

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental purpose of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) is to provide help to employees and their family members. However, how this is done has led to some divisive, though meritorious developments in the field. Two distinct options have emerged over time: assistance through professional or volunteer resources internal to the organization versus professional counsellors external to the organization. The first significant study to compare internal and external programs was published in 1986 by Steidinger. She surveyed 34 organizations in San Francisco and discovered that 47% used an internal model, 38% used an external provider while 15% used both. In 1988, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics conducted a two-stage random sample survey of 7,502 American businesses to determine the prevalence of EAPs. Somewhat surprisingly only 6.5% of respondents indicated that they had a formal EAP in place, with the likelihood of a program existing predicated upon the size of the workforce. Of those reporting having an EAP, 55.5% had an external EAP provider while 44.5% used resources internal to the organization. Larger organizations more often used internal EAP staff than did organizations of less than 1,000 employees. Only 24% of companies with over 5,000 employees used an external provider. The response of American government organizations was very similar to the overall study results with 54.0% using external providers while 46% used internal providers (Favorini and Spitzer, 1993). In 1995 the results of the National Survey of Worksites and Employee Assistance Programs in the United States was released (French et al., 1995). The survey drew from all non-agricultural worksites of 50 or more full-time employees. This study found that EAP prevalence had risen to 39%, with 17% of worksites using internal professionals, 80% using external professionals and 3% utilizing a combined

internal/external model. French and his associates reported that internal programs generally cost more per employee than did external programs but that internal programs provided more comprehensive services than did their external counterparts. To further elaborate upon the work of French, Bray et al. (1996) conducted a more in depth review of seven specific EAPs. Four of the seven examined were staffed by internal professionals while three used a combined model. No organization using external professionals alone to provide Employee Assistance services participated in the study. The costs reported in Table 3 are generally higher than those from the French (1995) study. What is interesting to note from the results is that the larger the workforce the lower the per employee cost. It is also further evident that the comprehensive nature of a combined program does come with a financial cost. However, what is not demonstrated by this type of analysis is what the dollar return is on these more extensive programs. It is not known if more expensive programs lead to corresponding increases in productivity and heightened decreases in absenteeism, injuries and other related health costs. It should also be noted that despite the costs associated with providing their particular style of EAP, no organization studied intended to change the manner in which EAP services were being delivered nor the range of services offered to employees and their families.

Turning to examine Canadian findings, Macdonald and Wells (1993) reported that 32% of Ontario workplaces with 50 or more employees had EAPs, double the results of a 1989 survey conducted by Macdonald and Dooley. Government agencies were the leading sector having a program with 51.4% reporting the existence of an EAP, up from 38.9% in 1989. Of the 1989 sample, 66 of 126 used an internal professional while in 1993, 62 of 220 reported using this method of service provision. External professionals were used by 121 organizations while 137 of

the 220 used community resources to supplement professional assistance. Unfortunately, to this time, no equivalent analysis to that conducted by French or Bray has been done in Canada.

SERVICE DELIVERY ASSUMPTIONS

There has been an extensive debate in the profession, and to a degree in the literature, of the virtues of internal versus external EAPs since the emergence of external providers in the 1970's to challenge the position of internal counsellors and program administrators. As empirical support, both quantitative and qualitative, for these assumptions remains relatively weak, most of the beliefs are derived from anecdotal evidence and personal experiences. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the key strengths and weaknesses as gleaned from the literature and from the author's practice experience of these two methods of EAP service delivery. found 36 articles specifically discussing EAPs for Canadian based organizations.

Table 1: Summary of Internal EAP Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- use of an internal model will produce organizational cost savings
- organizational belongingness and understanding of the dynamic environment of the workplace
- higher utilization rates than external programs
- organizational positioning and support

Weaknesses

- replication of resources available in the community
- staffing may not be adequate to meet organizational diversity
- ability for ongoing professional developmental opportunities

- long range perspective

- immediacy of response to critical incidents

- quicker response to organizational changes

- knowledge of organization policies and procedures

- better positioned to respond to the Integrated Model of Occupational Assistance¹

- ethical conflict over who is the client and confidentiality perceptions

- greater cost per employee

sources: Christie, 1994; Csiernik, 1995b; Cunningham, 1994; Curran & Shirley, 1998; Favorini & Spitzer, 1993; Googins & Godfrey, 1987; Leong & Every, 1997; Ross, 1996.

Table 2: Summary of External EAP Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•use of an external model will produce organizational cost savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•necessity of profit margin to maintain operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•greater utilization by non-employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•less awareness of organizational culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•greater utilization by senior management/executives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•fewer informal contacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•off-site locations promote feelings of confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•ethical conflict over who is the client
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•best option for smaller organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•fewer supervisor consultations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•wider range of clinical resources and greater	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•slower response time to immediate crisis or critical

likelihood to provide
longer hours for access

- consistent service over
broad geographic areas

- provision of some service
at a minimal cost

- more emphasis on and
experience with marketing of
services and self-promotion

incident

- lower use of services for
alcohol or other drug use
and for work related problems

- capped services

- fewer core services per
employee

- increased cost if threshold
utilization rate surpassed

- lack of consistency between intake and
counselling services

sources: Christie, 1994; Csiernik, 1995b; Cunningham, 1994; Curran & Shirley, 1998; Favorini & Spitzer, 1993; Googins & Godfrey, 1987; Leong & Every, 1997; Ross, 1996.

Air Canada (1985) Air Canada's Health Promotion Program, Toronto: Air Canada Medical Services Department.

Bray, J.; French, M; Bowland, B.; and Dunlap, J. (1996) "The Cost of Employee Assistance Programs: Findings from Seven Case Studies," Employee Assistance Quarterly, 11 (4), 1-19.

Christie, Jeff (1994) "Grazing in Each Other's Pastures: Internal and External EAPs," EAPA Exchange, 24 (6), 18-19.

Cox, Christine (1997) "Teachers' Sick Leave Climbs As Stress Soars," Hamilton Spectator, February 17, 1; 3.

Csiernik, Rick (1998) "An Integrated Model of Occupational Assistance," The Social Worker, 66 (3), 37-47.

Csiernik, Richard (1995) Developing An Employee Assistance Program: Essential Aspects and Components, Hamilton: McMaster University.

Cunningham, Gloria (1994) Effective Employee Assistance Programs, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

CUPE Local 813 (1995) Review of the Employee Assistance Program, St. John, New Brunswick: Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Curran, Joe and Shirley, Jack (1998) "An Internal EAP: The Best Fit for Philadelphia Newspapers," EAPA Exchange, 28 (4), 35.

Favorini, Alison and Spitzer, Kevin (1993) "The Emergence of External Employee Assistance Programs: Report of a Survey and Identification of Trends," Journal of Employee Assistance Research, 2 (1), 23-35.

Feeney, Gordon (1984) "The Royal Bank's Access Program," On Site, 1 (1), 2-3.

French, M.; Zarkin, G.; Bray, J.; and Hartwell, T. (1995) Costs of Employee Assistance Programs: Comparison of National Estimates from 1993 and 1995, Rockville: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Goodard, Hans (1989) "EAPs: Programs That Pay Off," CPJ-RPC, March, 146-147.

Googins, Bradley and Godfrey, Joline (1987) Occupational Social Work, Toronto: Prentice-Hall.

Groeneveld, Judith; Shain, Martin; Brayshaw, Donald; and Heideman, Isabel (1984) The Alcoholism Treatment Program at Canadian National Railways, Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.

Habinski, Ron (1985) "The Employee Assistance Program within the Department of National Defence," On Site, 2 (1), 3.

Hart, David (1988) Overview of an Industrial EAP, Chatham: Addiction Research Foundation.

Hospital for Sick Children (1989) EAP Highlights, Toronto.

LEAC (1990) 1989-1990 Annual Report, London: London Employee Assistance Consortium.

Leong, Deborah and Every, Deborah (1997) "Internal and External EAPs: Is One Better Than The Other?," Employee Assistance Quarterly, 12 (3), 47-62.

List, William (1986) "Helping Out the Problem Employee," Report on Business, September, 68-76.

Lynch, JoAnn (1980) "Variations in Program Usage in Different Occupational Settings," Labour-Management Alcoholism Journal, 10 (3), 85-96.

Macdonald, Scott; Lothian, Shelley; and Wells, Samantha (1997) "Evaluation of an Employee Assistance Program at a Transportation Company," Evaluation and Program Planning, 20 (4), 495-505.

Macdonald, Scott and Wells, Samantha (1993) Employee Assistance, Health Promotion and Drug Testing Programs at Ontario Work Sites, Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.

Mann, Sally (1998) "Industry Standards Needed For EAP Utilization Rates," EAPA Exchange, 28 (3), 14-17.

Martin, David; Heckel, Virginia; Goodrick, G.K.; Schreiber, Janet; and Young, Virginia (1985) "The Relationship Between Referral Types, Work Performance, Employee Problems," Employee Assistance Quarterly, 1 (2), 25-35.

Mowry, Stephaine (ed.) (1996) Prince Edward Island Public Sector Employee Assistance Program Evaluation, Charlottetown.

Newman, Paul (1983) "Program Evaluation as a Reflection of Program Goals" in Ray Thomlinson (ed), Perspective on Industrial Social Work Practice, Toronto: Family Service Canada.

Ontario Addiction Research Foundation (1990) Statistics on EAP Utilization, Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.

Ross, Guy (1996) "Marketing Internal Employee Assistance Programs: What Brings Them In?" EAPA Exchange, 26 (1), 26-27.

Sargent, Linda and Tepperman, Paul (1987) "People and Profits at Central Canada Grocers: HR Ventures into EAP Monitoring Software," Human Resources Management In Canada, Toronto: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.

Shepell Consultants (1996) Employee Assistance Program: North York Board of Education.

Steidinger, Joan (1986) "The Current State of Evaluation Practices in Employee Assistance Programs, San Francisco," Employee Assistance Quarterly, 1 (4), 51-65.

Van Halm, Rochelle (1988) "Out of the Woods," Occupational Health and Safety Canada, 4 (6), 22-29.