

Role of Counseling in Employee Performance in Public Universities (A Case Study of Kenyatta University)

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Abstract

In order to achieve the set goals or perform the activities of any organization, employees have to be taken care of economically, politically and socially, to enable them perform to the standards required. One way of taking care of the employees is through workplace counseling. The paper aimed at investigating the role counseling plays in employee performance in public universities and it focused on Kenyatta University as a case in Kenya. The study population comprised of management staff, counselors, teaching and non-teaching members of staff. In order for the objectives of the study to be achieved, a questionnaire was used and data was collected and analyzed using SPSS. The research employed descriptive statistics which gave a result that there was a positive link between counseling and employee performance in public universities in Kenya

Key Words: Employee counseling, Employee performance, Human Resource Management, Public Universities in Kenya.

1. Introduction

The success or failure of an organization is largely dependent on the caliber of the people working therein. According to Kaila (2005), counseling helps employee cope with problems and thus there is an assumption that it should improve both organizational performance and the employee performance since the employee becomes more cooperative, worries less about personal problems or improves in other ways. Today, Human Resource (HR) practitioners are busy developing new and innovative tools to attract and retain quality workforce. One such tool gaining popularity in the corporate world is employee counseling. It has become an innovative tool of retaining employees. When employee's problems affect their performance or that of the work group, the HR practitioner must intervene. Organizations that care for their employees are perceived as more meaningful and purposeful. A firm may gain competitive advantages from employee counseling activities especially if its reputation and image is valuable, rare and not easily imitated. Universities are examples of firms that could take advantage of counseling to gain competitive advantage over the corporate world by embracing the current wave of service of employee counseling for improved performance. The universities could monitor, assess and seek to improve poor performance and address continuing poor performance through "personal counseling" to the employees where by the staff, psychological, emotional and associated concerns are handled. In his study, Joseph (2012) agrees that any successful organization will come across stress among its employees. It is therefore the responsibility of the organization to help its employees to deal with stress. Astonishing economic and social changes have, over the years, transformed the ways in which we cope with our lives. So to deal with the challenges of modern times, counseling is important, where employees can speak and attempt to solve their personal and work associated worries. Counseling is a process of helping an individual to help himself.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Organizations have in the recent past been recognizing the role of Human Resource Management as opposed to earlier Personnel Management, which used to deal with employees as tools for organizational goal achievement.

If the goals were not met then a disciplinary action was taken against the employee without investigating what the problem the employee might be facing. The investigation could be in form of counseling. Counseling had been left to church organizations, social work centers or non-governmental organizations in the early eighties and of late, the new concept has been adopted by many organizations especially the private sectors. Employee counseling is an effort by both parties, namely the employee and the employer in that the employer offering the service to improve the work performance and the willingness of the employee to seek counseling services. According to a research by McLeod (2001), there is strong evidence that counseling is effective in overcoming employees' problems and improving their performance. The research found out that the majority of clients in several studies improved significantly within six to eight sessions of counseling and virtually all clients were highly satisfied with the help they had received. However, the extent to which the counseling facilities and services are contributing to employee performance has not been fully established especially in Kenya.

A demoralized and stressed staff will at the end of the day perform poorly or give results that are below the employer's expectations. Today stress and anxiety has become a part of everyone's life and there is no such thing as a stress-free employee. Stress is not always work-related, but due to problems like inability to find work-life balance and other personal issues. The only solution is to deal with it positively, and it is for the universities to take the initiative to encourage employees to opt for counseling sessions. Some employees will refuse to address their problems openly (Dobson, 2010). There was an assumption that many employees working in the Kenyan Universities likewise do not like sharing their personal problems or challenges lest they be seen as weak individuals who publically acknowledge their weakness. To help the employee in the universities overcome the stress and challenges of life that affect his/her work performance, it was necessary, therefore to investigate the role counseling plays in employee performance.

2. Literature Review

This chapter relates and covers literature review and in particular theoretical review, conceptual framework and the role of counseling in relation to employee performance. Employee performance counseling is a major part of counseling activities in any company. Managers counsel employees about proper job performances in achieving their goals and about their roles in achieving the goals of the company. Employees are also counseled when they encounter challenges and problems in performing certain tasks.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

There are three different theories that can make a counselor aware of possible depths of human problems namely:

- i) Person-centered approach
- ii) Psychoanalytical approach
- iii) Cognitive behavioral approach

2.1.1 Person-centered approach

This theory was introduced first by Carl Rogers and according to him, it was very important to have the relationship between client and counselor as equal as possible. He believed that it was in the human's nature, and indeed all of life's nature to grow to fulfill its potential. He saw life natural course as being self-actualizing. By this he meant that it was within the nature of each and every organism to be motivated to be the best it could be. He did not believe in original sin, believing instead that we were born with this self-actualizing tendency, which in our childhood got blocked from us as we developed a "false self" in order to survive. The focus therefore in this therapy is on the relationship between the counselor and the client and the attitudes and qualities of the counselor being congruence or genuineness, honesty, respecting the client in a non-judgmental way and empathetic understanding (Kidd, 2006).

2.1.2 Psychoanalytical approach

This approach is derived from the psychoanalytic tradition, which has its origin in the work of Sigmund Freud born in Austria in 1856. It is used to describe his theory of human psychological development, and his hypothesis about the structure of the human mind. Freud believed that talking was as effective as hypnosis in helping clients to locate the cause of their problems, and this belief in the value of the 'talking cure' was, and is, central to psychoanalysis and to all theoretical models which drive from it.

The ‘talking cure’ are just one aspect of Freud’s original work; there are several other important ideas. They include: the role of the unconscious, the structure of personality, the psychosexual stages of development, the importance of the past and childhood experience, the use of ego defense mechanism, transference and the nature of the therapeutic relationship, the significance of dreams, free association or the ‘talking cure’ and interpretation. The skills makes counselor know the main cause of an employee’s lack or deteriorated performance are: establishing a contract, listening, observing, clarifying, giving reflective responses, linking, interpreting, attending to transference, looking at defenses and resistance, drawing parallels between past and present and looking at the dreams (Hough, 2006).

2.1.3 Cognitive Behavioural approach

According to Hough (2006), this approach views human personality as a collection of learned behaviors. This means that in effect that when anyone is rewarded for certain types of behaviors, he/she will tend to repeat them. When we are not reward, however, the behavior tends to diminish. This approach was mainly used by D’Zurilla and Goldfried through the Problem- solving therapy (PST) and focused on training in constructive problem-solving attitudes and skills (Dobson, 2010).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The dependent variable in this study is desired employee performance and the independent variables are reduced workplace stress, facing challenges positively through counseling and positive employee attitude as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

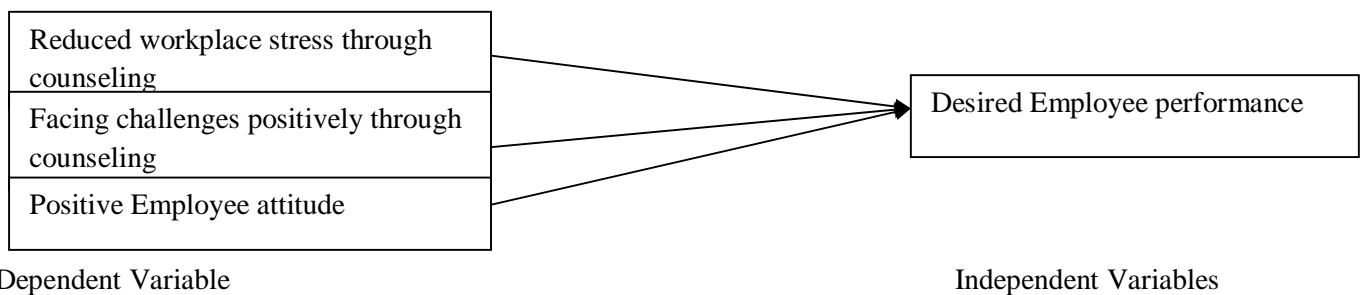


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

2.3 Reducing Workplace Stress Through Counseling

An employee with a personal problem can turn easily into a problematic employee, which demands a one-on-one communication counseling. This is most important since the success of these meetings could mean the difference between an employee’s continued employment or not. Just one employee who does not carry his or her weight seriously can undo the hard work of the team. Consequently, poor performance cannot be tolerated. Employees who are working ineffectively need to know it, and they need the Manager’s help to make the necessary improvements. In today’s tough antidiscrimination legal climate, managers need to demonstrate how they have expended every reasonable effort to help employees perform well (Stone, 2007). Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Stress-related disorders namely: anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder dissatisfaction, and lack of concentration and memory problems may lead to poor work performance or even work injury. There are cases of employee constantly being considered as non-performers at the place of work. These are signs of burnout, which results to employees being termed as lazy, inconsistent, or poor performers.

However, if the Management takes responsibility to try and alleviate these stress factors, this can be minimized. This will show willingness of the Management in sharing responsibility. Often the blame for burnout is laid on the individual employee, who is given little support until it is too late (Wise, 2001). There are three symptoms of occupational stress namely, psychological, physical health and behavioral symptoms (Ross, 2000). On the effects of stress on an organization, Spiers (2003) argue that stress can have an impact on the organizational performance as a whole. According to him the most obvious and easily quantifiable effect of stress is its impact on sickness absence. There are other factors all of which are detrimental to organizational performance and profitability.

They are, high levels of absenteeism, increased staff turnover, low productivity, poor morale, decreased worker commitment, poor industrial relations, imperfect customer relationships, and difficulty in retaining or recruiting good managers. Counseling can come in handy while dealing or trying to curb stress in any organization. The above factors can be costly to any organization.

Some costs that can be incurred are: unreliable services, poor quality control, conflict, and aggression, high level of absenteeism, poor communication, low productivity, frequent staff changes, high accident rates, frequent sickness leading to high cost in insurance covers and poor morale. Raising healthcare costs accounts for one reason organizations are so interested in helping employees with personal problems, through counseling (Werner, 2012).

2.3.1 Consequences of staff with stress

Staff members with stress may take more time off work for sicknesses that are either real or imagined. Many who suffer from stress get related illnesses like depression, high blood pressure or ulcers. This is expensive for the organization both from the viewpoint of the cost of the treatment and the cost of the time away from the job. Remaining staff members also suffer since they will have to do additional work to cover for the member who is away. This at the end impacts on their productivity negatively and lowers their morale. Others may agitate for job or career changes within the organization because the problems make them unable to cope with their work. They may even decide to leave their job and this will create difficulties as new people will have to be found, recruited, inducted and trained to replace them. This is an expensive and time-consuming exercise for an organization. It is now recognized that a complete understanding of stress in the workplace requires understanding the positive situations, relationships and emotions that staff experience, in addition to the negative ones (Winefeild, 2008). For employees who are in customer care situations their personal difficulties will negatively affect the customers they serve. Their organization may lose business as a result of their staff suffering from stress. Customers who are badly treated initially quickly escalate to becoming problem customers who take a great deal of the organization's time and senior management intervention before they can be soothed. Bosses with difficulties will impact on the staff they supervise. Each staff member may lose productivity even though they are ordinarily productive because they are hurting from the way their boss treats them. When the members of the team don't interact well because of stress, the work of the team or the project will suffer (Winefeild, 2008).

2.4 Facing Challenges Positively Through Counseling

The university can play a great role in improvement of performance of an employee by in introduction of counseling programs. Their attitude towards counseling will determine how an employee will be assisted to face life challenges positively. For a university employee to face challenges positively he/she has to see a positive effort of the employer and he/she has to have a positive attitude towards counseling. Employees can be helped to face individual challenges through organized counseling. Hough (2010) lists some of the challenges that prompt employees to seek counseling as crisis situations, which can be used to describe a variety of situations, which seem overwhelming at the time they are experienced. What is perceived as crisis by one person may not be viewed as such by someone else. Other problems that employees can be trained to face positively through counseling are: bereavement, issues from the past, depression and anxiety, addiction and substance abuse, phobias and obsessions, work problems, personal growth, eating disorders and HIV and AIDS. By applying different skills staff can be helped to face the challenges mentioned above positively (Hough, 2010).

2.5.1 Employer's Attitude

The services offered by the employer should be geared to helping the employee to be a better worker and one who faces challenges positively. The attitude of the employer therefore is very important and will determine whether the employer takes care of the challenges of the employee. For example, it is clear that the introduction of stress management interventions into an organization involves taking into account complex individual and organizational issues. In addition, social factors both within and outside of the organization are likely to have an impact on employee participation and attitude. Moreover, since the workplace provides a unique opportunity to address wider concerns about the escalating cost of health care, interventions to address and prevent ill health among employees will benefit individual employees, the organization and society as a whole. The employer being the helper has to have one attitude that is mentioned by Hough (2010), whereby she argues that the presence of certain helper attitude is unconsciously transmitted. Different attitude are employed and one very key is the attitude of listening. Employer has to listen to her employees regardless their cadre.

2.5.2 Employee's Attitude

According to Wikipedia, an attitude (psychology) is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for something. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event— this is often referred to as the attitude object.

People can also be conflicted or undecided toward an object, meaning that they simultaneously possess both positive and negative attitudes toward the item in question. It can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, activities, ideas, or just about anything in your environment. As discussed earlier, (chapter one) some employees will refuse to address their problems openly (Dobson, 2010) and not likewise many university employees like sharing their personal problems or challenges lest they be seen as weak individuals who publically acknowledge their weakness. McGuire (1985) supports this argument by saying that only when the balance is tipped between the fears they may be experiencing, in asking for help and the rising level of their anxiety about their situations, do they present themselves for counseling to the suggestion of referral. Many are hindered by the fact that they fear what others will view them. In an individualistic environment, where there are strong messages about self-reliance, asking for help can be distressing. The idea that an individual might require some support is repulsive and yet at the same time that is exactly what they need (Wicker, 1969). This has a great impact on the way an employee will face challenges positively unless counseling is used to intervene.

2.6 Employee Counseling and Performance

Historically the term Counseling was associated with serious personal problems such as alcohol dependency and marital breakdown (Novarra, 1986). 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 counselors'. 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 (Zima, 1983).

2.6.1 Performance decline

Managing poor performance is an unpleasant and difficult task and managers do not use disciplinary actions as often as they should; many would rather put up with poor performance than conduct a work performance or disciplinary interview. This lack of desire to manage poor performance is of particular concern, as there is evidence that work performance intervention may be the most effective and one of the most important management tasks. If a manager is to manage performance decline, then performance must be explicitly defined. This requires the establishment of performance standards. Without established performance standards, it is impossible to measure any decline. If over time the employee's performance drops significantly from the established standards, we have work performance decline. It is important to note that this performance decline should be significant and sustained. All employees may have minor deviation in performance over time due to transient environmental factors, workload, or scheduling. As well as established standards, it is equally important that deviations be measured and observed. This requires properly trained managers and clearly defined and agreed procedures. Most importantly, it requires consistent feedback, rewards when standards are achieved or surpassed, and sanctions when they are not met.

2.6.2 Correcting performance decline

What causes performance decline with a previously functioning employee? Work-related factors such as poorly defined goals, lack of training, and lack of effective recognition can affect an employee's work performance. Personal factors such as alcohol dependency, family problems, or financial worries can cause employees to lower the quality of their work (Buon, 1990). Any diagnosis of the cause of performance decline brings with it the need for action. Appropriate corrective strategies include training, coaching, job design, and various forms of employee 'Counseling'. The Management response to performance decline must address the underlying cause of the problem. If the cause is work-related, the solution lies within the domain of the manager. However, one is bound to ask: what if this cause is a set of complex and private personal problems? Most authors suggest some form of counseling as the appropriate strategy in these situations. If the manager discovers that the performance problem is caused by personal problems, they are still left with two major problems: in many cases, the actual causes of personal problems are extremely difficult to diagnose, even for skilled counselors and if a manager diagnoses the cause of a personal problem what are they supposed to do (treat, refer, ignore)? The solution to this dilemma lies in appropriate work performance intervention.

2.6.3 Appropriate intervention

Appropriate work performance intervention rests on the observational skills (of work performance decline) of managers but there is great danger in assuming that they are able or even willing to take on the Counseling role. Their job should be to detect a work performance problem at the earliest time, determine if the cause is work related, and if not offer referral for assistance. This should happen only when two conditions are satisfied: the problem must be affecting work performance and the employee must agree to accept assistance. The manager should not become involved in private matters; their focus must remain on the work performance of the employee. Problems in an employee's private life that do not affect their work performance are not the business of the employer (Buon, 1992). There are then three essential requirements for a manager who wishes to conduct an appropriate work performance interview:

The manager should use interviewing techniques to establish if the problem is work related. For example, lack of standards or a lack of training. In these cases, the manager should intervene directly. If the employee's work performance problem is due to personal issues, the manager should keep the focus of their concern on the employee's work performance only. It is important to offer all employees free, independent, professional, voluntary and confidential assistance. The manager must not attempt to 'counsel' the employee about personal problems under any circumstances. Perhaps counseling could be offered internally by a professional counselor or externally by an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The EAP model provides managers with a framework for appropriate work performance intervention. It allows managers to show concern without getting involved in employee 'Counseling' or losing focus on the performance decline. The primary role of the manager remains the management of employees and their work performance.

2.6.6 Key Performance Indicators (KIPs)

According to Armstrong (2009), the concept of performance covers both what and how it has been achieved. The most obvious way of measuring what has been achieved and the approach used in many studies is by reference to Key performance Indicators, which are usually to do with financial results (profitability) or productivity. He argues that measuring the 'how' is more difficult. It has to rely on qualitative assessment of organizational capacity or effectiveness. Organizational capability is defined as the capacity of a firm to function effectively in order to compete and deliver results. One of the key and very important resources firms have, and for the purpose of the study, universities have, is the human resources. Different ways can be employed to measure performance in universities, namely, profit earned after every financial year, rate of students passing exams or in general student's performance, how the students are performing in the job market, increased Income Generating Units, high staff motivation, low turnover and workable success plan. However, the external forces beyond the employees' ability can affect the above performance of the employee. Rue & Byars (2006) indicate that an employee performance can be influenced by certain environmental factors for example, inadequate work facilities and modernized equipment, restrictive policies that directly affect the job, lack of cooperation from other people and department among others.

2.6.7 Consequences of staff with problems

Staff members with problems may take more time off work for sicknesses that are either real or imagined. Many may suffer from stress related illnesses like high blood pressure or ulcers. This is expensive for the organization both from the viewpoint of the cost of the treatment and the cost of the time away from the job. Remaining staff members also suffer since they will have to do additional work to cover for the member who is away. This influences their productivity and lowers their morale. Others may agitate for job or career changes within the organization because the problems make them unable to cope with their work. They may even decide to leave their job and this will create difficulties as new people will have to be found, recruited, inducted and trained to replace them. This is an expensive and time-consuming exercise for an organization. For employees who are in customer care situations their personal difficulties will influence the customers they serve. Their organization may lose business because of their problems. Customers who are treated badly initially quickly escalate to becoming problem customers who take a great deal of the organization's time and senior management intervention before they can be soothed. Bosses with difficulties will affect the staff they supervise. Each staff member may lose productivity even though they are ordinarily productive because they are hurting from the way their boss treats them the boss's decisions will be clouded with the personal issues and the organization may lose money or customers as a result.

Expensive mistakes may be made. Modern business methods call for people to do a great deal of work as part of a team or a project group. When the members of the team don't interact well because of their personal issues, the work of the team or the project will suffer (Rue & Byars 2006).

2.6.8 Employee Counseling Programmes/Training

One of the variables that contribute towards employee performance is reduction of stress that is brought about by counseling. Programs aimed at sensitization or training staff on the importance of counseling and its effect towards stress reduction leading to improved performance are introduced in work places. These are called Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). The history of EAP dates back in the year 1930 when Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) was founded and demonstrated that it could help alcoholics recover from their addiction. Some companies' attempts to develop employee programs were short-lived. Even though alcoholism was regarded as an occupational health problem, by the late 1950's, only 35 companies had occupational alcoholism programs. By 1973, the number of programs in the United States had expanded to 500. In the early 1970s, programs began to offer assistance for a broad range of employee programs and continued until currently the program is designed to identify people needing assistance (for all types of problems), refer them to appropriate sources of treatment, and provide supportive services during and after the treatment period. The goals of EAP are to: provide an alternative to disciplinary action for employees who are having job-performance problems, assist employees with personal problems, Help companies maintain a stable, well-functioning workforce and decrease companies' expenses caused by the loss of well-trained employees (Smith, 2009). When an employee is identified, it is vital that the manager arrange for a private meeting to relate the issues and specific concerns of job performance. At that time, a suggestion is made that the employee utilizes the services of the EAP. The employee may reject or accept the offer. If the employee accepts, he or she is put in contact with an EAP counselor who assesses the problem and plans a course of action.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

Thirty-nine members responded while eleven did not return the questionnaire or did not respond. This represented a 78% response rate, a percentage reliable enough to guarantee the acceptability of the research findings.

4.1 Awareness of Counseling Services at Kenyatta University

Seventy percent of the Management indicated that staff were aware, 80% of counselors indicated that staff were aware and 56% of staff indicated that they were aware of the existence of the services. In total 64% indicated that staff was aware while 36% indicated that members of staff were not aware of counseling services in Kenyatta University. 8% percent of the respondents had worked for over 20 years, 8% had worked for over 10 years, 32% over 5 years and 52% had worked for less than 5 years. According to the counselors who responded, this service had been in existence for over 5 years. This shows an ignorance or lack of proper communication from the analysis above, one can say that the services of counseling were not being utilized as expected. Asked how they solved their problems only 8% sought the help of a counselor. From the findings, the 33% of the respondents who were aware of the existence of the services were male while 67% were female. From the Management, 40% were male while 60% were female. From the non-teaching members of staff, 32% were male while 68% were female. This confirms study findings by Pederson & Vogel (2007) which found out those men seek professional help less frequently than women do even when they exhibit comparable levels of distress. It further showed that African men due to their culture do not seek counseling as their female counterparts.

4.1.1 Staff awareness and utilization of counseling services

The research also sought to know if the staff who were aware of the counseling services were utilizing the facilities or services offered and if not why. 84%, of the members of staff responding to the questionnaire indicated that they had problems and challenges; they were aware of the services yet had not visited the counselors for counseling. Only 16% who were aware had voluntarily sought the counseling services. From the findings, other members of staff who consulted the counseling services either were referred by Management or visited voluntarily due to the challenges they were facing. 90% of the Management had referred staff for counseling due to stress and drug/substance abuse which was affecting their work performance. Staff indicated different problems that were affecting their work performance and which led them to the counseling services either through referrals or through voluntary visits to seek help. The majority of staff who were aware sought help from the counselors was having job related stress.

From the findings, 92% responded that they had work related stress while 8% indicated that the stress they had was not work related. From the findings, it is true that work related stress is an issue that needs attention by any organization. Those with work related issues and were aware of the counseling services gave different answers to how they handle the stress. Only 4% sought help from counselor and 4% only sought the service after being referred from the hospital to seek help from counseling services. The research then sought to know why the staffs who were aware of the services were not utilizing it and it emerged that there was a problem of confidentiality in from the counselors. 53% indicated that disclosure of confidential information had led them to stigma and discrimination.

Asked the challenges that made them not seek counseling help yet they were aware, the staff cited lack of facilities or resources which made it impossible to offer effective services, lack of time, counselors were few and always busy, they felt that that going for counseling services is exposing their privacy and majority cited lack of confidentiality which led to some members of staff not really utilizing the counseling services and majority cited the fear that their challenges will be disclosed.

4.2 Role of counseling in reducing stress at Kenyatta University

The research was to establish the role counseling has played in reducing stress at Kenyatta University. Hundred percent (100%) of the management responded that counseling had played a positive role in reduction of stress on the members who had been referred to counseling help and in return their work performance had improved, 91% percent of the staff who had sought the service of the counselors said that it has a positive impact while 50% of the counselors responded positively. The research found out that it is all agreeable that counseling has reduced stress at Kenyatta University. From the analysis, the Management were agreeable that all the members of staff who were referred for counseling services and adhered to the suggestion or requirement were helped and their work performance improved. The staff themselves did not agree on the reducing of stress and neither the counselors fully agreed. This is may be because as stated in the statement of the problem, not all wish to disclose their problems to the “public” lest others think they are weak. 95% of the management cited a great stress reduction of the members of staff who had sought the help of the Counselors. As a result their performance had improved. One hindrance that was found out from the findings was the attitude of the both staff and management on the issue of counseling.

The researcher wanted to know what the attitude of Kenyatta University staff and management was regarding this issue of counseling. Ninety (90%) of the Management had a positive attitude towards counseling in order to improve performance while 10% felt otherwise. The Management felt that 78% of the employees had a negative attitude towards counseling while only 22% appreciated counseling as a tool to improving work performance. Fifty percent of the Counselors mentioned that the Management and the staff had a positive attitude towards while 50% of the Counselors felt that the Management and the staff had a negative attitude. 67% of the staff responding felt that the Management had a negative attitude towards counseling while 33% had observed a positive attitude from the Management. The research found out that counselors are not involved in the disciplinary matters of the staff whatsoever. From the findings above it is clear there is a mixed attitude of the counseling issue among the staff and the Management. Brammer, Lawrence, Abrego Philipp, Sholtrom and Everett (1993) observed that certain obstacles to readiness for counseling seem to be inherent in society in general. It is important for employees to have a positive attitude towards work and counselors as well. This improves the performance of the employee and the company as well. A survey of employers by Holzer and Wissoker (2000) suggested that more weight is placed on good attitude than on basic skills among workers. Other studies have shown that although employees see counseling as being of benefit to the organization, they may be reluctant to participate themselves.

For example, Sutherland and Davidson (1990), in a study of construction managers, found that only a quarter of respondents indicated that they would personally participate in counseling, although nearly two-thirds felt that the company would benefit from such interventions. Although one might expect that individual counseling would be more acceptable to social services employees in comparison with some other occupations, attitudes towards counseling are likely to be influenced by a combination of personal, organizational and societal factors. In this particular study, there were strong indications from the interview phase of the research that employees were very concerned about the potential consequences of “admitting to stress” and seeking outside help including counseling. More generally, this underlines the importance of recognizing and dealing with some of the barriers to reducing stress in the organization.

For example, if the existing organizational climate makes it difficult for employees to discuss stress-related issues, interventions to reduce stress may be perceived as a means of “shifting the blame” onto the individual employee.

4.3 How counseling has helped employees face challenges at Kenyatta University

One of the objectives of the study was to evaluate how counseling has helped employees face challenges at Kenyatta University. The study found out that counseling had indeed helped the staff face challenges positively. Members of staff who responded to this question indicated that they had started facing challenges positively after counseling sessions. Other challenges apart from stress discussed above, were drug/substance abuse and others which some stated that they were HIV/AIDS challenges, family challenges and other financial challenges.

The question got an overwhelming majority of a 90% positive response that counseling had helped staff face challenges positively. 75% of the counselors said it was positive while among the staff, 96% said it had a positive impact and 4% indicated negative. 25% of the staff felt that it did not have an impact but this depends on their attitude towards counseling. As McLeod (2001) put it, there is strong evidence that counseling is effective in overcoming employees’ problems helping them face challenges positively and as a result improving their performance.

4.4 Impact of counseling towards improved work performance at Kenyatta University

The researcher sought to know whether counseling could improve work performance. The impact of the counseling was implied by the 90% response from the respondents who said it was positive it had improved while 10% indicated the opposite. The management of Kenyatta University has a wellness department in Kenyatta University to help members of staff who had challenges or problems, which in the long run will affect their work performance. The management noted that counseling helps persons to explore the possible origins of their problems thereby proving a flat-form on which the problems can be tackled effectively as observed by Hough (2006). Personal problems brought to work place lower the level of productivity but the desire to correct this eases ones burdens providing them with the disposition to return to normal duty. Those who visited the counselors’ respondent that their work had improved and had been helped to have a focused mind. They started having positive attitude towards work and fellow colleagues. Those demoralized improved after counseling and put more effort to their duties. This clearly indicates that counseling does improve performance. The ones who had challenges with drug abuse/substance abuse 45% indicated that through therapeutic talks they had improved greatly and had started taking work seriously.

Many at times people are critical of others and wish them to change yet people become better agents of change when the change begins with them. Asked to recommend on the role of counseling towards employee performance, employees 55% indicated that counseling had helped them realize their potential and had made an effort to improve in their work areas. This would facilitate growth of an employee and be motivated to acquire more skills to better perform their duties. Thirty-five percent had worked for a longer period and indicated that they had visited the counselors to get counseling on retirement issues. Counseling has helped members of staff who are about to retire get prepared psychologically. It emerged that staff members had helped Kenyatta University members of staff start communicating with one another with respect. Once they were referred for counseling, their communication improved and as a result less friction in the offices. Counseling also has helped in promote good health. A healthy workforce is the pride of any employer, and as stated earlier, counseling had helped members of staff in Kenyatta University have peace of mind and a focused mind. With a peaceful mind one is productive. This also results to emotional stability, physical well being and hence well balanced employees and improved performance. Productive communication is very key in any organization. Counseling has improved the communication in Kenyatta University. Employees who sought counseling services indicated that they were now able to communicate freely and also express themselves freely. This has also resulted in career development whereby, the employee is keen on developing themselves career wise.

5. Summary, conclusion and recommendations

The study found out that those who had used the services of counseling at Kenyatta University indeed confirmed that their work challenges had changed to better performance. The managers who responded also concurred that the staff who had been having challenges and had utilized the services had produced better performance which were commendable. Counseling can be a tool that can be used by the management of public universities to help their employees be better employees and help them realize their vision and mission.

5.1 Role of Counseling in Employee performance

Counseling services were used by over 64% of the respondents who participated in the research. Their responses indicated that the services had helped them to overcome challenges and difficult situations they were facing at the time they sought the help. Counseling employees helped them after a single or more than one session depending on the type of the challenge and the client pinpoint the problem and the situation. Examining the progress and the outcome of clients undergoing therapy, it is apparent that while the majority of the employees improve, a majority remains unchanged and still others actually deteriorate. The study findings show that over half of employee participants, the management and the counselors rated the performance of counseling service as effective in helping them face challenges positively.

Although it was rated positive and effective, some employees who responded revealed that they were not happy and satisfied with some areas, which need attention. Some cited that there was need for the counselors to maintain confidentiality, improve communication, and use demonstrations. It was clear that although the counseling department has been in existence, there are many areas affecting employees that need to be dealt with. Some are not work related but affect their performance. From the response from the Counselors, it is emerged that the counselor employed very few (5) for a population of about 1,700 members of staff. This needs attention in order for them to be effective and offer satisfactory services.

5.2 Counselors' involvement in disciplinary of staff by the Management

From the study it was established that the Management did not involve counselors and it would be important if the management involved the counselors who will investigate why an employee whose performance had suddenly declined. To embrace fair judgment, and avoid victimization, the counselors should be involved in the disciplinary of the staff and be included in the Human Resource functions of the University. The counselors should desist from disclosing confidential information about members of staff who visit them to avoid discouragement of staff or individuals from seeking help in future and can lead to poor performance. The Management can be involved and to promote positive attitude towards counseling. The Managers should also have basic training in counseling to judge when a staff need counseling more than disciplinary action. If the attitude of management could change, then better performance can be realized in Kenyatta University.

5.3 Recommendation

The study concentrated on public universities. A similar study could be done on private universities and the corporate firms. Future study can also be done to investigate the role of training counseling skills to Human Resource Managers in order to detect when an employee who has work performance problems need counseling and not disciplinary measures.

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