Employee Assistance Research Supplement

Documenting the Value of An EAP to Administrators In Higher Education: A Survey of Customer Satisfaction by Supervisors and Managers

DAVID W. JOHNSON, M.A., CEAP, AND MARGIE L. TOMSIC, PH.D.

Abstract

With the rising costs of higher education and the need to justify these costs to taxpayers, directors of employee assistance programs (EAPs) are under increasing pressure to document the value of their services to members of the campus community. This is often done by monitoring the satisfaction levels of current and former clients, tallying the number of persons served by such services, and analyzing the performance records of those served. More recently, EAP directors have begun to document the benefits of such services to supervisors and managers as they manage issues that surround an increasingly diverse workforce. The following study examines the attitudes of supervisors and managers towards an EAP at a Big Ten institution, using a satisfaction survey modified from a study of administrators served by an EAP in the corporate sector. Implications of current findings and suggestions for future study are discussed.

Background

Nationwide, approximately 100 members of the International Association of Employee Assistance Professionals in Education provide employee assistance services to accommodate the diverse needs of an educational workforce. As the costs of higher education continue to soar[1], directors of employee assistance programs (EAPs) may find it prudent to justify the benefits of having an EAP housed within their campus communities. EAP directors typically evaluate their programs by surveying the satisfaction levels of current and former clients, analyzing performance records of those served by a program, and tallying the frequency rates of persons served. Yet, satisfaction surveys have their limitations.

Errors in conducting surveys can arise from the way in which persons are sampled and in how questions are asked. They can further become evident when researchers fail to use statistical sampling techniques or when they ignore non-respondents.[2] In fact, until recently, few EAP directors gathered perceptions from supervisors and managers, whose participation in an EAP often is critical to the success of such services.[3]

Studies suggest that knowledge and ease of access are necessary if supervisors and managers are to utilize the services of an EAP. In a study by Googins and Kurtz[4], knowledge of the EAP was associated directly with its use by supervisors. Moreover, supervisors who did not make referrals or encourage employees to use an EAP were less likely to see such a service as useful to an organization.

Similar studies by Park[5], Braun, and Novak[6] have demonstrated a link between EAP familiarity, program use, and perceptions of effectiveness. Supervisors and managers with EAP training were more likely to see the need for an EAP than those with little or no training. Moreover, those who perceived such services as accessible and easy to use were more likely to rate EAPs as effective and necessary for an institution, more likely to refer others to such services, and more likely to recommend such services to their colleagues.[7,8]

In a study conducted within an industrial setting, Harlow[3] further identified several factors related to the positive perceptions of EAPs among administrators. These factors included the importance of knowing others who had used the EAP, the desire to know more or the degree of comfort with current knowledge about the EAP, perceived ratings of confidentiality, and satisfaction with the quality of information shared between EAP directors and administrators. Given these findings, the authors of this study used such factors to document and analyze the value of having an EAP within an institution of higher learning.

Purpose of This Study

This study examined the attitudes of supervisors and managers towards an EAP at a Big Ten institution. Its purpose was to explore the degree of supervisors' familiarity and satisfaction with an EAP located within a university setting. More specifically, the authors wanted to assess administrators' knowledge and use of the EAP and their perceptions of the information exchange and value the EAP added to the University of Minnesota.

The authors wished to determine users' levels of satisfaction with EAP contacts as well as their willingness to refer others to the program. Particular areas of interest included the EAP's impact on resolving organizational problems, improving the productivity of employees, contributing to improved morale, and building a more effective workforce. In addition, the authors wanted to know what impact education and training efforts had on the EAP's mission, especially concerning the effect of initiatives developed to educate staff on depression, stress-related issues, and the promotion of a respectful, violence-free workplace.

Description of the EAP

The EAP in this study is an internal program at a Big Ten institution in the upper Midwest. The program serves 7,000 Civil Service and bargaining unit employees. Staffing for this group includes 1.75 FTE administrators and counseling staff and 0.25 FTE support staff. A full range of EAP services is provided,

AREA OF KNOWLEDGE	N	%YES
Awareness of Organizational Services Provided by the EAP	1,419	66
Knowledge of How to Contact The EAP	940	70
Could Explain EAP Use to a New Supervisor	1,354	37
Desired More Information About the EAP	1,349	55
Desired More Training With The EAP	1,339	29

Table 1. Percentage of Supervisors With Knowledge of the EAP

including assessment and referral, supervisory consultation, and training and education offerings. The study involved 2,225 supervisors and managers responsible for the work of the Civil Service and bargaining unit employees.

Method

Sample. The Office of Human Resources supplied the names and campus mailing addresses of 2,500 managers and supervisors from a university staff list. The list was coded to track the names of persons who supervise Civil Service and bargaining unit staff at a large university in the Upper Midwest. All persons on this supervisory list are responsible for directing non-academic university work activities. The list was then reduced to include only persons located on the main campus of the university with campus mailing addresses, since these persons are most likely to use and have access to the EAP. The final mailing consisted of 2,225 names, or 89 percent of the original sample.

Survey. The survey instrument consisted of a two-page form developed for persons in an industrial setting and adapted for people in education. The questions in sections titled "Knowledge of the EAP," "Use of the EAP," and "Information Exchange" were patterned after those developed by Harlow to analyze the effect of knowledge, use of services, and information exchange on supervisors' perceptions of an EAP. These particular items were selected because they correlated significantly well with variables relating to quality.

Additional survey items in the areas of training, effectiveness, and background information were expanded and tailored specifically to the goals of the institution by a team of university experts that reviewed the instrument. Researchers ultimately hope to make regional comparisons on items similar in content to those in the Harlow study.

Most of the questions used a five point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree/very ineffective to strongly agree/highly effective. Background items provided information on job category, sex, age, years in the position, and ways in which respondents learned about the program. Specific items in a section about adding value to the university included ratings of effectiveness in such areas as promoting a violence-free workplace, educating staff on depression and stress-related issues, and contributing to a more effective workforce. A final area of the questionnaire provided space for comments.

Procedure. Surveys were mailed to all supervisors and managers in the spring of the academic year, using their campus mailing addresses. Each respondent received a cover letter from the EAP director along with a copy of the survey and a preaddressed envelope to return the completed survey to the Office of Measurement Services. Respondents were tracked using preassigned identification numbers and were sent up to two mailings of the survey and a reminder card. Participation was voluntary, but a drawing for one of four $50 gift certificates from the university bookstore was used as an incentive to increase participation.

Surveys were scanned, and descriptive statistics and relational statistics were used to analyze results. Comments were later summarized and analyzed by content area. Comments from persons who did not respond to the rating portion of the survey also were summarized.

Results

A total of 1,419 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 64 percent. Two-thirds of the respondents were women, and 45 percent were between the ages of 41 and 50. Forty percent had been in the same position for five years or less, while 15 percent had remained in the same position for more than 20 years. The demographics of this sample were similar to the population of employees as a whole and to those who used EAP services at the University of Minnesota.

As shown in Table 1, two-thirds of the sample audience were aware of services provided by the EAP. Of these, 70 percent knew how to contact the EAP when necessary, but only 37 percent felt comfortable explaining how to use an EAP to a new supervisor. Over half of the sample said they would like more information about the EAP, and 29 percent desired additional training on how to use the program.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents knew of other supervisors who had used the service for training/consultation or for counsel-