

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Using the Workplace Outcome Suite New Tool Illustrates Results from EAP Services

By David Sharar & Richard Lennox

In 1988, Pallassana Balgopal, a long-time occupational social worker and professor, stated that the, “*growth of EAPs has not been accompanied by an increase in rigorous or routine evaluation of these programs.*”

Unfortunately, his statement remains accurate more than 20 years later. In other words, the EAP field has, to date, not produced outcomes research at a level commensurate with its involvement and scope in providing services to the American workforce.

What is the WOS?

The Workplace Outcome Suite (WOS) was specifically designed to help EAP providers make Dr. Balgopal’s statement obsolete by providing a validated and free tool to conduct routine outcome monitoring. The WOS approach – a workplace outcome-based survey tool – can illustrate

the workplace effects of EAP by quantifying productivity improvements.

The WOS is short (25 total items with 5 scales), psychometrically tested and validated, workplace focused, and easy to administer (Lennox, Sharar, Schmitz, and Goehner, 2010). This is a crucial point because one of the major obstacles EAP providers have faced has been that most outcome measures are simply too long, consider only one aspect, and/or are expensive to purchase or administer.

The WOS contains five-item measures of five scales that are popular and lie at the heart of understanding the effects of EAP in the workplace. They are:

- Absenteeism;
- Presenteeism;
- Work engagement;
- Life satisfaction; and
- Workplace distress.

Each scale can “stand-alone” or be used in conjunction with the other scales. In addition, the WOS is free to EAPs by simply signing a short license agreement. To date, more than 400 EAP firms in the U.S. and overseas have signed license agreements to use the WOS.

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Table 2: Pre-EAP and Post-EAP comparisons of two Fortune 100 Manufacturing firms on five WOS scales

WOS Score	Pre-test		Post-test		N	2-tailed Statistical Significance
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Absenteeism	8.39	21.29	5.87	14.42	197	0.040 ^a
Presenteeism	13.99	5.67	10.15	5.44	193	0.000
Work Engagement	17.58	4.60	17.91	4.46	193	0.272
Life Satisfaction	14.13	3.88	15.45	4.04	193	0.000
Workplace Distress	12.37	5.57	11.71	5.16	194	0.049

Note: ^aWilcoxon ranks sum tests were used to test the significance of the reduction in missed hours of work. Although the 2-tailed test is reported, the 1-tailed test is appropriate in this directional test of the hypotheses, which means that the presented significance levels should actually be divided by 2.

(Editor's note: For more information, see "Measuring Workplace Outcomes in EAPs: New Approach Appears Promising," in the February 2010 issue of *EAR*.)

How the WOS is Used

Most EAPs deploy a simple correlative "pre-post" or "before-after" design to examine the relationship between EAP counseling and specific workplace effects. This design is the "workhorse" of "real" (and unfunded) practice evaluation, and is frequently used when access to a matched comparison group is not available or permitted.

It is popular because it is not disruptive to the normal "help seeking" process, and most EAPs have neither the time nor the cooperation from employers to deploy other types of more complex research.

The purpose of the WOS is to test the strength of the association between EAP counseling and work effectiveness, so it can identify IF employees are improving at work but not authoritatively explain WHY, or prove that EAP counseling caused the improvements at work.

Obviously, the stronger the correlation between EAP counseling and work effectiveness, the stronger the association and the likelihood that EAP contributed to improved work effectiveness.

Sample

The sample for the data in the accompanying Table 2 graphic includes 197 subjects (EAP clients) who received EAP counseling services between March and September of 2010. The employees (clients) were all employed by one of two Fortune 100 companies with dispersed employees in numerous communities throughout the continental U.S., including urban, suburban, and rural locations.

The sample is a heterogeneous mix of labor (hourly workers) and

management or administrative personnel (salaried, "white collar") and only includes employees as EAP clients (not spouses or dependents).

Both companies use an external EAP provider who in turn uses local network "affiliates", a highly prevalent and common model for large, multi-location employers.

The Intervention Using 'Affiliates'

Affiliates, as "general mental health practitioners" use a "grab bag" of assessment and therapeutic approaches with a variety of low to high (or severe) EAP cases. Given this "patchwork quilt" of highly varied approaches and competencies among affiliates, the "EAP counseling" intervention deployed in this evaluation is not well defined or specified.

Brief or short-term counseling is likely the best umbrella term to describe the intervention approach used with these EAP cases, meaning there is some emphasis on being helpful in:

- Utilizing six or fewer sessions;
- Identifying highly specific problem areas; and
- Using direct intervention techniques.

The most common approaches used by affiliates with EAP cases are either Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Solution-Focused Counseling.

Results

Table 1, located on page 5 presents the means (averages) and standard deviations of the 25 items in the WOS – while Table 2 presents the pre- and post-test statistics for the five summary scores. Four of the five scales all produce change in a positive, statistically significant direction, yielding support for the ability of "generic" EAP intervention to create workplace change in the right direction.

In particular, *Presenteeism* and *Life satisfaction* are highly

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significant at the level of 0.000. *Absenteeism*, with the presence of some extreme cases, had a "skewed" distribution, likely reflective of the complex dynamics when making decisions about missing work.

Workplace distress showed a similar resistance to higher levels of change, probably due to the extreme nature of the construct itself.

Work engagement is the lone scale that did not yield significant

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results. EAP counseling, in this evaluation, did not produce a more “engaged” worker.

In fact, the network affiliate model itself proved to be a critical point – as a heterogeneous and common brief counseling intervention in EAP, lacking in specific clinical protocols, seemed to produce sufficiently improved workplace outcomes. In addition, the WOS appears to be a “sensitive” test, meaning it can detect change, if in fact change is present.

The authors of this article are receptive to collaborating with other EAPs who want to measure outcomes that are specific to their particular programs and models. Contact us at dsharar@chestnut.org or rlennox@chestnut.org.

Conclusion

Employers have not traditionally viewed EAP outcome measures as highly persuasive or credible, leaving low price as the one measure they do understand. In theory, no employer is willing to pay for a service that does not produce positive workplace outcomes – but in the absence of standard outcome monitoring, there has not been a link between price and expected results.

Consequently, EAP providers are not paid in proportion to their effectiveness. This is unlikely to change unless we embrace improved outcome measurement. The WOS, while not foolproof, is one tool that can help accomplish this elusive goal – if implemented in a credible manner, consistent with normal standards for program evaluation. ■

Dave Sharar, Ph.D., is a provider and evaluator of EAPs and related services with Chestnut Global Partners. Richard “Rik” Lennox, Ph.D., is a research psychologist, psychometrics expert, and principal developer of the Workplace Outcome Suite. Editor’s note: For more information on improving workplace productivity, see this month’s Brown Bagger insert.



Editor’s Notebook

The authors of this month’s cover article have implemented a workplace outcome approach that represents a departure from conventional measures used to address the age-old question of whether EAPs actually work.

With more than 400 users to date – and with a standing-room only session on the Workplace Outcome Suite (WOS) at last fall’s World EAP Conference in Tampa – it’s obvious that Dave and Rik have had the attention of their professional colleagues with their innovative new tool.

I was pleased to meet them last fall and learn that their WOS approach was, in fact, working –

information and figures we’re pleased to share with *EAR* readers this month.

Several articles on this topic have also appeared in the *Journal of Employee Assistance* - most recently the 4th quarter 2010 issue.

In summary, the EAP field has needed a way to improve the empirical basis of claims that might be made about EAP to an employer. The WOS – an easy-to-administer tool – might be just the ticket. Thanks Dave & Rik for your time & talent! Until next time.



Mike Jacquart, Editor
(715) 258-2448
mike.jacquart@impacttrainingcenter.net

Resources

☞ The **Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law** is a nonprofit organization devoted to improving the lives of people with mental illnesses through changes in policy and law. Visit www.bazelon.org.

☞ The **Employers Resource Association**. EA professionals sometimes lament that they don’t know more about Human Resources (HR) professionals. This site offers links including: information about the ERA, surveys, upcoming forums and events, and more. Log on to www.hrxperts.org.

☞ The **HandsOn Network** is a nonprofit organization that works with action centers located in disaster-impacted regions from the recent domestic tornadoes and flooding. It also supports a center working on recovery efforts in Japan. Check out <http://handsonnetwork.org>.

📖 **The Skinny On™**. Using a format light on text and heavy on visuals that caters to today’s Internet style of reading, this book series offers advice on scores of topics, including willpower, success, time management, credit cards, and more. Visit www.theskinnyon.com. ■

Hallmarks of a Great Workplace – Part II

By Norm Spitzig

What exactly makes a workplace “great?” What are the specific characteristics common to those very special workplaces that are universally recognized as the indisputable signs of a superior operation?

I believe there are seven such hallmarks. I listed three of them in part one of this two-part article. The remainder appear here:

❖ **Reasonable, understandable, and uniformly enforced work rules.** Great workplaces have rules and policies that are reasonable, understandable, and fairly and uniformly enforced. (For instance, if smoking is prohibited in the work environment, *no one* smokes: not the president, and not the new dishwasher.)

The rules and policies at great workplaces are not written in language so arcane that no one but a senior tax attorney can understand them. Ideally, they are not written to prevent employees *from* doing something, but rather to set appropriate standards whereby all employees are assured the opportunity to maximize their potential.

❖ **An appropriate blending of tradition and innovation.** While great workplaces are environments where employees devote a significant amount of time to improving current products and services as well as creating new ones, they are also places where tradition and continuity are highly valued.

Long-standing products and services are not whimsically eliminated to the detriment of loyal customers; rather, they are improved as circumstances dictate.

❖ **Open communication among all vested parties.** Great workplaces have regular, honest communication. Staff and customers are given adequate opportunity to convey their ideas and suggestions to company leadership.

Managers at great workplaces understand the practice of, “management by walking around,” because they know that this time-tested practice promotes open communication and minimizes potential problems.

❖ **Fiscal responsibility.** Last, but certainly not least, great workplaces are fiscally prudent in the manner they operate. They have detailed, multi-year business plans that feature [among other areas] realistic cash flow projections.

Great businesses rigorously monitor and adjust their financial plans on a regular basis and as circumstances dictate. They understand how much money will be required to provide the products and services their customers want as well the costs associated with them. The long-term financial well-being of the workplace remains a high priority.

Summary

A great workplace employs happy, productive, and talented people who perform meaningful work compatible with the mission, vision, and financial goals of the company. It takes constant effort and vigilance to be a truly great workplace, but the end result is worth it. ■

Norm Spitzig, Principal at Master Club Advisors, is internationally recognized as a visionary speaker and industry expert. His groundbreaking book, Perspectives on Club Management, continues to inspire and challenge business leaders worldwide. For more information, visit www.masterclubadvisors.com.

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EARF Issues 2nd Call For Grant Proposals

The Employee Assistance Research Foundation (EARF) has announced preliminary plans for its 2011 call for grant proposals, the organization's second grant cycle. This year's proposals will focus on EAP effectiveness and outcomes.

The Foundation's second grant cycle will be announced in September. Details of the proposal process and the

deadline for submitting a brief abstract will be posted on the Foundation's website (www.eapfoundation.org).

The following applicants were awarded the Foundation's initial grants:

- ❖ ISW Limits and the University of Leuven (Belgium) was recognized for its proposal, "EAP in Continental Europe:

State of the Art and Future Challenges."

- ❖ The National Behavioral Consortium (NBC), located in the U.S., was lauded for its proposal, "Creating a National Benchmarking Resource of Metrics for the EAP field."

The studies are expected to provide valuable empirical data, according to Carl Tisone, the Foundation's founder and board chairman. ■

WOS Table 1

Table 1: Means and standard Deviation of the 25 WOS items

	Item Description	Pre-test		Post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	Personal problem caused you miss to work altogether.	4.87	17.12	3.05	12.38
2	Personal problem made you late for work.	0.69	2.84	0.34	1.67
3	Personal problem caused you to take off early.	0.90	1.95	0.64	1.73
4	Personal problem pulled you away from your normal work...	0.70	5.82	0.46	1.85
5	Personal problem required... phone, email or Internet	1.22	2.50	1.035	2.56
6	I had a hard time ...work because of my personal problems.	2.81	1.34	2.05	1.26
7	My personal problems kept me from concentrating on my work.	3.02	1.28	2.22	1.30
8	Because of my personal problems I was not able to enjoy my work.	3.15	1.40	2.28	1.31
9	My personal problems made me worry about completing my tasks.	2.71	1.44	1.93	1.23
10	I could not do my job well because of my personal problems.	2.38	1.32	1.74	1.09
11	I feel stimulated by my work.	3.31	1.36	3.58	1.19
12	I often think about work on my way to the work site.	3.90	1.25	3.84	1.20
13	I feel passionate about my job.	3.71	1.23	3.76	1.20
14	I am often eager to get to the work site to start the day.	3.09	1.29	3.19	1.26
15	I often find myself thinking about my work at home.	3.54	1.28	3.54	1.22
16	My life is nearly perfect.	2.32	1.08	2.70	1.08
17	I am not very satisfied with my life as a whole.	2.83	1.17	2.64	1.18
18	So far, my life seems to be going very well.	3.01	1.09	3.39	1.05
19	There isn't anything about my life that I would change if I could.	2.11	1.14	2.18	1.07
20	I am very disappointed about the way my life has turned out.	2.43	1.15	2.13	1.06
21	I often feel anxious at work.	3.03	1.33	2.79	1.27
22	Thinking about being at work makes me upset.	2.18	1.30	2.08	1.21
23	I am unhappy most of the time at work.	2.19	1.21	2.05	1.18
24	I dread going into work	2.31	1.39	2.14	1.24
25	I can't wait to get away from work.	2.72	1.38	2.63	1.28

Looking Past Road Rage

Horns blaring in heavy traffic. Aggressive drivers swerving from lane to lane. Anyone who drives a car has witnessed road rage at some point.

Although any normally calm and collected person might become angry under severe enough stress, people with intermittent explosive disorder lose their tempers repeatedly — often in response to minor frustrations.

The good news, according to a recent issue of the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, is that medication and cognitive behavioral therapy may help.

Intermittent explosive disorder is more common than experts initially believed — affecting 3% to 4% of people in any given year. And intermittent explosive disorder tends to



appear early in life, with an average onset of age 13 in males and age 19 in females.

This condition remains controversial, especially when it is diagnosed in an individual charged with a violent crime. Several studies suggest that the disorder is associated with abnormal activity in parts of the brain that play a role in regulating aggressive behavior.

The biggest challenge with intermittent explosive disorder, notes Dr. Michael Miller, editor in chief of the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, is that people who have trouble resisting violent impulses are not likely to seek treatment.

Research on drug treatment has been limited, but antidepressants, mood stabilizers, and antipsychotic drugs may help.

Cognitive behavioral therapy, involving training in coping skills and relaxation techniques, also appears promising. Given the relatively early onset of intermittent explosive disorder, school-based violence prevention programs may help identify the condition and spur its treatment. ■

Source: *Harvard Health Publications.*

Workplace Survey

Sloppy Work Most Annoying Behavior

If you're looking for ways to stay in your colleagues' good graces, give your work "the once-over," an Accountemps survey suggests. Forty-one percent of CFOs said lacking attention to detail or sloppy work is the co-worker behavior that annoys them most.

"Having to constantly double-check someone else's work is a sure recipe for tension between co-workers," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of *Human Resources Kit For Dummies*®, 2nd Edition (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). "The success of any team depends on everyone

carrying his or her weight."

Gossiping or engaging in office politics also are pet peeves, both of which were cited by 23% of respondents.

Regarding office politics, Messmer noted that a certain amount of political maneuvering exists in nearly every organization, but it's wise for employees to not get caught up in it. "Office politics can damage your credibility," he said. "The most successful professionals build relationships with colleagues — they need this level of trust for effective collaboration." ■

Source: *Accountemps* (www.accountemps.com).

The Journal of Employee Assistance

Read the *Journal of Employee Assistance!*

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Turning Lemons into Lemonade

By Bill Treasurer

For most Americans, the economic recovery can't come quick enough. Even with an anemic upward trend, six-and-a-half million jobs have been lost in the current recession, and unemployment is at a 26-year high, with nearly 15 million people out of work.

There are still more job seekers than jobs – making now a potentially good time for career changers to strike out on their own.

As a result, many employee assistance professionals have been solicited for job and career-related advice in recent years. But where do they start? The following are some suggestions:

1. **Ditch the herd.** There's nothing wrong with running counter to the masses. The recession has millions of people competing for jobs – and even when they get one, employees may not get the job they want and deserve. Consequently,

many people have nothing to lose to give entrepreneurship a try.

2. **Cash in on favors.** Ask an employee in a career conundrum to honestly address the following question, "Who 'owes' you?" If there was ever a time to take someone up on a favor, it's now.

In addition to EA professionals and career counselors, individuals should also solicit family members, friends, and former colleagues for help in addressing their job situation.

3. **Beware of naysayers.** Ironically, the people who love an individual the most may support him or her the least. Odds are, naysayers such as family members have the person's best interests at heart — wanting to protect him/her from disappointment or harm.

They should be listened to, certainly, but an objective third party like an EA professional must remind the individual that while naysayers should be *heard*, their advice needn't necessarily be *followed*.

4. **Create a safety net.** Building a business requires more than sweat equity — it takes cold hard cash. Individuals should stash away as much money as possible for both immediate and future needs. Three to six months of income is recommended.

5. **Straddle both worlds.** In many instances, it's wise for an individual to keep looking for a "real job" while laying the groundwork for a business. Pursuing parallel paths is a good way to hedge bets until a new enterprise is up and running.

Summary

Heed the "theory of least regrets." In the end, the risks we most regret are often the ones we *didn't* take. ■

Bill Treasurer is the author of *Courage Goes to Work* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008) and the founder and CEO of Giant Leap Consulting, Inc. For more information, log on to www.couragegoestowork.com.

Quick Ideas

Ask Employees to Choose Words Wisely

Employee assistance professionals are often called upon to help resolve workplace conflicts. The following are some tips to share with employees:

- 1) Be honest. Start with, "I feel..."
- 2) Be aware that you might be

misunderstood. Ask questions.

- 3) Be open.
- 4) Be creative. Humor helps.
- 5) Be specific. The other person may not understand.
- 6) Be sensitive to the other person's reactions.
- 7) Be expressive when you listen. Use

verbal and non-verbal feedback.

- 8) Be patient. Interruptions can be irritating.
- 9) Offer reassurances that you are interested. ■

Source: *Taking Charge of Anger: How to Resole Conflict, Sustain Relationships, and Express Yourself without Losing Control.*

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Boomers at Work –

Age Discrimination not a Big Issue; but Boomers are Working Longer

Many Baby Boomers claim that age discrimination isn't a big problem at work. That's the good part. On the flip side, a substantial number of those born between 1946 and 1964 plan on retiring later than previous generations, according to a recent poll conducted by Associated Press-Life-GoesStrong.com.

Sixty-one percent of Boomers surveyed said their age is not an issue at work, and 25% even called it an asset. Only 14% classified getting older as a workplace liability. The most often-cited form of age discrimination was being passed over for a raise or promotion.

Moreover, roughly two-thirds of poll respondents said they were able to stay abreast of developments in their field and keep up with technology.

However, while the first post-World War II Boomers reach age 65 this year, two-thirds of them say they will work at least part time past retirement age for financial reasons – either because they'll need to or because they'll want additional spending money. Another 29% said they'll keep working just to stay busy.

On the other hand, a Congressional Budget Office report also noted that this trend could “substantially dampen growth in

the labor market” through 2021.

Institutional changes in pension plans, health insurance, and Social Security also give older workers more reasons to keep their jobs longer, the CBO said.

The Life-GoesStrong report is considered an important snapshot of the nation's economy at a time when the unemployment rate remains persistently high. A heightened workforce at the older end of the spectrum could mean fewer jobs for younger workers who became unemployed during the recent recession.

For the methodology used in this report, check out <http://surveys.ap.org> – and then scroll to, “Boomers in the workplace.” ■

Workplace Survey

Remain Calm to Overcome Embarrassing Moments

Ever felt like crawling under your desk on the job? According to a new OfficeTeam survey, you're in good company.

Executives interviewed were asked to recount their most embarrassing moments at work. Here are some of their responses:

- “I screamed when I saw a lizard in my office.”
- “While speaking at a business event, I fell off the stage.”
- “I got locked in the office.”
- “I fainted during a meeting with a client.”
- “I went into the ladies' bathroom by mistake.”
- “While interviewing a job candidate, I fell asleep.”

- “I answered the phone using the wrong company name.”
- “I sent an offer letter to the wrong candidate.”
- “When I joined the organization, my colleagues told me to sing a song.”
- “I laughed so hard at a joke the boss told me that I started snorting.”

“Nearly everyone has had an embarrassing situation at work,” said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam. “Although these moments can be awkward, it's best not to dwell on them, or you risk drawing more negative attention to yourself.”

OfficeTeam offers four tips for rebounding from embarrassing work mishaps:

1. **Remain calm.** It's easy to lose your nerves after a slip-up, but try to keep your composure. Take a deep breath and collect yourself.

2. **Own up.** Acknowledging a blunder before someone else does can alleviate any awkward tension that may arise. If appropriate, address the situation in a humorous way to make everyone feel more at ease.

3. **Make amends.** If your accident affected another person, immediately apologize and take steps to ensure a similar mistake does not happen again.

4. **Move on.** Rather than dwell on it, focus on getting back on track. The faster you recover, the less memorable the incident will be. ■

Source: OfficeTeam, a leading staffing service (www.officeteam.com).