

A Process Evaluation of
A Canadian Public Sector Employee Assistance Program

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ABSTRACT

This Canadian Public Service Employee Assistance Program was initiated in 1990 and over the course of the past two decades since its implementation great changes have occurred in both the public service and in EAP. In response a comprehensive process evaluation was conducted to determine if the current mandate, objectives, services and processes were still meeting the needs of employees and if the EAP had the capacity to meet the future needs of the employees and organization. A mixed methods data collection approach was used in the evaluation including: a comparative best practice literature review, a review of program utilization data, an on-line survey of employees and managers across the entire public service system and a series of qualitative interviews with program stakeholders, members of the EAP Advisory Committee, EAP Counselors and employees who had used the program. As well a review of the current governance model and organization structure was undertaken. The evaluation data indicated that the existing EAP program was well integrated into the organization, well utilized and generated high ratings of user satisfaction and helpfulness. Its governance structure included involvement and input from all key public sector stakeholders including the various public service unions. However, several areas for enhancement were also discovered specifically in terms of revising the EAP policy, providing 24 hour service and the need to further increase the program profile and visibility across the broad public sector. As well, it was assessed that additional resources would have to be allocated if the EAP staff were to fully address worksite education, early intervention, prevention and wellness promotion to the extent desired by the stakeholders.

Key words: Evaluation, Employee Assistance Program, public sector, Canada

A PROCESS EVALUATION OF A CANADIAN PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation has historically been cited as being critical for the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) field (Jerrell & Righmyer, 1982; Kurtz, Googins & Howard, 1984; Macdonald, 1986; Masi, 1986; Masi, & Goff 1987). The case for the importance of Employee Assistance Programs has continued to be argued into the 21st century (Attridge, Amaral, Bjornson, Herlihy, McPherson, Routledge, S., et al., 2009) and has taken on a growing international perspective (Addley, McQuillan, & Ruddle, 2001; Arthur, 2000; Ichikawa, Matsui, Nishikawa, Tsunoda, Teruya, Takeda, & Okamoto, 2006; Masi & Tisone, 2010; Terblanche, 2009). However, considering the number of EAPs known to exist the actual number of published evaluations, particularly more extensive cost-benefit and process evaluations is miniscule (Csiernik, 2005a; 2011; McLeod & McLeod, 2001). Thus, it is incumbent on those working in the EAP field to continue to offer insights into the process of EAP development and evaluation and to continue to build a foundation of empirical knowledge into this expansive yet under researched area.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The mission of the evaluated Canadian public sector Employee Assistance Program is to contribute toward the total health of employees in order to have a productive and satisfied workforce. This mission is achieved through two main program thrusts. The first of these is the provision of a confidential counseling service offered to both employees and to family members of employees whose job performance is, or has the potential to be, adversely affected by personal or

work-related stress. The second is to offer timely group-based education and wellness sessions designed to act as a preventive or early intervention support to the workplace.

The EAP program was designed around several founding principles, specifically:

- a joint labour-management partnership;
- confidentiality;
- voluntary participation;
- early intervention;
- granting of leave for the purpose of counseling and/or treatment;
- identification by supervisors and managers in conjunction with employees situations when EAP would be appropriate as a intervention to address job performance issues;
- the use of the program to address a wide range of problems including but not limited to physical, emotional, marital or family distress; legal or financial problems, compulsive behaviors, impulse control disorder and addiction; and issues related to harassment, job-related stress or job conflict; and,
- ensuring equal access for all employees and their family members.

The initial agreement to establish the EAP was signed in the spring of 1990 and the program is available to all probationary and permanent employees, contract employees, interns, and other employees and their immediate families with six months continuous service, within all departments, agencies and commissions. Services are also made available to retirees, upon request. At the time of evaluation the EAP team consisted of four staff; a full-time manager/counselor who because of service demand spent 80% plus of his time providing counseling services and to a

lesser extent workplace education sessions; two full-time counselors who also spend the major part of their time with employees who are requesting services though also conducting some workplace education and an administrative support staff. EAP staff personally meet any employee or family member with a serious or urgent need typically within two days of initial contact with wait times for new non-urgent referrals ranging from one to two weeks.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Process evaluation is the most complex form of EAP evaluation undertaken (Macdonald, 1986). It provides information on how program inputs are translated into outcomes and from that offers insights into why the outcomes that were observed arose allowing for more comprehensive program awareness and in turn more relevant recommendations regarding what is functioning well and what needs to be adjusted.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- to evaluate the EAP to determine if the current mandate, objectives, services and processes would continue to meet the future needs of the workplace;
- to evaluate the EAP to determine if the program was successfully meeting the current employee and employer requirements. This included the identification of both strengths and limits in processes, service delivery quality and effectiveness in meeting the stated outcome of improved job performance;
- to review and comment upon the current EAP Advisory Committee governance model, the EAP organization structure, and the reporting relationship; and,

- to make recommendations for improvement to ensure that the EAP will continue to meet employee and employer requirements in the future, recognizing fiscal realities as well as the evolving work environment.

A participatory evaluation approach was utilized to inform and engage key stakeholders in the research process. An initial presentation to the EAP Advisory Committee outlined the evaluation objectives and methodology with a second presentation outlining the preliminary evaluation results. In addition, members of the EAP Evaluation Steering Committee were consulted frequently on developing the specific data collection approaches and reviewing and approving the data collection instruments. A review of the final evaluation report draft was conducted with members of the EAP Evaluation Steering Committee prior to the report and its recommendations being finalized and publically presented.

METHODOLOGY

As with any process evaluation multiple sources of data were collected in order to answer the questions posed. The process began with a review of relevant reports, studies, and best practices approaches with a focus upon the Canadian experience (Csiernik 2003a; 2003b) including program utilization data from 2005-2006 to 2009-2010. The EAP Manager and staff next completed a questionnaire about their service and the results were compared to a database of Canadian EAPs (Csiernik, 2002; 2005b).

Qualitative data was collected through a series of individual and group interviews with key stakeholders involved in directing, managing, and/or delivering the EAP Program. This included six Human Resource managers four senior managers, two senior labour leaders, six individuals offering counseling services either as staff members or as external private providers plus twelve

persons who had used the EAP and agreed to confidentially share their experiences. Participants were invited to respond to questions related to three areas; counseling services; workplace education and wellness; and program promotion, operation, and governance. Employees who has previously used the program were interviewed with respect to their experience with the counseling service only. In each instance, a structured interview guide was developed outlining the questions to be explored with each group which was reviewed and approved by the EAP Steering Committee.

Quantitative data was collected through an anonymous survey that was circulated to all employees through the government email system. An invitation to participate in the survey with a link to an on-line survey was electronically sent with a reminder email sent two weeks later. Survey invitations were also sent via a paper cheque stub insert that invited participants to visit the on-line survey site to complete the survey. It also included a telephone number to call for assistance or to request a paper copy of the survey with a stamped, addressed return envelope if this was a preferred method of responding. All paper surveys received were entered into the on-line survey and immediately shredded. However, no reminder was sent via the cheque stub insert method. Three prize draws for a gift certificate were used as an inducement to increase the survey response rate. Forced-choice (check box) survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as proportions and differences between demographic subgroups were analyzed using simple inferential statistics such as chi-squared tests at an alpha level of 0.01.¹ The open-ended survey questions were coded into themes based upon frequency of response and relevance to the evaluation issues.

¹ *The alpha level of 0.01 was chosen instead of 0.05 due in part to the larger number of tests being performed and due to the fact that the large sample size for many comparisons rendered very small differences significant at alpha = 0.05.*

A total of 2,263 surveys were completed including 2,002 surveys completed via the email invitation and 261 surveys completed via the cheque stub insert invitation, including 255 surveys completed electronically and six surveys completed in hard copy and returned by mail. Overall, there was a response rate of approximately 22%. The large number of respondents resulted in a low margin of error of +/- 1.9% when adjusted for the finite population of the workplace. Thus, there was a high level of statistical accuracy for those survey questions applicable to all respondents.

Despite the breadth of the mechanisms used to collect data there still were several limitations to the data collection. The first is that employees who did not have an email address had a lower likelihood of completing the survey as it required more effort to go on-line and type in the web address to complete the survey. This group also did not receive a survey reminder as was the case with emailed invitations. As well, cheque stub inserts were sent later than the emails due to the timing of cheque mailings resulting in a shorter time period to complete the survey and there was no follow-up.

The structure of the data collection made it possible that users of EAP services were more likely to complete the survey than were non-users, thus inflating estimates of awareness of, and need for, the program. Efforts made to stress the applicability of the survey to all employees and managers and use of survey incentives were intended to limit this potential bias. Family members had limited opportunity to participate in any aspect of the data collection process despite being an important target group for the EAP. Finally, in the qualitative data collection users of EAP individual counseling that were interviewed were self-identified or were identified by EAP counselors and subsequently agreed to be contacted for the interview creating a potential bias toward the inclusion of more satisfied users in the interview process. This was counteracted to

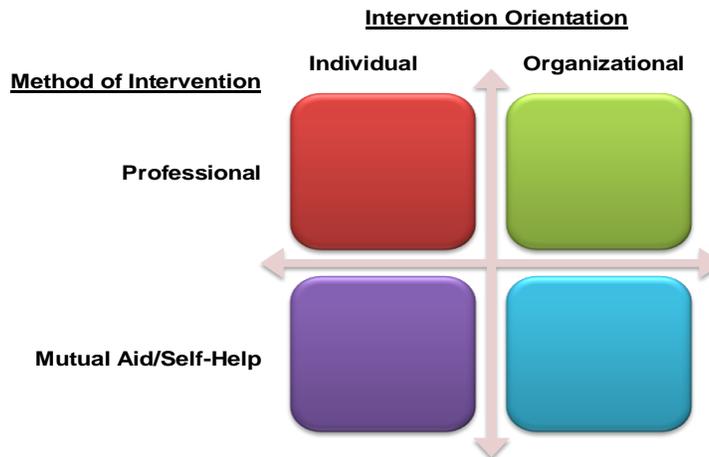
some degree by the inclusion of open-ended questions on the anonymous survey that was circulated to the entire workforce.

RESULTS

1. Program Components

The Integrated Model of Occupational Assistance (Csiernik 2005b) draws upon the existing practice models of occupational assistance while placing a renewed importance upon self-help. Worker participation is incorporated within an ecological framework to create an organizational plan to complement the historical emphasis upon the individual worker. The proposed model consists of two dimensions. The first focuses upon the target; individual employee or the workplace. Individual wellness is balanced with organizational wellness, taking into account the needs of the range of stakeholders that exist in the immediate and extended workplace environment. The second axis is the method of intervention. It is divided into the categories of professional intervention and mutual aid/self-help. By combining both forms of assistance four quadrants are created allowing for a greater range of access points and prevention alternatives (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Integrated Model of Occupational Assistance Model Quadrants.



Of the 20 components of the Integrated Model of Occupational Assistance, the evaluated Canadian public sector Employee Assistance Program offered 13 (65.0%) (Table 1). Of the seven areas not currently being offered through the auspices of the EAP, only two are offered by the majority of EAPs from across Canada used in the baseline data, one from the Professional - Individual quadrant, the second from the Professional - Organizational quadrant. Twenty-four hour access to EAP services, either crisis counseling or consultation is provided by 71.4% of EAPs whereas slightly over one-half of EAPs provide worksite-wide health promotion, safety and/or critical incident awareness and related wellness education programs with a prevention focus. Occupational Health and Safety training and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) are offered, though not directly through EAP, though EAP staff do participate in the management of CISM and provide CISM debriefs.

Table 1: Public Service EAP compared to a national sample

| | Public Service EAP | National Study (% of 133 EAPs) |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Professional - Individual Quadrant | | |
| i) one-to-one counseling by formally trained counseling professionals | Yes | 95.5% |
| ii) crisis intervention, brief solution-focused counseling and case management for <u>employees</u> | Yes | 90.9% |
| iii) crisis intervention, brief solution-focused counseling or case management for <u>family members</u> | Yes | 83.0% |
| iv) educational seminars and/or workshops to the workforce (<i>problem focused</i>) | Yes | 85.2% |
| v) voluntary health screenings or wellness appraisals | No | 15.9% |
| vi) self-care activities (library, reading materials with a prevention focus) | Yes | 61.4% |
| vii) critical incident debriefings conducted by professional counselors | Yes | 78.4% |
| viii) 24 hour program crisis access/consultation | No | 71.6% |
| ix) follow up for employees absent from work for an extended period of time from the workplace to inquire if any additional, non-financial, assistance is required | No | 20.5% |
| Mutual Aid/Self-Help - Individual Quadrant | | |
| x) use of peer supports (union counselors, referral agents, peer resource teams and/or peer advisors) to help employees access the appropriate forms of assistance and/or to provide on-going social support | Yes | 59.1% |
| xi) use of community-based self-help groups as an adjunct to individual assistance | Yes | 67.0% |
| xii) on-site self-help groups | No | 15.9% |
| xiii) respond to critical incident situations with trained peer debriefers | Yes | 39.8% |
| Professional - Organizational Quadrant | | |
| ivx) provision of worksite wide health promotion, safety and/or critical incident awareness and related wellness education programs (<i>prevention focus</i>) | No | 56.8% |
| vx) provide consultation and training for ongoing organizational intervention, development and change including team-building initiatives | Yes | 33.0% |
| vix) enhance the health of work units through the provision of technical assistance including mediation or conflict-resolution services on both individual and organizational issues | Yes | 35.2% |
| viix) participate in EFAP groups external to the workplace for EFAP advocacy related issues | Yes | 52.3% |
| Mutual Aid/Self-Help - Organizational Quadrant | | |
| viiiix) team building exercises and activities to educate workers about expectations, rights and responsibilities of being a team or group member | No | 23.9% |
| xix) development of, or assistance with, mutual aid group(s) open to employees that examine stressors both internal and external to the workplace affecting individual and group wellness | No | 20.5% |
| xx) development of, or assistance with, work unit support groups to decrease work related stress and to act as problem solving and/or peer social support groups | Yes | 28.4% |

The remaining areas that the evaluated EAP does not provide nor do the majority of Canadian EAPS are:

- voluntary health screenings or wellness appraisals (15.9%);
- follow up for employees absent from work for an extended period of time from the workplace to inquire if any additional, non-financial, assistance is required (20.5%);
- on-site self-help groups (15.9%);
- team-building exercises and activities to educate workers about expectations, rights and responsibilities of being a team or group member (23.9%); and,
- development of, or assistance with, mutual aid group(s) open to employees that examine stressors both internal and external to the workplace affecting individual and group wellness (20.5%).

However, the evaluated Canadian Public Service EAP did demonstrate leadership in four areas, with particular strengths in the organizational sector of service provision:

- responding to critical incident situations with trained peer debriefers (39.8%);
- providing consultation and training for ongoing organizational intervention, development and change including team-building initiatives (33.0%);
- enhancing the health of work units through the provision of technical assistance including mediation or conflict-resolution services on both individual and organizational issues (35.2%); and,

- development of, or assistance with, work unit support groups to decrease work-related stress and to act as problem solving and/or peer social support groups (28.4%).

Additional areas of strength of the program are that it has a formalized policy and a monitoring system as well as a formalized critical incident response protocol. In addition, a new employee orientation had recently been implemented which was supported with regular promotion of the EAP and specific training for supervisors and managers, though not for labour representatives. Another substantive growth opportunity identified in the evaluation was for the EAP to expand into wellness programming, a component of nearly two-thirds of Canadian EAPs in the database.

2. Employee Assistance Program Policy

Table 2 summarizes the items included in the Canadian database in terms of comprehensiveness of the various characteristics using the EAP Policy Best Practices guidelines (Csiernik, 2003c), and compares them to the evaluated Canadian public sector EAP policy. The EAP policy scored marginally higher than the average score on the Canadian database, 59.6% versus 58.7%. The EAP policy had greater values for 16 of the 28 scored items while having lower ratings on only eight. The policy's introductory statement of principles was slightly stronger than the average Canadian policy while the roles section was slightly below average. The strongest component of the policy was the procedures section which scored 81.7% versus 56.8% of those in the database. However, in terms of program development, which is the weakest section in most EAP policies, the evaluated Canadian public sector EAP policy scored only 14/50, versus 23.7 for the average

| Table 2: EAP Policy Scores: Comparing National Findings to the Canadian Public Sector EAP Policy. | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|---------|------------------------------|--------|------|----------------------------|
| | Included N=80 | (%) | Item Score (maximum 10) | | | EAP Score |
| | | | Mean | Median | Mode | |
| 1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES | | | | | | |
| Union and Management Support / Endorsement | 61 | (76.2%) | 6.8 | 7 | 8 | 10 |
| Range of Problems Covered by EAP | 78 | (97.5%) | 6.7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Job Protection | 48 | (60.0%) | 6.3 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Confidentiality of Program | 73 | (91.3%) | 6.4 | 7 | 7 | 9 |
| Anonymity of Program | 22 | (27.5%) | 5.0 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Benefit Provision | 50 | (62.5%) | 6.0 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Sub-Total | | | 37.2 | | | 39/60 |
| 2. PROCEDURES | | | | | | |
| Voluntary access to program | 76 | (95.0%) | 5.8 | 12 | 12 | 9 |
| Informal referrals to program | 37 | (46.3%) | 6.5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Formal referrals to program | 44 | (56.4%) | 6.5 | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| Follow-up | 35 | (43.8%) | 4.7 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Monitoring | 38 | (47.5%) | 5.4 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Evaluation | 45 | (56.2%) | 5.2 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Sub-Total | | | 34.1 | | | 49/60 |
| 3. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT | | | | | | |
| Training of Supervisors/Stewards | 32 | (40.0%) | 4.96 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Orientation of Workforce | 40 | (50.0%) | 4.4 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Publicizing Program to Workforce | 44 | (55.0%) | 5.0 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Publicizing Program to Families/Family Orientation | 31 | (38.8%) | 5.0 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Community Liaison (EAP groups, community services & related agencies) | 31 | (38.8%) | 4.4 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Sub-Total | | | 23.7 | | | 14/50 |
| 4. ROLES | | | | | | |
| EAP committee | 56 | (70.0%) | 6.7 | 7 | 9 | 7 |
| Management | 42 | (52.5%) | 6.2 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Union | 40 | (50.0%) | 6.9 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| Employees Group (non-unionized) | 14 | (18.2%) | 6.7 | 7 | 10 | 0 |
| Supervisors | 41 | (51.3%) | 6.4 | 6 | 10 | 10 |
| Stewards | 18 | (33.8%) | 7.0 | 8 | 10 | 0 |
| Employees | 40 | (50.0%) | 6.2 | 6 | 9 | 10 |
| EAP Coordinator | 39 | (48.8%) | 7.1 | 8 | 8 | 10 |
| Referral Agents/Union Counselors | 26 | (33.8%) | 7.2 | 8 | 10 | N/A |
| Human Resources (personnel/industrial relations) | 23 | (29.1%) | 5.3 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Medical Department (OHN/Occupational Physician) | 20 | (25.6%) | 5.1 | 3 | 2 | N/A |
| Sub-Total | | | 70.8/110 (64.4%) | | | 50/90 (55.6%) |
| 5. OVERALL DOCUMENT CRITIQUE | | | | | | |
| Clarity | | | 5.0 | 2 | 1 | 9 |
| Thoroughness | | | 5.4 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Sub-Total | | | 10.4 | | | 15/20 |
| TOTAL | | | 176.2/300 (58.7%) | | | 167/280 (59.6%) |

Canadian policy, being below average on four of the five items and above average only upon publicizing the program to the workforce (7/10 versus 5/10).

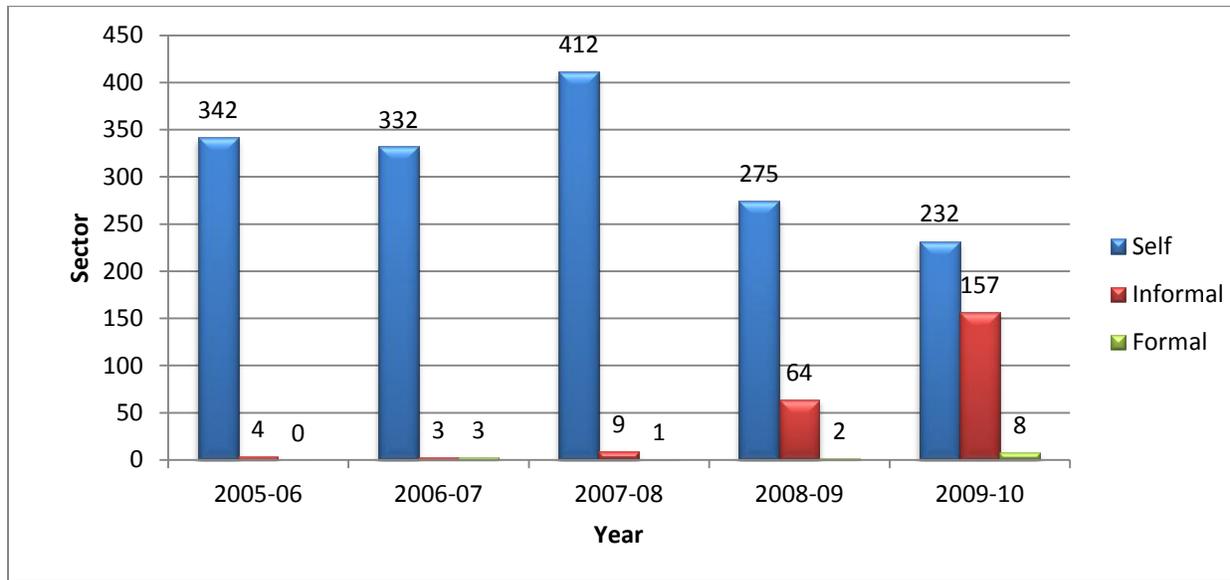
3. Program Utilization

A five-year profile, 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 fiscal years, of EAP program utilization data indicated that the number of new EAP individual counseling clients varied somewhat by year but remained in the range of 346 to 422 per year over the five-year period representing. This represented an average five year utilization rate based upon employee population of 3.0% with a low of 2.6% in 2008-2009 to a high of 3.5% in 2007-2008 (Table 3). While self-referrals remained the majority of referrals (86.4%), informal referrals by managers/supervisors became more frequent in the past two years, in part due to enhanced manager/supervisor training. It is however interesting to note that as management referrals increased in number voluntary use of the program decreased (Figure 2).

Table 3: Utilization Rate Based Upon Employee Population

| Year | Employee Population | Total Referrals | Utilization Rate (%) |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 2005-2006 | 11487 | 346 | 3.0 |
| 2006-2007 | 11612 | 338 | 2.9 |
| 2007-2008 | 12120 | 422 | 3.5 |
| 2008-2009 | 12902 | 341 | 2.6 |
| 2009-2010 | 12949 | 397 | 3.1 |

Figure 2. Type of Referral for Individual Counseling.



The most common presenting reasons for attending EAP counseling from 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 were marital/relationship issues, anxiety, family/children issues, other personal issues such as addictions, grief, and depression and job or career issues.

The final responsibility of EAP staff is the provision of workshops and information sessions. Though limited by demands placed on it for individual counseling, the EAP Manager and staff averaged 13 sessions per year between 2005-2006 and 2009-2010 with a range of nine to 19.

4. Key Informant Interviews

i. Overall Awareness of Program

Both stakeholders and EAP counselors indicated that there was a general level of awareness of EAP and the services it offered. Yet there were still misconceptions about the true purpose and nature of the program and how it is intended to assist employees and the workplace in general. In addition, there was lower level of awareness regarding the fact that family members are also eligible to receive counseling and that the EAP program offers workplace education and wellness

sessions as part of its mandate. A number of stakeholders also observed that while the program has been in place for a long time they perceived that its overall profile and visibility tended to be lower especially among newer employees.

".... a lot of staff within the system are not aware of it....or some feel it is just deals with things like addictions issues... so it carries a bit of a stigma....and some are still wary of confidentiality...' (Stakeholder).

EAP counselors noted that employees who used the service often remarked that prior to receiving counseling services they really did not know much about EAP services. Counselors believe that the program requires more profile and visibility and that more effort is needed to distribute information about what is offered and what the benefits are. Of particular concern to this group as well was that many employees were not aware that EAP services were also available to their family members. Employees who used EAP services also indicated that while many employees may be vaguely aware that such a program exists knowing more precisely what EAP offers is not immediately clear and locating the contact information may not be easy for everyone.

'....the phone number was hard to find in the phone book.....and it is not clear that it is a counseling service for employees.....maybe have it listed in the general listings under EAP - Private Counseling service - or something like that....' (Employee)

'.....a lot of people have heard about EAP but don't really know how easy and convenient it is to access.... and I don't think people realize that these are top-notch counselors that can really help....' (Employee)

ii. Confidential Counseling Services

There was strong positive feedback expressed by all respondents in this area. The perception among all stakeholders interviewed indicated that the counseling service is well utilized, well received and the sense of user satisfaction appears high. The service was seen as easy to access, and the existing referral protocols seem to be working well. EAP counselors were viewed as professional, well experienced, very dedicated to their work and providing an important 'add value' service to the public sector.

'.....EAP is an important resource to staff and managers within the system....' (Stakeholder)

Employees who had used EAP services indicated that they self-referred to the program and for the most part they were at least somewhat aware of the program prior to their using it. It was easy to access in terms of knowing where and who to call and the wait time for the first contact session was very reasonable; for most it was within one to two days. In all cases users worked with an internal EAP counselor and their level of satisfaction with the service was very high. Users felt listened to, supported and helped to develop practical steps to deal with their concerns and issues.

'.....it was very much a life-changing experience.... I'm a better person, a better employee, and a better parent ... I feel this is a direct result of my EAP counseling experience....'
(Employee)

'..... a really good service...helped me through a difficult time....nothing but a positive experience for me...nothing but good things to say....' (Employee)

Stakeholders generally indicated that they believed that privacy and confidentiality regarding the service is well maintained. However, they indicated that those employees who have

never used the program may have some hesitancy regarding the issue of confidentiality and there is some ambiguity regarding confidentiality and the sharing of information in the case of formal referrals.

'... I am very positive about this.... I feel that both the staff and the system have done everything possible to protect privacy and confidentialityI am very confident in and impressed with the professionalism shown by staff....' (Stakeholder)

'.....some are concerned about confidentiality....especially as to whether information is shared with their supervisor or manager.....it's important that this point is clear.....workers need to be reassured that it is confidential.... managers don't get feedback on them when they go for counseling....or if they do in what circumstances....this needs to be clarified....' (Stakeholder)

Counselors did note that the issue of confidentiality can become confusing or ambiguous in instances where there has been a formal referral by management. Ideally, it is hoped that the manager has already consulted with the EAP counselors and there is a sense that all other avenues have been followed to encourage the employee to self-refer. In these instances some managers feel that they should be entitled to feedback on the employee's progress. These situations place the EAP counselor role in a somewhat difficult situation; client confidentiality must be maintained to ensure the integrity of the program, at the same time the manager is attempting to deal with the employee's workplace job responsibilities and obligations. While these situations are not numerous, EAP counselors indicated that this is an area in which they must ensure that client confidentiality regarding the counseling intervention is maintained. While counselors can indicate that the employee did follow through on the formal referral, he/she is attending counseling

sessions, the manager or supervisor is not entitled to any feedback or information regarding the actual counseling sessions.

iii. Program Needs and Demands

The demands on the individual counseling component of the service has increased in recent years both in terms of volume and the types of presenting issues. Stakeholders indicated that today's workplace is one of ongoing change driven by the introduction of new service mandates, new service methodologies, new information and communication technologies and new or changing public expectations and demands. Added to this is the intergenerational and cultural dynamics involving an aging workforce, younger workers and managers, and immigrant workers and thus one quickly appreciates the need for, and the impact on, the EAP. Given this context, stakeholders generally believed that the counseling needs had become more complex and consequentially the demands on the time and skills of EAP counselors will be greater in terms volume and complexity.

'.....there is a younger generation of employees and managers.....some have moved into managerial and supervisory roles with limited experience.....also many younger employees are starting their families and are feeling pressures as new parents....' (Stakeholder)

'.....the workplace has become multi-generational and this results in a certain level of tension and conflict...there are differences in work values, job expectations, communication styles....' (Stakeholder)

EAP counselors indicated that their workloads had been steadily increasing and that the nature of issues that many employees are dealing with has resulted in a heavier and more complex counseling workloads which in turn sometimes resulted in longer wait times for new referrals.

'.....we are seeing different types of issues.... more couples and more family counseling requests.... these type of cases have become a much bigger part of the workload.... families are dealing with children and adolescents with special needs or other behavior issues, coping issues..... families also need help in connecting up with other family and community resources....' (EAP Counselor)

'....there are times where it seems that workers simply become exhausted with the emotional impact of workplace change, and this is reflected in such things as increase in sick time, low morale, workplace tension and stress.....' (EAP Counselor)

iv. Group Education and Wellness Sessions

Group education and wellness was also viewed as important with most stakeholders indicating that there is a definite need for this service. However the number of presentations made has become a time and resource issue, with individual counseling remaining the priority EAP service. While EAP counselors continue to offer a limited amount of workplace education sessions, some stakeholders indicated that there is a need to provide even more training and support to managers across the system to increase their capacity to better assess and intervene with workplace dynamics at an early point. They stressed that there is a need to offer more not less prevention initiatives.

'....this type of need exists....workplace assessments, wellness sessions, and prevention work in the workplace helps to create a healthier workplace but it is a resource issue....' (Stakeholder)

Generally, stakeholders indicated that workplace education and wellness workshops are very valuable and that they can serve an early intervention role in addressing emerging workplace

conflicts and tensions. Using the workshop model to provide new information, coping strategies and skills can be a normalizing event and provides a positive message: that today's work environments can be demanding, and there are times where all of us need to develop new strategies and skills to ensure healthy work-life balance. Stakeholders believe that it is important that this service continue and that Human Resource managers and EAP staff should explore strategies on how to accomplish this. In addition to providing managers with the general EAP orientation and manager referral training sessions, stakeholders perceived a need to develop a broader series of manager training modules specific to managing workplace stressors more effectively as a preventative measure.

'.... we need to concentrate on building the capacity and confidence of HR and mid-level managers to deal more effectively with stressors in the workplace, and to address workplace issues at an earlier point....we need to do more of this type of training....'

(Stakeholder)

v. Program Promotion

Initiatives are undertaken periodically to promote the EAP program including providing information on the website, via brochures, newsletter inserts, presentations to managers and a table at the annual public service convention. However, these efforts tend to be offered primarily in response to inquiries, rather than the result of a well-developed promotion and communication strategy. Many stakeholders perceived there to be a general lack of awareness among front-line staff and to some extent managers as well, with regard to the EAP program, how it can be accessed, what services are provided, and the privacy and confidential issue.

'.....there has been some promotion at times....but something needs to be happening in an ongoing way.... we need to develop ways to keep the visibility and profile of the program high....to keep it in the forefront of people's mind....' (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders indicated that ongoing promotion of the EAP program is important to ensure that the program's profile and visibility are maintained in the minds of employees and managers across the system. There should be a promotional strategy that is rolled out annually; it should include: orientation sessions with key managers and supervisors; bulletin type inserts in various union newsletters, updated information posters and flyers; electronic updates sent out to the 'managers forums;' and an updated website that is linked to all websites of government departments and agencies, as well as union websites. EAP counselors concurred adding that in their view the program had limited visibility. Over the years there have been efforts to promote the program, but there has never been a well developed and sustained promotion strategy for the program.

' it (promotion) is something that needs to be done again.....there should be some level of promotion happening continuously.....' (EAP Counselor)

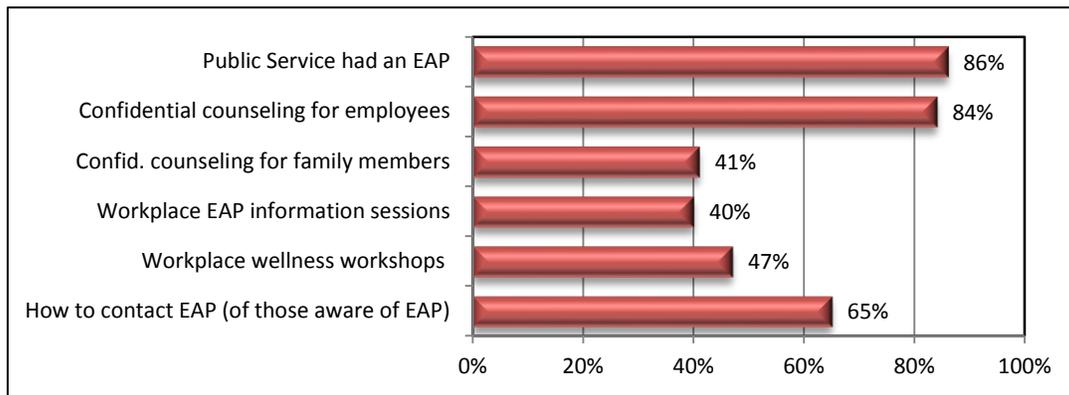
5. Survey Results

A total of 2,263 surveys were completed including 2,002 surveys completed via the email invitation and 261 surveys completed via the cheque stub insert invitation, including 255 surveys completed electronically and six surveys completed in hard copy and returned by mail. Of these 18.3% (n=415) were completed by individuals with supervisory, management or leadership roles while the remaining 1,848 (81.7%) surveys upon which the following is based were employees without these responsibilities.

i. Awareness

There was a high level of awareness of the EAP (86%) and the fact that the public service offered confidential counseling for employees (84%) among survey respondents (Figure 3). There was however a lower awareness that counseling was available to family members of employees and a lower awareness of group sessions, which mirror the findings from the key informant interviews.

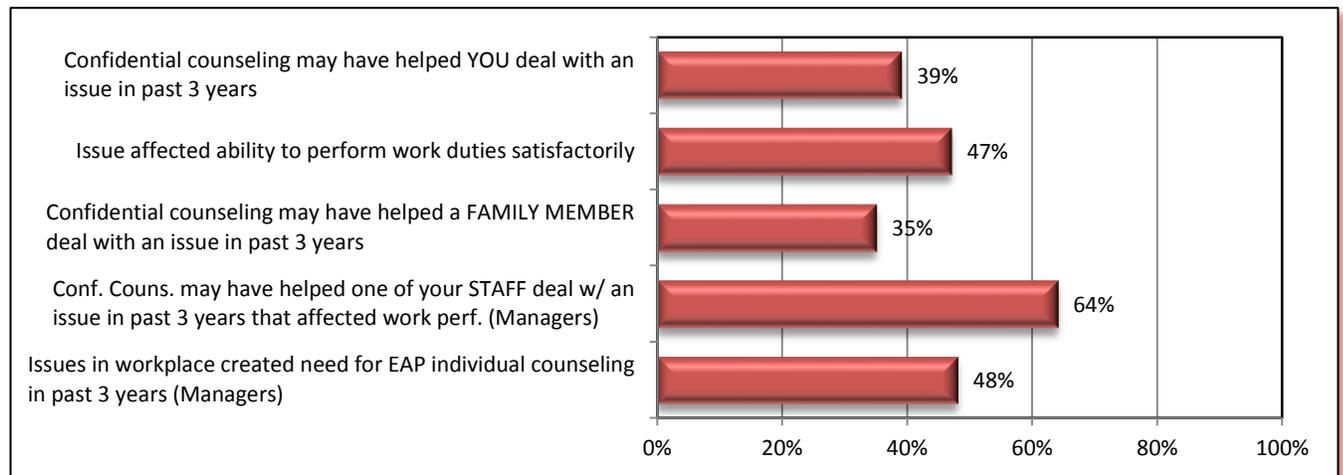
Figure 3. Awareness of EAP and Services Offered. Public Service Employee Survey, 2011 (n=2263).



ii. Needs

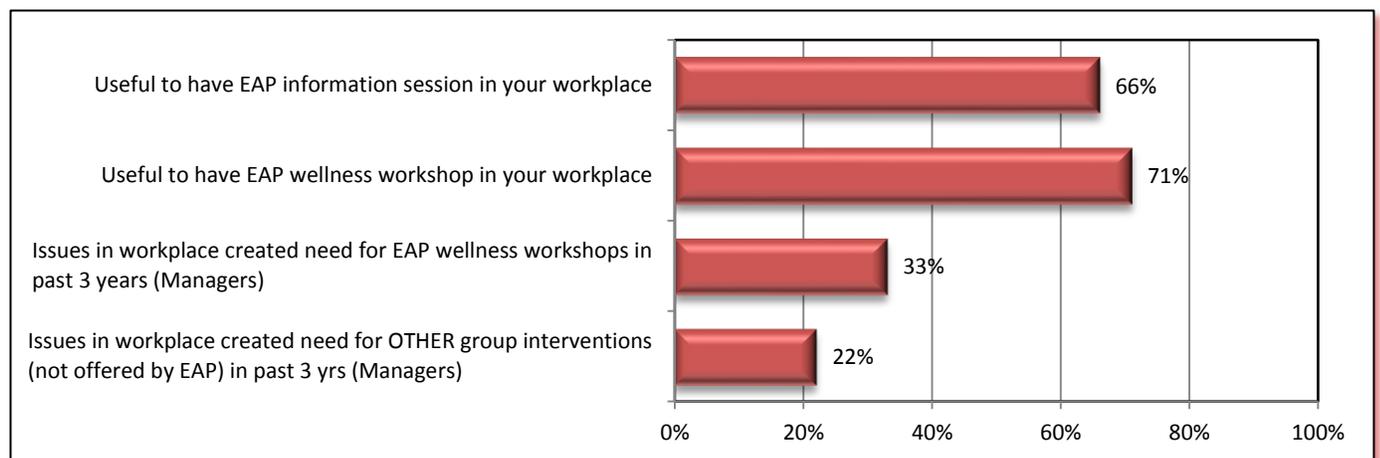
Survey responses indicated a high need for individual counseling services in the past three years. A substantial proportion of survey respondents indicated that confidential counseling may have helped them (39%) or a family member (47%) deal with an issue in the past three years (Figure 4). Nearly half of those who indicated that counseling may have helped them deal with an issue in the past three years indicated that the issue affected their ability to perform work duties. The need for individual counseling was corroborated by management ratings of the need for counseling for their staff.

Figure 4. Need for Individual Counseling in the Past Three Years. Public Service Employee Survey, 2011 (n=2263).



Survey responses indicated that a majority of respondents felt that EAP group sessions were useful (Figure 5). However, only a minority of managers indicated that there were issues in workplace creating a need for EAP wellness workshops or other interventions such as conflict resolution not offered by EAP.

Figure 5. Need for Group Sessions in the Past Three Years. Public Service Employee Survey, 2011 (n=2263).



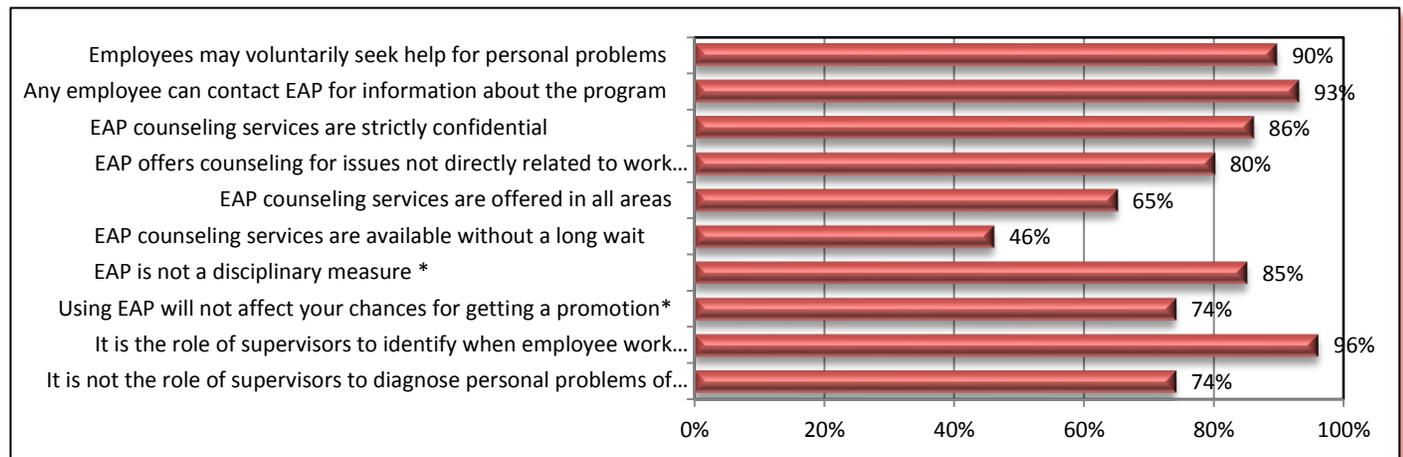
The most frequently mentioned workplace issues that managers indicated had created a need for EAP individual counseling in the past three years were; job or career issues, personal

issues such as addictions, grief, and depression, anxiety, family and children issues and marital and relationship issues. This contrasts with the frequency of issues counseling was actually provided for by EAP in the past five years where marital issues were most frequent and job and career issues were less frequent. The most frequently mentioned workplace issues that managers indicated had created a need for EAP workplace wellness sessions in the past three years were, workplace stress, change management and coping with change, work-life balance, work load and employee interpersonal conflicts and conflicts with management. Finally, the large majority of comments as to issues creating a need for other group interventions such as conflict resolution not offered by EAP were focused on conflict, mainly between employees and sometimes with management/supervisors. Harassment and bullying was also mentioned.

iii. Attitudes

Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of ten attitudinal statements that correspond with the core principles of the EAP. Figure 6 indicates that there was a high level of awareness or agreement with most statements, Exceptions were EAP counseling services are available without a long wait (46%) and EAP counseling services are offered in all areas (65%).

Figure 6. Agreement With Attitudinal Statements About EAP (n=2263).



** An update in the survey software caused this question to be omitted for the last 843 respondents to complete the survey, so there is reduced sample size and a possible bias in the type of respondents.*

iv. Experience Using the EAP

Over one-quarter (29%) of survey respondents and/or their family member had used some type of counseling service in the past ten years. The majority of those seeking assistance (81%) had used EAP counseling services (n=428) while 16% had used external private counselors (n=87) and a few respondents were ‘not sure.’ Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated some degree of satisfaction (including ‘somewhat satisfied’) while 73% were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied.’ Ninety-two percent indicated EAP counseling helped deal with the issue ‘a little’ or ‘a great deal.’ While 91% of those for whom it was applicable indicated that EAP counseling helped them complete their work duties.

When asked, if they needed EAP counseling services in the future, how likely they would be to use services delivered in various ways, the most preferred method remained receiving counseling in-person followed by talking with a counselor over the phone, with on-line communication being the least preferred. A substantial minority 33%-39% were also ‘somewhat likely’ to use phone or the two types of in-person counseling in the future.

DISCUSSION

The mandate, objectives and policies of the evaluated Canadian public sector EAP were found to be on par with or superior to most of the EAPs catalogued in the Canadian EAP database (Csiernik, 2002; 2005b). The overall program operations, such as timely delivery of counseling services, maintenance of confidentiality and supervision of counselors were generally strong. There was a significant level of demonstrated need for EAP services, both for individual counseling and group education and wellness sessions. There was a high level of client satisfaction both for direct services and for the limited number of information sessions that had been provided over the past five years. An increase in workplace stressors and the complexity of individual counseling needs was discovered through the process evaluation resulting in a consistently high level of demand for individual counseling. EAP counseling staff were highly regarded. They were viewed as knowledgeable, experienced and skilled professionals by both users and management at all levels across the public service. The EAP offered service in four areas not commonly offered; responding to critical incident situations with trained peer debriefers, providing consultation and training for ongoing organizational intervention, development and change including team-building initiatives, enhancing the health of work units through the provision of technical assistance including mediation or conflict-resolution services on both individual and organizational issues, and the development of or assistance with work unit support groups to decrease work related stress and to act as problem solving and/or peer social support groups. The review of the policy indicated that it was slightly above average compared to other Canadian EAPs using the Canadian best practices guidelines (Csiernik, 2003a). Unfortunately due in part to the length of time the EAP had been operating earlier baseline data had not been collected and thus additional pre-post outcomes could not be determined.

Based upon the process evaluation results a number of recommendations were suggested to the EAP joint committee for program enhancement in order to ensure that the EAP will continue to meet employee and employer requirements in the future, recognizing fiscal realities as well as the evolving work environment. The most important was to expand the availability of after hour service. This was the most significant shortcoming of the EAP. There were also seven distinct areas for revisions to the EAP policy and it was also recommended that upon program renewal and revision of the policy document to reflect the agreed upon changes and updating of the program, current labour and management representatives should re-sign the policy adding their signatures to those who initiated the program in 1990, indicating their ongoing support for this joint initiative.

A second major programming element that was missing that needed to be targeted was the lack of worksite-wide health promotion, safety and/or critical incident awareness. Along with this was identified the need to strengthen and target ongoing promotion of EAP individual counseling services through a reviewed employee orientation program, updated promotional materials including a new website, raising awareness of the availability of counseling services, to family members of employees, better engaging union representatives in program promotion and developing a schedule for workplace presentations so that employees and managers in all major worksites are covered in a predetermined period of time. It was also recommended that additional resources be allocated to allow the EAP staff to fully address worksite education, early intervention, prevention and wellness promotion to the extent desired by the stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

It is rare for an organization to undertake this extensive an examination of its Employee Assistance Program. Triangulation in this in depth process evaluation entailed five distinct forms of data

collection including over two thousand survey responses and over a dozen detailed qualitative interviews involving a complex examination of what was already perceived by stakeholders as being a well functioning EAP. This article demonstrates what can be done and what can be learned if there is a willingness to invite external evaluators to critically appraise existing programs. With all forms of evaluation there is risk, to stakeholders, staff, management and labour leaders but with great risk comes great reward, if those affected are willing to honestly examine what they have created and what they wish to leave as a legacy.

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