

Employee Assistance Programme in Acropetal Technologies: An experiential learning

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'I sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by all possible means- except by getting off his back'(Tolstoy, 1886)

'Sick companies produce sick employees, as dysfunctional families produce dysfunctional families, as sick societies produce sick citizens. (Carroll, 1996)

Introduction:

In the advanced industrialized economies, up to the 1980's the dominant organisational model in the business and public services sector alike was the engineering or the bureaucratic model of the smooth running machine or system. Managers saw their role as maintaining and improving the organisation's mechanisms and procedures, and if necessary 'trouble shooting' breakdowns in the system. Should such breakdowns present a persistent pattern, then managers' response was devise a routine or technique which restored the organisational functioning to a steady state, if not to the original state as far as possible. Subsequently, managers sought to re-establish control and achieve a degree of accuracy in forecasting future organisational operation and performance. (Mintzberg, 1979).The underlying assumption of such an organisational paradigm was that the controlled and predictable organisational machine could be created, eventually, removing the pressure upon managers arising from operational crises, breakdowns and malfunctions. This belief sustained until the evidence came from the International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), the international conglomerate which followed the practice draconianally, and results ran to the contrary with high levels of interpersonal conflict among top management, traumatic board meetings, and a large proportion of personally troubled CEO's of ITT subsidiary companies.

The organisational orthodoxy of such a complex mechanistic practice was hit further by the 1970's severe energy crises, new technologies including IT, increased competition, changing product and labour market, new social values,- a combined effect of all the above factors on the organisational structures and process. The resultant effect was to move from the steady state to a new dynamic state.

These moves lead to the new forms of organisation (e.g. Matrix organisation), higher performance demands, (lean and mean firms), or market responsiveness (flexible employment). Processes increased with, the 'excellence theories' (Peters & Waterman, 1982), 'thriving on chaos' (Peters, 1987), or 'reengineering the corporation' (Hammer and Champy, 1993). These, new and unfamiliar and relatively untested organisational forms and processes, new stressors of insecurity, underperformance, non adaptability and lack of competence characterised the days to come later. It was such organisational contexts that helped to spread the modern Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which owes its rationale as much to factors internal to the employing organisation, as to the pressures of wider society or those of the specific social contexts of individuals.

Employee Assistance Program (EAPs) are plans that help identify and resolve issues facing troubled employees through short-term counseling, referrals to specialized professionals or organizations, and follow-up services. Many EAPs also train business owners and supervisors to recognize and deal with behavioral problems in the workforce. These programs are not designed to provide long-term treatment, but as Business Week noted, "they do offer a safe environment where an employee can discuss problems with a counselor who then makes a confidential assessment, and if necessary, gives a referral to a mental-health professional."For example: a number of employee assistance programs have actively promoted AIDS/HIV workplace policies and education efforts.

The purpose of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is to improve the psychological health of the employees. It will help the staff to develop coping skills and accept a greater degree of personal responsibility. It will help to resolve individual, marital, family and job performance problems. As a result, their productivity and attendance will improve.

Employees and dependents will have immediate access to confidential professional counseling, free of charge. Counselors are Psychologists professionals with the highest qualification in the field of human behavior provide direct counseling. It focuses on helping the employee deal effectively with change and stress in their personal, career and family lives. Managers, supervisors and human resource staff will be able to focus on work performance. They will no longer feel the need to struggle with the personal problems of their staff.

Definition of EAP

"Employee Assistance Program is employee benefit program offered by many employers. EAP's are intended to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their work performance, health and well-being. EAP's generally included short term counseling and referral services for employees and their household members."

EAP'S History

The historical background of the Employee Assistance Programs [EAP] movement is blurred (Roman, 1988). It may have evolved partly out of Occupational/Industrial Alcohol Programs, or it may be traced to more general, job-based programs.

e.g., social betterment, personnel counseling & occupational mental health.

The title "Employee Assistance Programs" was coined by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA); according to Masi (1984), it achieves two major purposes:"

(1) It conveys that the programme focuses on assisting employees, regardless of the type of program from which they may suffer.

(2) It avoids the stigma that may be attached to a narrower program, specifically identified as for alcohol or drug problems".

Literature Review:

The concept of the 'troubled employee' is at the heart of EAP. Practitioners in EAP's note Freud's assertion that work is man's strongest tie to reality (Follman, 1978), and also that work is one of the three key bases of social identity along marriage and parenthood (Gould and Smith, 1988).

The establishment of an EAP and commitment to it may well represent a major paradigmatic shift in an organisation's view of a troubled employee. Organisations which are seeking to represent themselves as socially responsible to 'quality labour' may communicate this message by incorporating EAP's as part of a long-term commitment to employees (Luthans and Waldersee, 1989). An EAP in place facilitates the rehabilitation of employees who are troubled, whether it is from the external intensity of market forces or the imperatives of internal efficiency, such as restructuring, delayering, performance appraisal or performance-related pay. From their origins in alcoholism programmes in the US in the 1940's and 1950's, providing a 'functional socio-anthropological perspective in occupational programming' EAP's have become what is in essence a social movement (Archer, 1977). As such, the EAP have been interpreted as an aspect of the employer's wider social responsibility and a contribution to wider society.

The methodologies of EAP's are diverse and unstandardised, needing to be tailored to contexts, in spite of tendencies towards standardization on the part of service provider firms. The categorization of EAP's into seven 'core technologies' (Blum and Roman, 1988) is nevertheless sufficiently representative to serve well as the basis of an examination of the unique nature of the contributions of EAP's. These are:

1. The identification of troubled employees through specific, objective documented evidence of job detriment,
2. The availability of designated EAP specialists for assistance to the employee and management,
3. The use of constructive confrontation to reate a recognition of the problem,
4. The acceptance by the employee that external expert resources can aid in individual problem treatment,
5. long- term collaboration between work contexts and external resources,
6. the organisational culture accepts external resources as legitimate intervention,
7. any evaluation of success in intervention is job- based in an objective manner.

Blum and Roman see various consequences of application of the core EAP technologies, these core functions include:

- enhanced retention of employees,
- reduced responsibility of supervisors for counseling,
- existence of due process for troubled employees,
- reduction of employers' health care/ insurance costs,
- the building of employee morale and trust

Objectives of the study

1. To know the awareness of employees regarding Employee Assistance Programme in an organization.
2. To know about the EAP services in the organization.
3. To know about employees expectations on EAP.
4. To analyze the level of importance given to EAP in an organization.
5. To interpret the overall satisfaction level of EAP with employees in the organization.

Methodology:

The Study on Employee Assistance Program was conducted in Acropetal Technologies Ltd, Bengaluru".

The data collection method includes two types:

- Primary data
- Secondary data

a) Primary data

Primary data was collected through observations and discussions with the concerned persons in the company. To make study to be effective personal interview method was adopted backed up by structured questionnaire.

b) Secondary data

Information obtained from published or unpublished sources is secondary data. Secondary data used in the study was collected from internal sources like company brochure and from external sources like books, magazines, periodicals and websites.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique followed in this study is "Convenient Sampling". The research work has been carried out on the basis of structured questionnaire. The study is restricted to the employees of Acropetal Technologies Ltd, Bengaluru.

Sample size

The total sample size is 100 respondents were chosen as sampling from Acropetal Technologies Ltd, Bengaluru.

ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION:

The main objectives of the study was to know about the awareness about EAP and the services offered by the company, the expectations of the employees regarding the EAP as a practise and the services offered, importance accorded to EAP in Acropetal, and overall satisfaction of employees with respect to EAP services. We predicted that the practise of EAP being relatively new in India and had a history of having been implemented in US parts of Europe, Canada, Australia, Newzealand, and isolated instances in Asia. The implementation is relatively is in its nascent stage in India, hence the results are in accordance to our assumptions. The sources of the data are primary.

Age group of the respondents in Acropetal:

According to this survey 39% of the employees are aged between 21-25 years, 22% are between 25-35 years, 28% are between 35-45 years and 11% are above 45 years.

Table-1 showing the age group of the respondents

Age	No of respondents	Percentage
21-25	39	39
25-35	22	22
35-45	28	28
Above 45	11	11

Interpretation: From the above data it can be observed that majority of the employees are within the age group of 21-25 years. With this it can be inferred that most of the employees are young and relatively in the beginning phase of their careers.

Awareness of employees regarding Employee Assistance Programme in Acropetal:

From the Table-2 below it is clear that all the employees are aware of Employee Assistance Program.

Table-2 chart showing awareness of an EAP

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	100	100
No	0	0
Total	100	100

Interpretation: It can be inferred that all the employees are aware of EAP in Acropetal and the primary objective of the programme has been realized.

Exposure to EAP sessions in Acropetal:

As per the responses obtained and presented in the Table-3 below, 92% of the respondents are exposed to EAP sessions and 8% of the respondents are not exposed to EAP sessions.

Table-3 showing employees' exposure of EAP sessions

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	92	92
No	08	08
Total	100	100

Interpretation: From the responses, it is clear that the majority of the employees are exposed to EAP sessions and 8% have not been exposed, this could be because they might be new to the organization.

Satisfaction of employees toward EAP services in Acropetal:

From the responses received as demonstrated in Table-4 2% of the employees are highly dissatisfied with EAP scheduled services, 3% employees are dissatisfied, 22% of employees have no opinion, 55% of employees are satisfied, 10% of employees are highly satisfied and 8 % of the employees are not at all exposed to EAP sessions.

Table -4 showing satisfaction levels with EAP schedule services in Acropetal

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Highly dissatisfied	2	2
Dissatisfied	3	3
Neutral	22	22
Satisfied	55	55
Highly satisfied	10	10
Not Attended	8	8
Total	100	100

Interpretation: From the above table it is clear that most of the employees are satisfied with EAP scheduled services and hence the objective is realized.

Services rendered and employee preferences under EAP in Acropetal Technologies Ltd:

According to the survey we can analyze that 10% of the employees want the EAP should render services in family conflict, 7% of the employees want in monetary problem, 29% of the employees want in occupational stress, 26% of the employees want in job related issues, 6% of them want in health issues, 16% of them want in managing work life balance and 6% of them want in flexi time.

Table-5 showing areas and services rendered under EAP in Acropetal Technologies Ltd.

Areas	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Family conflict	10	10
Monetary Problem	7	7
Occupational Stress	29	29
Job related issues	26	26
Health issues	6	6
Work life balance	16	16
Flexi time	6	6
Total	100	100

Interpretation: From the above data we can interpret that most of the employees want EAP to render services in occupational stress or work stress as well as other job related issues.

Satisfaction toward EAP services in Acropetal:

According to the survey we can analyze that 5% of the employees are very dissatisfied with the time of EAP services in an organization, 7% of the employees are dissatisfied, 24% of them have No Opinion, 44% of the employees are satisfied, 12% of them are highly satisfied and 8% of the employees are not at all exposed to EAP sessions.

Table-6 showing satisfaction level with the EAP services

Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Highly dissatisfied	5	10
Dissatisfied	7	7
No Opinion	24	29
Satisfied	44	26
Highly satisfied	12	6
Not Attended	08	16
Total	100	100

Interpretation: From the above survey we can interpret that most of the employees are satisfied with the EAP services.

Employees' confidence regarding the confidentiality of EAP services in Acropetal:

According to the survey we find that 4% of the employee do not feel safe to discuss their personal problems with the counselor and they strongly disagree, 6% of them disagree to discuss their issues with the counselor, while 14% of them are Neutral,44% of the employees accept and agree the fact of sharing their problems with the EAP counselors, 24% of them strongly agree to support the fact of sharing their issues and 8 % of the employees are not at all exposed to EAP sessions.

Interpretation: From the above survey we can infer that most of the employees share their problems very freely and in a comfortable manner with their EAP counselors as they are willing to solve the issues for their personal goal as well as for the organizational goal.

Employees' expectations from the EAP services rendered at Acropetal:

From the data collected we can analyze 26% of the employees expect EAP to be conducted by professionals from outside, 58% of the employees expect by counselors, 5% of the employees expect in-house managers and 11% of the employees expect Team leaders.

Table-7 showing from whom the employees expect the EAP services from

Expectations	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Professionals from outside	26	26
Counselors	58	58
In house managers	5	5
Team leaders	11	26
Total	100	100

Interpretation: From the above table we can interpret that most of the employees are expecting counselors to do EAP sessions in the organization.

Employees' expectations toward other add-on services to be included:

As per the data 30% of the employees expect the EAP to be implemented in troubled relationships, 14% of the employees expect in Depression, 39% of the employees expect in Stress and 17% of them expect in Work place problem.

Interpretation: From the above it is clear that most of the employees are suffering either from occupational stress or from troubled relationships that they are undergoing day by day within the organization.

Employees' willingness to recommend EAP to friend or colleague:

As per the data we can analyze that 3% of the employees are of the opinion that they will never recommend about EAP to their friends or colleagues, 5% of the employees occasionally would recommend, 16% of the employees will fairly some times, 37% of them would recommend very often and 31% of the employees will recommend always and 8 % of the employees are not at all exposed to EAP sessions.

Interpretation: From the above analysis we come to know majority of the employees will recommend often to their friends or colleague about EAP.

Reasons as to what makes employees' like EAP:

From the data it is clear that 33% of the employees liked EAP because it is confidential, 13% of the employees liked as it is economical, 13% of the employees liked because it is trouble shooter, 18% of the employees liked because it is short term counseling, 15% of them have opted all the above and 8% of the employees are not at all exposed to EAP sessions.

Interpretation: From the above analysis it is clear that majority of the employees likes EAP because it is confidential.

Overall satisfaction level with the quality of services provided by the EAP:

From the above table it is clear that 5% of the employees are highly dissatisfied with the quality of services provided by EAP, 11% of the employees are dissatisfied, 20% of them have no opinion about the services, 46% of the employees are satisfied, 10% of the employees are highly satisfied and 8% of the employees are not at all exposed to EAP sessions.

Table-8 showing overall satisfaction level with the quality of services provided by the EAP

Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Highly dissatisfied	5	5
Dissatisfied	11	11
No Opinion	20	20
Satisfied	46	46
Highly satisfied	10	10
Not attended	08	08
Total	100	100

Interpretation: From the above analysis it is clear that majority of the employees are satisfied with their EAP services.

Findings & Conclusions:

A standardized model of the EAPs in practice does not exist, but there are a variety of definitions that all mention a common group of core components. The EAPs include the provision of counseling, confidential assessment, therapeutic services for employees and dependants experiencing a range of personal, emotional and psychological problems, with a telephone helpline for advice and information on domestic, international, medical, legal and financial affairs. Also, the EAP companies contract with public and private organizations to provide employees, and sometimes their dependants, with free confidential access to an affiliate network of mental health practitioners (e.g. psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc.) who are all called counselors and generally employed on an associate basis. Employees have access to a toll-free telephone number where they can express and discuss their difficulties and, if proper, be referred to an off-site counselor. From the above study we can infer that the company Acropetal Technologies Limited has implemented programmes for the employees' well being and assistance. As the survey says, from the employees expectations, there are some areas in the EAP the company can bring into its fold for a better employee well being, eventually reflecting in the better performance on overall parameters.

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