

Patterns of Counselling-related Problems in a Malaysian Corporate Setting

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ABSTRAK

Beberapa kategori masalah yang berkaitan dengan kaunseling telah dikenal pasti dalam sebuah badan korporat. Selanjutnya, satu analisis perbandingan telah dijalankan bagi membeza masalah mengikut umur, jantina dan jenis pekerjaan. Saiz sampel dalam kajian ini ialah $n = 288$ berasaskan kepada kuasa .8 dan $\alpha = .05$, ia-ini penentuan bagi mengurangkan ralat jenis II. Dapatan daripada kajian ini menunjukkan masalah yang berkaitan dengan persaraan adalah paling penting (24.5%). Ini diikuti dengan masalah kerjaya (16.1%); masalah peribadi (13%); dan akhirnya masalah keluarga dan perkahwinan (11.4%). Dapatan ini juga menunjukkan bahawa masalah persaraan mempunyai perbezaan yang signifikan mengikut dua kumpulan umur. Perbandingan antara jantina menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan hanya tentang masalah peribadi. Tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan tentang semua kategori masalah antara kumpulan eksekutif dengan bukan eksekutif.

ABSTRACT

Categories of counselling related problems in a corporation were identified. Subsequently, a comparative analysis was initiated differentiating the problems according to age, gender and job position. The sample size in the study $n = 288$ was determined with a power set at .8 and $\alpha = .05$, thus ensuring a reduction of Type II Error. Through frequency analysis, the result pattern showed that problems related with retirement was highest (24.5%); career problems (16.1%); personal problems (13%); family and marital problems (11.4%). Also, the results indicated that retirement problems showed a significant difference among age groups. The comparison between gender indicated a significant difference only on personal problems. There was no significant difference in all categories of problems between the executives and the non-executives.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, there are two categories of counselling services in the corporate environment. The first category focuses on development and career planning activities such as evaluation, training and planning, and counselling. In this respect, employees are given assistance in appropriate decision making toward meeting their career development needs within the corporation. The second category focuses on the physical and mental health dimension, involving all factors, which has an interactive relationship with the employees' quality of life in the corporate environment.

In this regard, management policies that incorporate contemporary management theories not only increase productivity; they also help in-

crease wellness of the employees (Othman Mohamed 1993). One of the welfare services which is closest to counselling in the corporate sector is the Employee Assistance Program. Lewis and Lewis (1986) explained that the fundamental objective in the employee assistance program is catering for the needs of employees who require professional help. The conveyance of such help to employees who have personal problems is important. Without such help the possibility of absenteeism, work related accidents, job dissatisfaction, and conflict among employees may occur (Lewis and Lewis 1986). Unlike the United States of America, such programs have not been widely implemented in Malaysia (Othman Mohamed 1993).

Counselling Services in the Corporate Sector in Malaysia

There have been several early studies on the need for counselling services in the corporate sector in Malaysia. A study conducted by the National Institute of Public Administration Malaysia examined training needs and designed a course in guidance and counselling for the Institute (INTAN 1990). Subjects for the study comprised 129 supervisory officers and 135 supervisees. This study was representative and incorporated all divisions of the public sector. However, the study had several limitations because the reliability of the questionnaire instruments administered to the subjects were not reported. Moreover, the sampling criteria were not explicitly reported, thus rendering validity of the results obtained from the study open to question.

In another setting, Engliman Roslan (1991) conducted a study on the need for a counselling service at the Johor Port Authority. This research study determined the sample size $n = 288$ with a power level set at .8, thus reducing Type II Error. The research instrument was categorized into 3 sections, a) demographic; b) needs and perception on the counselling service; c) employee problems. The questionnaire pertaining to the needs and perception of employees toward counselling contained 30 items with a reported Chronbach Alpha reliability of .82. The reliability on the questionnaire pertaining to employee problems had a Chronbach Alpha reliability of .84.

The problems identified among the employees at the Johor Port Authority were personnel services (40%); physical problems (30%); finance (23.6%); attitude (22.6%); facilities (20%); relationships (18%); self-concept (13.3%). Also, the results of the study indicated that 76.8% of the employees were agreeable to the establishment of a counselling service at the Johor Port Authority. The non-executive employees (72.3%) favoured the need for a counselling service compared with only 27.8% among the executives. It was found that more male employees required counselling (69.53%) than female employees (30.5%).

This study also made a comparative analysis of the variables according to gender, employees' job status, and work experience. The

results of the study indicated no significant difference between the executives and non-executives on the various problems. There was, however, a significant difference on matters related to finance and relationships between the male and female employees. The mean score on financial problems among males was 15.41, and the mean score for the female employees was 13.86, with $t(286) 3.26, p < .05$.

The studies indicated that a counselling service was found necessary in the organizations concerned. The results of the study conducted by INTAN indicated 82.8% of the supervisory staff and 95.4% among the officers being supervised agreed to the establishment of a counselling service in the public sector. Also, among the employees in the Johor Port Authority, 76.8% agreed to the establishment of a counselling service in the organization.

Evidently from these studies, the categorization of employees' problems needs also to be identified in corporations. The limitations of previous studies, and scarcity of related studies in Malaysia have led to the conduct of this research on a major telecommunication corporation in Malaysia.

The objectives of the study were 1) to identify problems faced by the workers; 2) to compare categories of problems according to age, gender, and job position. Subsequently, the study sought to answer the following questions: (1) what are the frequency of counselling-related problems found in a corporate setting? (2) what are the categories of problems faced by employees according to age, gender and job position? It was hypothesized that there is no difference in the various categories of age, gender and job position with counselling problems in the corporate setting.

METHODOLOGY

The study incorporated a descriptive survey research method, limited to one large corporation that is involved in the telecommunication business in Malaysia. The sample size in the research study was determined by using the Power Statistical Analysis (Borenstein and Cohen 1988). With power set at .8 and $\alpha = .05$, the 288 subjects randomly chosen were sufficient to ensure a reduction of Type II Error. The subjects were participants of courses conducted at the corporation's training center in Kuala Lumpur. They were executives and non-executives who came from all parts of Malaysia.

The survey questionnaires were administered over a period of 3 weeks to the captive respondents in their lecture rooms at the training center in Kuala Lumpur.

A frequency analysis was carried out to explain the need for counselling services and related problems. The t-test was used to explain the differences between the means on the dependent variables such as age, gender, job position, marital status with personal problems.

Instruments

The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A consisted of 90 items constructed to evaluate types of problems faced by employees. The items required a response on a Likert scale between 1 to 5 with 1 being "strongly agree" and 5 "strongly disagree". The overall reliability of the Part A questionnaire instruments was high, Chronbach Alpha = .91. Part B consisted of the demographic questionnaire with related items identifying the need for counselling. In Part B, 10 items relating to the need for counselling also required a response on a Likert scale between 1 to 5.

RESULTS

Results of the study illustrated the counselling needs and patterns of counselling-related problems in a corporation. Table 1 shows the various categories of problems. Problems related to retirement were highest (24.5%); followed by career problems (16.1%); personal problems (13%); family problems (6%); marital problems (5.4%).

TABLE 1
Categories of problems
(with percentages and frequencies)

Problem category	Percentage	Frequency
Retirement	24.5	70
Career	16.1	46
Personal	13.0	37
Family	6.0	17
Marriage	5.4	15

n = 288

Table 2 reflects the frequencies related to career problems. The data indicated insufficient remuneration as a main problem category. Also, relationship problems between management and the staff were high on the problem frequency list. This is reflected by the high percentage of employees reporting that management was unconcerned with employees' affairs (29.8%) and employees having difficulty in discussing problems with their supervisors (21.2%).

TABLE 2
Categories of career problems
(with percentages and frequencies)

Problem category	Percentage	Frequency
Insufficient remuneration	41.0	118
Management unconcerned toward employees' affairs	29.8	85
Worksite relocation	25.0	72
Inclination to work with the public sector	23.2	66
Difficulty in discussing problems with supervisors	21.2	61
Restricted office procedure	19.4	55
Non-opportunity for expression	17.0	48
Few promotion opportunities	16.3	46
Non-assertive superior	16.3	46
Insufficient experience in administration	14.2	40
Dislike for the work/job	13.2	38
Incumbent position incompatible with interest	10.5	30

n = 288

Table 3 shows the frequencies related to personal problems. The percentage for smoking related problems was 13.9%. Drug abuse (7.6%), gambling (4.1%) and alcohol dependence (3.4%) were also identified among the personal problems reported by the employees. Also in the study, the number of employees reporting family problems (6.0%) and marriage problems (5.4%) was, however, relatively small. Subsequently, comparisons of personal problems related to career, marriage and family were analyzed according to age, gender and job position of the employees.

When comparing workers over the age of 34 with workers under the age of 34, a significant difference was found only on the retirement problem. The mean score for the higher age group (more than 34 years old) was 13.10, $n = 211$ and the mean score for the lower age group (less than 34) was 14.06, $n = 77$, $t(286) = 2.95$, $p < .05$.

TABLE 3
Categories of personal problems
(with percentages and frequencies)

Problem category	Percentage	Frequency
Smoking	13.9	40
Drug abuse	7.6	21
Gambling	4.1	11
Alcohol dependence	3.4	9

$n = 288$

The comparison between gender indicated a significant difference only on personal problems. The mean score for the male group was 109.56, $n = 222$, and the mean score for the female group was 115.88, $n = 66$, $t(286) = 4.65$, $p < .05$. There was no significant difference on any categories of problems between the executives and the non-executives.

The comparison on marital status between married and non-married personnel indicated a significant difference on personal and retirement problems. In regard to personal problems, the mean score of the non-married group was 108.87, $n = 97$, while the mean score for the married group was 112.00, $n = 189$, $t(286) = 2.53$, $p < .5$. Subsequently, the problems on retirement indicated the mean score for the non-married group was 12.97, $n = 97$ while the mean score for the married group was 13.58, $n = 189$, $t(286) = 1.98$, $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

The study indicated no significant difference between executives and non-executives in respect to all categories of problems identified. Certainly, the occurrence of problems cuts across all employees, indicating the presence of problem similarities irrespective of job status in the corporate sector. Personal problems surfaced as being signifi-

cant between gender. Cigarette smoking was cited by 13.9% of the subjects as the most frequent personal problem. Drug abuse and alcohol dependence totalled 11% amongst the disclosures, and gambling 4.1%. In Malaysia, with the current emphasis on drug abuse prevention programs, incidences of dependence call for concern within the workplace. There is, therefore, a need for a concerted effort toward awareness of drug abuse prevention and counselling related programs.

Also, personal problems were evident between the two marital groups. The higher incidence of personal problems among the married group is disturbing since the categories of problems tended towards dependence on drugs, cigarettes and gambling. In this study, 41.0% of the subjects indicated insufficient remuneration as a problem. This relatively high incidence of financial insufficiency and the high dependence-related problems need to be addressed accordingly.

Problems related to retirement were also evident; there was a significant difference among the age categories. The findings suggest that the married group above the age of 34 years seems to be more concerned with their retirement programs. As employees gradually mature within the corporation, their concern about stability at both the workplace and upon retirement becomes a pertinent issue. Frequencies of career related problems indicated 29.8% of employees felt that the management was unconcerned with their affairs. The findings showed that 21.2% of the employees faced difficulties in discussing problems with their supervisors. These findings are consistent with the findings of Engliman Roslan (1991) where 18% of the employees of the Johor Port Authority reported problems on relationships and 22.6% as having attitude related problems. Although this moderate occurrence is not alarming, there is an implied need for an employee counselling and consultation service in the corporate workplace in the Malaysian setting. Nevertheless, the study indicated that 83.3% of the respondents agreed that a counselling service should be introduced in the corporation.

IMPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

The findings of the study imply that the counselling profession must be sensitive to the need for a comprehensive counsellor education programme.

Also, the counsellor education programme in Malaysia must focus on counselling courses most suitable within the corporate culture in Malaysia. More courses inclined to preventive programmes and dealing with alcohol dependence, career development and retirement management need to be introduced in the counsellor education programme to meet this need.

The findings also indicate that, irrespective of organizational setting, patterns of counselling-related problems do occur in the workplace. A comprehensive counselling-related programme could be initiated in the work setting with a set goal of benefiting the employees' wellness and at the same time ensuring a caring corporate culture.

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