



Focusing on Integration of EAP with other Services

By Mark Attridge, PhD, MA

This is the first article of a new column in the *JEA* that addresses the integration of employee assistance programs (EAPs) with other kinds of workplace benefits and services. Each column of *Integration Insights* will examine the research studies and applied best practices for a particular area of integration, often focusing on a different type of integration partner.

I would also like to include case studies that briefly profile specific internal EAP programs or vendors that are doing a good job of partnering with the client organization in innovative ways. Please contact me with your suggestions for a case study.

Future columns will include but not be limited to the following topics: 1) Integration of EAP and Work/Life; 2) Integration of EAP and Wellness; and 3) Integration of EAP and Treatment Programs for Mental Health and Addictions.

For this initial column, my goal is to present the case for why integration is a worthy topic for EA professionals. I present evidence of this trend toward EAPs offering a wider range of services. I also examine the views of EA professionals on the role of integration. Also relevant are conceptual issues of how integration reflects aspects of EAP Core Technology and how integration is defined.

Time Trends in Integration

The percentage of companies and vendors providing employees

and family members with access to company-sponsored EAP and other allied workplace health benefits and programs has increased dramatically over the last couple of decades.

➤ In 1994 only 10% of the top 100 family friendly companies had integrated programs that combined EAP, work/life and wellness related services (Herlihy, 1997).

➤ By 2002 our EAPA work/life committee study found that roughly one-third of vendors (65 of 208 = 31%) offered integrated programs with some combination of EAP, work/life and/or wellness services.

➤ In 2007 a Canadian study found that 62% of EAP programs offered wellness initiatives as well as other kinds of workplace support services.

➤ In 2011 the National Behavioral Consortium study of 82 external EAP vendors (Attridge, Cahill, Granberry, & Herlihy, 2013) revealed that an overwhelming 93% offered one or more “primary services” in addition to providing EAP services – with 74% also selling work/life services and 49% also selling wellness services.

EA Professionals’ Views on Integration

This change over time is consistent with a survey of 150 EA professionals that we did in 2011 (Attridge & Burke, 2011). The sample represented a mix of individuals who worked at either internal EAP programs, external EAP vendors or hybrid EAP programs. Seven kinds of services

were examined in the study, including integration. The results showed that “Integration of EAP with Work/Life and Wellness services to support families, prevention and behavioral lifestyle change” was offered at 96% of the EAP programs.

Furthermore, the level of use of integrated services at these organizational clients ranged from *low use* (23%), to *medium use* (37%), to *high use* (36%). Thus, some form of integration was being done in almost all of these organizations and yet how often it was being done varied quite a bit.

The majority of EA professionals (54%) considered integration to be of *high importance* to defining what an EAP should be, compared with 41% who rated it of *moderate importance* and only 5% who rated it as *low importance*.

Finally, when asked, “How is the business value of this type of service currently perceived in the EAP industry?”, most of the sample (60%) rated integration as *rising* in business value – much higher than the 28% who rated it as being of *stable* value or the 12% who felt it was *fading* in value. This study indicates that integration is now prevalent, variable in use across different organizational customers, considered an important aspect of EAP, and to be an increasing source of business development in the future.

EAP Core Technology and Integration

Almost a decade ago, when editing our book on the integra-

tion of EAP, work/life and wellness (Attridge, Herlihy & Maiden, 2005), a key issue was the “structure and definition” of integration. Two of the original seven components proposed by professors Paul Roman and Terry Blum back in the late 1980s address “linkages” that are relevant to understanding integration.

The EAP Core Technology represents a set of practices that defines the distinguishing properties of delivering employee assistance programming. Micro linkages relate to the creation and maintenance of connections between the EAP and other counseling, treatment, and community resources (for successful referral of EAP cases). Macro linkages relate to the creation and maintenance of connections between the work organization and counseling, treatment, and other community

resources (for appropriate role and use of EAP).

Thus, EAPs that endorse core technology should be engaging in some level of regular contact and integration with other programs and resources both inside and outside the organization. The initial expansion of EAP into the “broad brush” and “mega-brush” conceptualizations first discussed in the 1990s has now been fully realized on an industry-wide scale. In the columns to follow, I will explore these kinds of issues more fully as they relate to the different kinds of integration partners and practices.

Summary

Most EAPs now either directly or indirectly offer a wide range of workplace-based behavioral health programs and benefits that extend

beyond the traditional focus of EAP. As the workplace is becoming more complex, the expectation is that EAPs need to offer more comprehensive services and that we *can* effectively collaborate with other affiliated company programs. *How to best deliver* on this expectation is the focus of this new column. NOTE: Research study references are available upon request. ❖

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