

An Exploratory Study of Workplace Counseling and Conflict Management

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ABSTRACT

Counseling and conflict management are two traversed processes in modern organizations. Counseling is a dyadic invention to cope with individual's problems at personal and professional levels. While the conflict management is a proactive management approach to handle the negative echo at workplace. The main objective of the present study is to explore the dimensions of counseling and conflict management. The information was collected from 100 workers of a shoe manufacturing unit of Woodland in Dehradun, India. The collected information was analyzed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The four latent factors were explored. The results of the study presented work roles as main dimension followed by counseling interventions, interpersonal influence and working environment. The economic and supervisory aspects are significantly impacting the counseling and conflict management practices. While the organization needs to study the working environment condition provided to workers for better conflict management approach.

1. Introduction

1.1 Counseling

Counseling is an individual development technique to solve the existing problems. It is a dyadic, didactic and psycho-educational intervention that is willingly chosen by the client (Hayes et al, 2006). The major objective of counseling is to bring a self-recognized behavioral change. According to Perez (1965) counseling is an interactive process between counselor and counselee where the counselor is a trained person to provide assistance while counselee needs assistance from the counselor. Hahn and MacLean (1955) defined counseling as a one to one relation between counselor and counselee to solve the difficulties faced by counselee in his or her life roles. In the process counselor initiate with rapport building through tolerance, sincere behavior and respect toward counselee. The concepts of counseling developed during 1850-1900. During this period Stanley Hall established a psychological laboratory in United States of America. While a clinic for mental development was established at the University of Minnesota in 1909. The psychometric tests were developed to test the mental abilities and functions of individuals. During 1930-1940 the innovations in the field of psychology diverted the counseling into a vocational field. Through counseling clients understand the realities as they are and also realize their various overt and covert potentials. Counselor accepts the client's present personality and work on underlying phenomenon to explore the root causes of present situation of client. It involves the feelings emotions and other cognitive dimensions. Counselor should be responsive to the needs of individual clients (Bond and Bonce 2000). This whole process results in modification of behavior and outlook of client through possible solutions. In the organizational context people need help to handle the work related issues, personal problems, interpersonal relationship, substance misuse and symptoms of stress and depression.

1.2 Conflict Management

On the other hand conflict a universal phenomenon is endemic to every type of life. The economic and social situations lead to conflict. The term conflict consist ambiguity and subjectivity about its meaning. The normative approach to conflict restricts it to ineffectiveness and inefficiency. While Descriptive approaches involves any social interaction and states that scarce resources has the potential for conflict. The conflict in broader sense refers to situations between two parties due to incompatibility in their objectives. It is an interpersonal and group phenomenon found in organizations. Conflict management is the organizational process of controlling the negative sides of conflict. The major objective of conflict management is to create a culture of learning and to enhance efficiency at group level; and effectiveness at organizational level. The people challenge the status quo through conflict management strategies. These strategies involve termination of all types of conflict (Womack, 1988). Blake and Mouton (1964) classified conflict handling styles into "forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving for interpersonal conflicts". The bargaining across the table by dispute parties for their common interest results into cooperativeness between them for problem solving in term of mutual benefits (Pruitt, 1983; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). The distributive and integrative model of conflict management focuses on the outcomes received by both parties. The integrative model has better task related outcomes as compare to distributive model (Khun & Poole, 2000).

2. Literature Review

Counseling is a psychotherapy used to solve the problems (Thorne, 1950). The outside world has several challenges for human being and counseling as an individual intervention deals with external problems created due to the pressure from the outside environment (Blos, 1946). The basic structural aspect of counseling relies on permissive relationship and deep understanding with new approach about life (Rogers, 1942). Counseling is for normal people to enhance their skills for manifesting independence, maturity and better adjustment with

emerging situations (Robinson, 1950). Byrne (1963) stated value creation in human life as an important function of counseling. It is a process to interpret the facts and to make a choice (Smith, 1955). It is a psychological approach to gain knowledge of personality (Patterson, 1959). The philosophy of counseling described the core essence in term of faith in humanity (Smith, 1976) self-awareness (Blocher, 1968) and related to innate growth of human beings. According to Tyler (1958) the counseling domain is to remove only psychological hurdles not the physical or mental handicaps. The interpersonal and interdependence theories explained the social relationship in broader sense. According to the classical sociologist the conscious certain amount of conflict is a necessary condition for proper functioning of group. The conflict as a group phenomenon affects the trust and commitment of people at group and organizational levels (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). The people with diverse values in group difference in attitude different need structure create stress and frustration among group members and this leads to conflict (Capozzoli, 1995). In organizations the stressful situations due to confusion and pressure results in conflict (Rayeski and Bryant, 1994). In the last century the human relation movement showed the seed of cooperation at human level for effectiveness at individual and organizational level. Parsons (1949) viewed the conflict as an abnormality in a stable and integrated society. Child (1995) described the difference in sentiments of ordinary employees and management and stated conflict as inevitable and as a threat to organizational effectiveness. The people fight for time and space lead them toward conflict. Kezsbom (1992) identified "goal and priority definition, personality, communication politics, administrative procedures, resource allocations, scheduling, leadership, ambiguous roles/structure, costs, reward structure, technical opinions, and unresolved prior conflicts as sources of conflict". Learning is an important aspect in modern organization. The industrial dispute act 1947 provision clearly stated the role of counseling and conciliation in conflict management. The act provided a legal machinery to solve the conflict. But at individual and group level counseling can play a vital role in handling conflicts at workplace. This study is an attempt to identify the different dimensions of counseling and conflict management.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the factors related to counseling and conflict at workplace

- To study the relationship between factors of counseling and conflict management

4. Method

4.1. Measurement Tool

The measurement tool was developed on Likert scale where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 stands for strongly agree. Initially, 18 statements were framed from literature. The content validity of the scale was checked through expert validation. After expert validation further four statements were removed from the scale. The selected items are given below.

- V1:** Payment given to me for my work is adequate.
- V2:** My supervisor behaves properly at workplace.
- V3:** My work roles are properly communicated to me
- V4:** I follow my workmates regarding my work role decision
- V5:** My workplace is neat and clean
- V6:** In my organization polices are equally applicable to everyone
- V7:** My organization is paying according to the skills of workers
- V8:** I feel that my organization placed me at right job
- V9:** The instruction given to me by my supervisor is clear
- V10:** My supervisor listens to my problems carefully
- V11:** My organization support teamwork
- V12:** I feel that I can discuss my problems with my supervisor
- V13:** The solutions provided to me by my supervisor are realistic and immediate
- V14:** I feel integral part of my organization

Finally, the data was collected from 100 employees of Woodland manufacturing plant situated in the city of Dehradun, India. All the respondents were male. The mean age of respondents' was 32.62 years with standard deviation of 7.53. Reliability means the consistency of items of scale. In the present study Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale is 0.693.

5. Results

The descriptive statistics is presented in Table 1. The variable V1 is presenting highest mean value of 4.24 with standard deviation of 1.24. While the variable V14 showed lowest mean value of 2.96 with a standard deviation of 1.12. Most of the variables are negatively skewed. The skewness and kurtosis of the variable is between +2 and -2. The data is not presenting any issue of non-normality (see Table 1).

Table -1 Descriptive Statistics & Correlation Matrix (N=100)

Var.	Mean	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	Correlation Matrix													
					V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	V13	V14
V1	4.24	1.24	-1.74	1.95	1													
V2	3.71	0.79	-1.02	1.22	.28**	1												
V3	3.36	1.00	-0.28	0.01	.27**	-.01	1											
V4	3.15	0.98	-0.43	0.03	.12	.30**	.01	1										
V5	3.34	1.16	-0.38	-0.51	.21*	.09	.25**	-.10	1									
V6	3.27	1.00	-0.39	-0.11	.12	-.01	.09	.18	-.06	1								
V7	3.38	1.03	-0.26	-0.40	.02	.16	.16	.20*	-.06	-.07	1							
V8	3.23	1.09	-0.37	-0.47	.04	-.08	.27**	-.10	.19	.10	-.01	1						
V9	3.18	1.29	-0.05	-0.95	-.04	-.12	.10	.19	.16	-.03	.02	-.03	1					

V10	3.35	1.18	-0.37	-0.73	.02	.05	.02	.05	-.10	.07	.06	.19	.12	1				
V11	2.88	1.19	0.12	-0.87	.05	-.11	.14	.04	.11	.09	.07	.16	.11	.05	1			
V12	3.15	1.22	-0.19	-0.83	-.15	-.01	.07	-.14	.12	.03	-.01	.04	.18	.38**	.13	1		
V13	3.35	1.29	-0.20	-1.07	-.13	-.23*	.19	-.11	.06	.06	-.04	.11	.14	.20*	.25*	.29**	1	
V14	2.96	1.12	0.04	-0.58	-.04	.08	.01	.23*	.11	.01	-.06	-.03	.13	.17	-.01	.20*	.03	1

Source: SPSS Output

Note. * Significant at 95 percent level. **Significant at 99 percent level.

In the organization under study most of the supervisor and organization facilities are good. 75 percent of workers say that payment of wages is good provided by the company. In the organization supervisors' behavior are best for workers. The organization workplace is neat and clean.

5.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis

To explore the factor structure of workplace conflict and counseling R-type exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used. To extract the factors principal component analysis was used.

The rotated component matrix was calculated through Varimax rotation. To study the inter correlation between variables the Bartlett test of Sphericity was conducted (Chi-Square = 166.73, df = 91, p-value= .001). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was conducted with a value of 0.514 which is more than threshold value. The variables with communalities less than 0.40 were removed and the factors with Eigen value higher than one were extracted. The rotated component matrix is given below in Table 2.

Table 2
Extracted Factor Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix				
Var.	WorkRoles	Counseling Interventions	Interpersonal Influence	Working Environment
V3	0.719			
V8	0.607			
V11	0.487			
V12		0.701		
V14		0.642		
V10		0.552		
V9		0.543		
V2			0.713	
V1			0.59	
V4			0.579	
V5				-0.624
V6				0.514
V7				0.412

Source: SPSS Output

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 9 iterations

The first factor 'work roles' is constituted of 3 variables i.e. my work roles are properly communicated to me, I feel that my organization placed me at right job and my organization support teamwork. The Second factor 'counseling interventions' is constituted of 4 variables i.e. I feel that I can discuss my problems with my supervisor; I feel integral part of my organization; my supervisor listens to my problems carefully; the instruction given to me by my supervisor is clear. The third factor ' interpersonal influence' constituted 3 variables i.e. My supervisor behaves properly at workplace; Payment given to me for my work is adequate ; I follow my workmates regarding my work role decision. The Fourth factor 'working environment' constituted 3 variables i.e. my workplace is neat and clean; in my organization polices are equally applicable to everyone and my organization is paying according to the skills of workers.

6. Discussion

The study focused on individual interpersonal and organizational level variables. It is observed that highest rated variable is payment given to me for my work is adequate. The organization is paying as per the skills of employees. Employees are satisfied with the compensation structure. The behavior of the supervisor is important aspect of conflict management; the results found that supervisors are behaving properly at workplace. The communication of work roles to employees, role autonomy, organizational policies, supervisory support and working environment are different aspects of conflict management. Blocher (1966) explains it as "helping an individual become aware of himself and the ways in which he is reacting to the behavioral influences of his environment." While the counseling intervention aid the adjustment in term of accountability toward peers, improvement in personality and

higher order of skill set in employees. The work roles are properly communicated to employees; the confusion and role ambiguity lead to stress and anxiety (Rayeski and Bryant, 1994). The counseling at individual level aid to understand the role problems (Robinson, 1950). The research represents that people perceived role autonomy and taking their decisions regarding job. The symmetry in organizational and individual goal is established through proper interdependence of various stakeholders to generate trust and commitment (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). The right person at right job is the principle philosophy of modern management and leads to conflict management and higher productivity. The factor 'work roles' explained the highest variance in the model followed by counseling interventions. The role communication, right placement and team work are the main element in conflict management. Capozzoli (1995) also emphasized on the role of team member's needs, team expectation and scared resources as a source of conflict. While, 'counseling interventions' focused on the perceived openness, reach to supervisor and integration with organizational culture. These are the basic elements of commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. Through understanding all these aspects through different counseling intervention increase the mental health of employees (Patterson, 1959). Counseling can control the

reaction of individual toward a conflict (Blocher, 1966). The 'interpersonal influence' depends upon supervisor behavior and peers pressure. The interdependence acts as a source of conflict (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). The factor 'working environment' constituted the perceived physical aspects of organization life.

7. Conclusion

The study showed that counseling interventions and dimensions of conflict management are perceived by the employees on same platform. The counseling interventions are directly related to conflict management strategies in term of work role clarity, interpersonal influence and working environment. The counseling is a way to overcome the negative impacts of conflict at individual level. Counseling is a proactive futuristic positive individual level approach for conflict management in organizations.

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