
UNIT 10 EMPLOYEE COUNSELLING

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you would be able to:

- understand what counselling is and the need for counselling ,
- understand the few basic skills of counselling ,
- distinguish the type of counselling that can be provided to the employees , and
- understand the affect of counselling on the organisational output as a whole.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years there has been a growing concern regarding the needs of an employee as an individual. The organisations have seen and felt the need of guiding and helping their employees to solve their problems, pertaining to both personal life and professional careers. This change in the management attitude was not due to some sudden humane feelings for their employees, but was rather for the fact that, many a times organisations suffer losses as employees cannot give their best unless they are satisfied with all the factors affecting their lives. This aspect becomes much more relevant in the case of tourism as the employees are in direct contact with the customers.

Earlier it was considered impolite to enquire about any employee's private life and counselling was mainly restricted to career counselling, but with the changing times this factor is no longer considered rude. Many a time, private matters such as near and dear ones sickness or death may hamper the employee productivity and employer intervention might help to ease the matter. This intervention is counselling, which now a days is a broad term encompassing all the factors affecting the employee's life – both personal and professional.

This Unit starts with the definition of counselling, stresses why there is a need for counselling, goes on to explain the skills required for counselling someone, who all can be counsellors and finally the type of counselling that can be provided.

10.2 WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Counselling literally means to counsel/advice someone regarding some factor affecting the counsellee's life. But it is very wrong to confine the term "Counselling" to the word "Advice" since counselling is not advising but helping the counselled person(s) to find his or her own way out of one's own problem.

Counselling is a long-term process aimed at helping the counselled person(s) sort out their emotional problems and attain a better mental health. **Employee counselling or counselling is a discussion between the counsellor and the counselled which is aimed at making the counselled person feel better and comfortable about self, and thus better equipped to deal with the daily life problems and work situations.**

According to Warren Redman “**Counselling is a process of clarifying a problem held by another person(s), enabling them to take appropriate responsibility for that problem, and then assisting them to arrive at some form of resolution of the difficulty.**”

Thus, **counselling is a process of finding a resolution i.e. determination/ perseverance of solving the problems faced and not necessarily a solution.** Employee counselling is guidance provided to the employees so that they can approach, cope and solve their problems and the first towards this is the need to have an understanding of the problem. Counselling therefore helps the employees in understanding what is the actual problem that is causing them the discomfort. The basic theory of counselling is to make a person well equipped to understand and deal with stress, professional problem or an emotional problem, both in the present context as well as be prepared to tackle the problems of same nature in the future.

Some characteristics of Counselling are:

- **Counselling is a communication between the counsellor and the counselled.** It's an exchange of ideas between the two.
- **Counselling is a process and not an advice giving procedure.** It is a long-term process and takes some time for the person(s) involved to understand the problem and learn how to cope with it.
- **Counselling is about clarifying and helping the counselled** to handle him or her in the time of crisis and be able to meet the demands of life.
- **Both professional and non-professional counsellors can provide counselling.**
- **Counselling is usually private and confidential** so that the employee is free to speak out without any fear of retribution i.e. penalty from the employers.
- **Counselling is beneficial to the organisation** as it helps to solve problems relating to both job and personal life of the employees; thus helping them perform better on the job and also giving a more humane look to the organisation.

10.3 NEED FOR COUNSELLING

Emotional makeup of the employees plays a big part in their work efficiency. Counselling helps in understanding the employee grievances and also lets the employee know about the company rules and policies and disciplinary actions as well without being too much impersonal.

A need for counselling exists wherever there is a problem faced by the employees. The problem can be mid life crisis or an emotional problem or a fear of extra workload due to a promotion and so on. Some of the various situations where counselling is required are:

1) Stress

Stress is an important factor affecting employee performance and productivity. Stress is the strain or pressure that affects a person emotionally and physically. The result of the stress on the employee performance may vary from person to person and also on the reason of the stress. Different people have different levels or threshold for tolerating stress. Some people perform

better under pressure while others end up not performing at all. The reason for the employee stress can be either due to on the job crisis or off the job problems. The causes can be:

a) On the Job Causes

Almost all the jobs are stress inducible and a lot depends upon the employee's working. Work pressures such as deadlines to meet, work load, constant new ideas and changes to be implemented, can lead to a lot of strain and stress. The employees' stress threshold and nature in general would decide upon the pressure and strain that an employee would feel. For example, many a times a similar change may result in more productivity and better performance in one employee whereas it may result in stress induced low productivity in another employee.

Frustration can also lead to stress. The frustration can be a result of over estimating one's own potential or under estimating one's own potential or too much work load and deadlines to meet or not getting a salary as expected or being passed over for a much awaited promotion and so on. Frustration is a major cause of stress but many a times it may be a case of one-day or momentary frustration. For example; trying to finish a report in time for a meeting scheduled in an hours time and if one is constantly interrupted, than the person is liable to feel frustrated and irritated. It is so as one is not able to reach the desired goal. Mostly it has been observed that job environment contributes a lot to the feeling of stress. A kind and helpful supervisor will make a frustrated employee feel better and a helpful colleague can help ease an over loaded and over worked co-worker. If one is not at ease and comfortable in ones surroundings, than he or she won't be able to give his or her best. It has been observed that office politics and groups affect inter personal relationships thus affecting the work environment and the work potential of an employee.

Too much pressure and stress can result in **“Burnout”**. Burnout is the stage in a person's life when he or she feels that they have nothing more to give as a result of mental, emotional and physical exhaustion. This happens as a result of being under a prolonged period of stress. Nowadays, we are hearing about executives who reach their thirties and are cases of early burnout. This is usually due to the fact that they have put in too much time and energy for their work and constant work pressure has resulted in the total exhaustion.

b) Off the Job Causes

Pressures outside the work environment also affect the job performance. The pressure can be due to marital problems, problems with children , major injury or illness or death in the family and so on. Stress due to personal problem affects the organisation as a person coming to work brings with him or her mental and emotional trauma of the personal life which very much effects the work output.

It can be implied that stress is a personal problem and is not easy to decipher if the other person is not ready to disclose. But there are a few symptoms, which indicate when a person is under stress and strain:

- **Absenteeism:** The number of days of absenteeism increases, as the person is not satisfied with the job or job environment or due to some personal problem. As a result not only the individual suffers but it costs the organisation money.
- **Illness:** Employee might report sick more often and not come in or come in late. Also the employee might start behaving irrationally in the office often resulting in emotional outbursts. Many a times the person starts getting short tempered and irritable and thus affecting the office environment and finally the productivity.
- **Poor Work Quality:** Stress mostly results in low self - esteem which causes in lowering the self-motivation. Running low on motivation, the employees do not work to their full potential i.e. full capacity and abilities. This thus results in poor work quality and low performance.

The performance thus affected costs the organisation money as more people have to be recruited for doing the work of that employee who is not performing to his or her full potential.

Thus, stress is a major factor affecting an employee and counselling is required for the employee so as to analyse and understand the factors causing the stress.

2) Disciplinary Action

Counselling comes in handy while putting a disciplinary action in motion. Any typical disciplinary action in an organisation initiates with a verbal discussion with the offender, this is also counselling. Before punishing or giving any penalty to an employee a counselling session with the offender is a must where company rules and policies are again told to the employee and also about the penalties involved. The Counselling during the disciplinary process **puts emphasis on what the employee should do rather than putting the emphasis on what the employee should not do.**

3) Pre-Promotional

Counselling is required to quell any doubts regarding a new job or duties or power assigned with a job. Counselling is always used to put the employee to be promoted at ease with his or her would be new environment and to get him or her acquainted with his or her power, duties and job scope among other things, so that the employee is totally sure while taking over a new job/promotion.

4) Mid Career

Most of the good organisations now a days employ a counsellor to counsel the mid career manager. Usually the managers are well educated and are very motivated till they realise that they have reached a stage where promotion and upward movement is possible only if someone in the very top position vacates the position. During this period in their life it is necessary that they should be counselled so that they do not start running low on motivation and do not get depressed or frustrated. Mostly the mid career managers are aware of the problems related to their job and only need someone to listen to them and understand their plight and thus assist them to deal with expectations from life.

5) Pre-Retirement

An employee spends all his or her life with an organisation and when the time for retirement comes, the person is apprehensive about his or her future. If the apprehension is not taken care of in time then it will affect the work capacity of the employee during whatever time the employee is left with before his or her retirement and also affect those working in close contact of the employee. Counselling here can help the employee look forward towards the retirement with expectation and excitement rather than with apprehension. The other employees will also appreciate such a gesture and would reinforce their trust and loyalty in the organisation.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) What do you understand by Counselling?

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2) Mention some of the job causes for stress?

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10.4 COUNSELLING FUNCTIONS

The main objective of Counselling is to help the employees attain a better mental, emotional and physical health. A counsellor is the one who can help a person realise a better tomorrow by the attainment of self- confidence, self- development, patience and self - growth.

The objectives of counselling are achieved through the counselling functions. The counselling functions are the activities that can be done by counselling. The functions are:

- **Advice:** Advice giving is not desired for counselling, as it is a process of self-growth which advising would hamper. But many a time's counsellors do have to advice so as to show/ guide the counselled towards a path of action.
- **Reassurance:** Counselling has to provide reassurance to the employee that he or she is progressing well and moving towards achieving the desired goal. Reassurance here can be meant as encouragement also. This is mostly in the case of the mid career managers where counsellor can only reassure that everything will work out fine and also encourage him or her to work as the desired goal is within reach.
- **Communication:** Counselling is mostly about proper communication. A proper communication is required to pass the employee problems to the management and also to air the views of the management to the employees. Communication skills such as listening, providing feed back and so on are required for an effective counselling session.
- **Release of Emotional Tension:** Counselling gives a scope to the employees to release their emotional tension. Emotional outbursts help the employee to release one's anger and frustration to a sympathetic listener, which in turn helps to subside the tension.
- **Clarified Thinking:** Discussing one's problem with someone helps the person to see those points and facts which have been overlooked earlier due to emotional involvement with the problem. The counsellor is not required to guide the person in such a case, as only listening to the outpouring will help. Once the counselled person starts speaking very soon many facts are clarified as the counselled starts thinking aloud which in turn results in rational and logical thinking and helps in solving the problems, real or imaginary.
- **Reorientation:** Reorientation is a result of clear thinking which helps an employee to assess oneself – one's potential and limitation and in accordance to them set new goals and values.
Reorientation leads a person to have a better self-image and it also helps to treat the patients of depression. A clear self-image leads to be a more confident person and also a more effective worker.

10.5 COUNSELLORS

A basic question asked by many is “ who all can be counsellors?”

Counsellor is a person who helps the counselled to overcome his or her problem and in the process also have a better self – image and confidence. The interaction between the two takes place in a counselling session, the duration of which may vary case to case. The place of this interaction must have a congenial environment where the counselled must feel at ease.

A basic and most important quality of a counsellor is that he or she must be good at winning the confidence of the counselled. A counsellor at times can be a friend who listens to one's woes and in the process helps look at a problem more objectively and rationally.

An organisation can counsel its employees using either an in-house counsellor or acquire the help of outside agencies as well. The possibilities are:

- 1) **Manager:** Mostly in the smaller organisations the immediate managers help in counselling the employees as they are known to the employees and employees can open up fast and easily with the manager. But the same reason might work in the reverse also when an employee with a grievance against the manager cannot possibly speak to the same manager about the reason of grievance. All said this is the most common form of in-house counselling.
- 2) **HRD Manager:** HRD managers are often identified in an organisation as specialists to deal with all counselling work. The employees won't have to do a lot of explaining as the organisation is same and so the rules, policies and company structure is known to the manager but since the department is same so the employee won't be afraid of any retribution or tension with the immediate manager. This also is a form of in-house counselling.
- 3) **Volunteers:** There are many volunteers such as trainee HRD manager or a student of HRD who usually are available as volunteers since they want to gain some experience. The use of volunteers is possible in large organisations, where the employees are large in number. This use of outside volunteers helps the employees express anger and frustration regarding the company policies or any other such problem that might be regarding the organisation as a whole.
- 4) **Outside Agencies:** Many establishments are available which send their counsellors as and when required by an organisation. Mostly these are the organisations working for the employee welfare and running employee welfare programmes. Sometimes it can also be government assisted.
- 5) **In House Counsellors:** An organisation might decide to hire a professional counsellor as a company employee to work with the employees on a regular basis. This helps the organisation, as the counsellor doesn't have to be briefed about the company policies, rules and regulation and also the employees don't have to be introduced to the counsellor as the other employees would already know him or her. Moreover a regular counsellor can keep a track of the progress of the employees undergoing counselling such as a severely depressed employee, and so on.

Having an In - House counsellor has its minus and plus points. The employees might not talk freely as the counsellor too is after all an employee of the same firm and the fear of retribution is always there. Moreover, the question of confidentiality of the counsellor is also a problem. The counsellor might learn about some wrong doing by the employee/s and being an employee of the same organisation, the counsellor would be in a dilemma whether or not to report the incidence, as it was said in confidence. The plus point being that the employees are aware of the availability of counsellor to whom they can take their problems whenever needed and will believe that the organisation cares about their problems and thus in the long run this increases loyalty towards the organisation.

10.6 SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Counselling is a very delicate job requiring a lot of caution. Among other things, a counsellor has to remember that, advice giving is not the best way of counselling as it hampers the process of counselling. Also, one should remember that sitting in the counsellor's chair does not give one the right to judge the counselled person. There are a few guidelines which have to be followed,

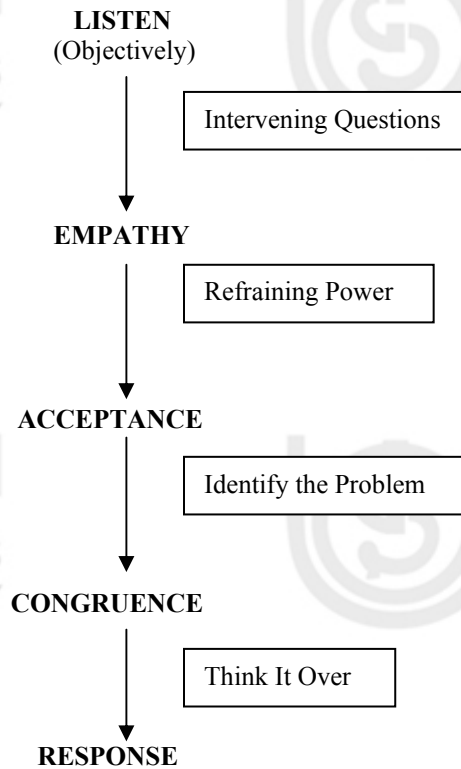
and a few skills and techniques which have to be applied by the manager while counselling any employee. They are:

- 1) **Objectivity:** The counsellor should be objective, i.e. he or she should not become too involved in the problem of the employees, as else they would lose the objective of the problem. As one gets emotionally involved in a situation then it is difficult to be objective and thus is unable to direct the flow of the conversation with the counselled person and thus lose the grip of the situation. The counsellor should always be in an objective mood so as to direct the flow of the session in a desired direction towards a positive outcome.
- 2) **Listening Skills:** The listening skill is the **most important skill** required for effective counselling. As discussed earlier, many a times once the emotional outburst is over in the presence of a sympathetic listener, the problem in question is neither as big or as difficult as thought of earlier. Listening here means listening with interest and asking proper questions at appropriate time. Along with this the quality to refrain oneself from asking too many indifferent questions and also to give advice has to be followed. The questions asked should not be judgmental in nature but should be trust building. The speaker should have confidence that the listener is not making fun of him or her and should trust that whatever is being said is confidential. In most of the cases the counselled person just requires someone to listen to them without judging them and also should understand or at least try to understand their real or imaginary problems. The counsellor has to have a lot of patience for this.
- 3) **Empathy:** Empathetic listening means to see the problem and understand it from the point of view of the other person. It is different from sympathy, as empathy requires the counsellor not to sit in for judging the person or for ridiculing the problem. A counsellor should always remember that the problem is very much real and difficult for the counselled person and therefore the counselling is being sought.
- 4) **Acceptance:** An empathetic response is a step towards the acceptance of the problem. Once a counselled person knows that the counsellor accepts his or her problem as real than the trust starts building up and encourages in solving the problems of the counselled.
- 5) **Congruence:** This means showing the genuine of concern by the counsellor. An employee can easily comprehend when a concern shown is real and when it is not. This is possible when one is in tune with the problem and has concern regarding the problem. This caring attitude is difficult to be found in the cut-throat business managers and has to be developed. Since caring attitude is very difficult to be developed overnight many organisations feel the need for hiring a trained counsellor.

A few other objectives and qualities that must be clear and necessary in the counsellor for effective counselling are that the counsellor:

- has to be aware of his or her own strengths and weaknesses to identify the same in others.
- has to be genuinely a caring person to project the same image to those being counselled.
- should be able to diagnose the real problem and distinguish between the meaningless chit-chat and the main cause of discomfort. So diagnostic quality is a must.
- should respond only when fully in position to answer a query. If someone asks such a question which the counsellor can't answer to than its better to respond later on.
- must keep in mind that the main concern is to solve a problem. Hence, responses should be made only when the problem has been understood and well thought over.
- can cite examples, case studies etc. to improve the situation in order to make the counselled involved in the sessions.
- seek information from others but this should be done discreetly.

We can say that the following are the steps of counselling:



10.7 TYPES OF COUNSELLING

Counselling session depends upon the counsellor to give it a direction. The type of direction the counsellor gives to the session differentiates it into three types of counselling:

1) Directive Counselling

In this type of counselling the counsellor gives the session its full direction. The counsellor leads the session completely and this type of counselling fulfils the criteria of the counsellor giving advice and reassurance. The counsellor listens to the counselled and decides on behalf of the counselled as to what should be done. It also helps in releasing the emotional tension. But this form of counselling does not equip the counselled person to handle similar situations in future as no self - growth has taken place. The self - growth can be achieved when a person tries to look for the answers himself or herself with some help from someone else. But, as stated earlier, in this case a person will always have to look towards someone else to advice and sort out the problems in future.

All said and done, one should remember that in many cases advice acts as reassurance. In adverse conditions advice and reassurances act as morale boosters and in the long run help on taking a course of action to resolve the difficult situation.

2) Non-Directive Counselling

This type of counselling is counsellee oriented. This means that the counsellor focuses on the counsellee and his or her problems without any sort of interference. The counsellor does not act as an advisor; rather the counsellor only listens to the counsellee, understands the problem but does not offers any solutions. The counsellee here has to the find the solution on his or her own.

This type of counselling helps in employee orientation as the employees are given a chance to find their own solution. Thus they are prepared to handle at least similar kinds of problems in future on their own.

3) Co-operative/Participative Counselling

This is a compromise between the above two extreme types of counselling. It is a mutual contribution for diagnosing a problem, analysing the problem and then looking for a solution. It is a mutual counsellor - counsellee relationship where both participate to find a solution. Here an exchange of ideas takes place between the two. Both the participants provide a bit of knowledge, experience and insight and thus it is a case of balanced compromise.

In general, it provides four counselling functions, i.e. of reassurance, communication, emotional release and clarified thinking.

Check Your Progress-2

1) What do you understand by counselling functions? Explain at least three counselling functions.

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2) What are the skills and techniques required for counselling?

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3) What are the different types of counselling?

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10.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have studied about Counselling. You have learnt what is counselling and what are its different characteristics. The need for counselling is stressed upon. Modern day life is full of stress and tension can lead to a lot of frustration and problems, if not dealt in time through counselling. Also any new change in life such as promotion or retirement or mid career crisis and also any disciplinary action calls for counselling, though we must remember that counselling is different in each case.

Counselling has to be provided keeping in mind that it should fulfil certain basic counselling functions such as Advice, Reassurance, Communication, Release of Emotional Tension, Clarified thinking and also Reorientation. The right type of counsellor is very necessary to have effective counselling. The work of a counsellor is very delicate and the job should be dealt with fineness. A counsellor should be acquainted with the various skills and techniques needed for proper counselling. A counsellor should be a good listener with objectivity and empathy. This helps in winning the trust of the counselled.

Lastly we have discussed about the various types of Counselling sessions. A counselling session should be directive i.e. counsellor to counsellee only, or non - directive where the counsellor does

not interfere and its just a counsellee to counsellor session. And finally co-operative where, both the counsellor and the counsellee participate.

10.9 CLUES TO ANSWERS

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Read Sec. 10.2 very carefully and answer.
- 2) Your answer should be based on point (1a) of Sec.10.3.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Mention the six functions discussed in Sec. 10.4.
- 2) Read carefully Sec. 10.6 for answering this question.
- 3) Directive, non-directive and participative, see Sec. 10.7.

Some Activities

- 1) Try to act as a counsellor to a friend when he or she faces a problem.
- 2) List the types of problems you foresee in a job that might require counselling.