but they started to execute the on-line concept of workplace counseling i.e., E-counseling. One of the best example of such innovative change is Unites (Union for Information Technology & Enabled Services) Professionals which has started web-based and face-to-face psychological counseling for BPO workers (P. Padmanabhan, 2006).

11. Conclusion:

Rightly said by Laveena Bhatia, Senior Manager, Human Resources, CSC in India "*Counseling helps employees to manage their own problems, using their own resources. An organization can earn competitive advantage through workplace counseling as this is a powerful tool for maximizing work performance and attracting and retaining quality workforce*".

Counseling can go a long way in helping the employees to have better control over their lives, take their decisions wisely and better charge of their responsibilities, reduce the level of employee's stress and anxiety. Counseling, if done well, can produce spectacular results, in terms of improving employee morale and productivity. However, when it comes to counseling co-workers, one has to be really careful and take the working environment and current situation into consideration. Go with a genuine intention to help and see how employee's counseling works wonders.

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