

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT VALUE OF THE EAP ACCORDING TO THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

De Vos (2005:357) indicates that for the qualitative approach the procedures are not as strictly formalised as in quantification and a more philosophical mode of operation is used. In the context of this study the qualitative approach was utilised when interviewing line managers who referred employees into the programme. The line managers chosen were the referral agents for the employees identified for the quantitative component of the survey. A semi-structured interview schedule was utilised that allowed for consistency in the opinions sought but was also open to growth build on the participant responses. Interviews were taped while manual transcription was used to support the process. Transcribing was also used to process the auditory information.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) defines qualitative research as a multi-perspective approach to social interaction, aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing interaction in terms of the meaning that the subjects attach to it.

The interaction with referral agents generated valuable information. It highlighted potential risks for companies through financial losses, accidents, litigation and losing credibility in their niche market. This kind of information opens the debate for the type of risk questions that should form part of the assessment tools when troubled employees enter their company-paid EAP. The type of information generated through pre- and post intervention assessment must contribute to measurement taking place effortlessly. Through the qualitative component the researcher aimed to understand how referral agents interpret employees' emotional problems impacting on their productivity, how performance problems are documented within their workplace, what their expectation is of the programme and their perception of

improvement regarding productivity indicators. A semi-structured interview schedule was utilised for this purpose.

Supervisors and line managers are an important component of the population utilising the programme and the information generated from them adds value to this study at two levels. Firstly their experience of the programme is more objective than that of the person being referred, thus adding value to the quantitative component of the study. Secondly, qualitative information has been generated from this part of the investigation by documenting referral agent experience of how performance challenges are recorded in the workplace, how this information is communicated when referring employees into the EAP as well as their experience of how the intervention contributed to improved performance specifically. The views of referral agents are particularly important, as this population provides a value judgement to top management about the impact of the programme on productivity.

This section thus represents the semi-structured interviews held with line-managers, also referred to as referral agents in the EAP. The researcher is making use of a randomized longitudinal survey as the research design for this study (Grinnel & Williams: 1990:159). The longitudinal design maintains a focus on behavioural changes over a period of time and its impact on the company financial bottom-line. For Company One twelve participants were selected and for Company Two another twelve participants were selected. Participants selected for the study were line managers to the employees who participated in the quantitative part of the study and were responsible for their referral into the program.

The researcher did a **qualitative content analysis**. Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Shaw (1995:288) indicate that in this instance the emphasis is more on meaning rather than on quantification. Patton (2002:453) states that content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes volumes of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings. Themes had been identified from data obtained through means of semi-structured interviews.

The following format is utilised in discussing the themes derived from the

responses during the interviews:

- *Interpretation of data*
- *Quotations from discussions*
- *Theory-control*
- *Conclusion*

The following themes were identified from the discussion deriving from the semi-structured interviews :

- *Lack of specific training*
- *Progressive discipline*
- *Identification of deteriorating work performance*
- *The referral process*
- *Documentation*
- *Financial implication of lower productivity*
- *The social impact of lower productivity*
- *Expectation of improved performance vs. real change*
- *Consistency of change*

The above themes reflect areas of interest that stretches further than a pure cost benefit analysis. The first, second, fourth and fifth themes highlight areas that are valuable for program development in general. Participants in this part of the study contributed both from a subjective (part of the organisation who experience the service), and an objective (not recipient of clinical services) view. Their contributions illustrate their experience of the value of the program as well as their needs for program enhancement.

## 5.2 **PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS**

The table below provides a profile of the participants involved in the qualitative study. There has been a varying degree of experience in terms of their role as

referral agents. The responses of the participants together with other demographic information will be presented in a table form.

Table 5.1: Profile of participants from Company One

Participant	Number of years in line management position	Age	Gender	Educational qualifications	Line manager / supervisors
1	12 years	45 years	Male	Matric	Line manager
2	Since inception	43 years	Male	Matric	Supervisor
3	3 years	51 years	Male	Matric	Supervisor
4	1 ½ year	33 years	Male	Post Matric	Supervisor
5	28 years	58 years	Male	Matric	Line manager
6	15 years	47 years	Male	Matric	Line manager
7	10 years	42 years	Male	Matric	Line manager
8	4 years	47 years	Male	Matric	Line manager
9	Since start of EAP	54 years	Male	Matric	Supervisor
10	5 years	32 years	Male	Post Matric	Supervisor
11	9 years	43 years	Male	Post Matric	Line manage
12	10 years	57 years	Male	Matric	Line manager

According to the programme manager at the company the programme has been in operation for the last 13 years. Two of the respondents indicated their involvement in the programme to exceed the total years the programme has been in operation. It is possible that they misunderstood the question and interpreted it as referring to their role as supervisors/line managers rather than acting as referral agents.

The table below provides a profile of the participants from Company Two involved in the qualitative study. There has been a varying degree of experience in terms of their role as referral agents. The responses of the twelve respondents together with other demographic information will be presented in a table form.

Table 5.2: Profile of participants from Company Two

Participants	Number of years in position	Age	Gender	Educational qualifications	Line manager / supervisors
1	2 years	49	Male	Post matric	Team manager
2	12 years	39	Male	Post matric	Team manager
3	10 years	36	Female	Post matric	Department manager
4	2 ½ year	36	Female	Post matric	Team manager
5	3 years	43	Female	Post matric	Department manager
6	13 years	39	Female	Post matric	Department manager
7	10 years	29	Female	Post matric	Team manager
8	11 years	50	Female	Post matric	Team manager

9	7 years	34	Male	Post matric	Department manager
10	5 years	30	Female	Post matric	Team manager
11	13 years	36	Female	Post matric	Team manager
12	3 ½ years	37	Female	Post matric	Department manager

### 5.3 **Lack of specific training:**

#### 5.3.1 **Quotations from discussions on supervisory training: Company One**

- *Participants 1, 3, 6, 7 and 11: confirmed training which was provided. ‘ Yes, we had training more in managing employee effectiveness where you are given the human resource benefits status and understanding the (PNP- a course helping you to manage people effectively) and the proper referral if an employee becomes a problematic child, types of referral and why you would refer.( Participant 1)*
- *Participants 3: Yes, there is a course we do at a lower level, called: Managing People Effectively. It taught us to identify troubled employees, e.g. absenteeism on repeated and specific days.*
- *Participants 6: Yes, you sort of build what they teach you there and you start pick it up in people, their related problems, for example, if he is on drugs and he is not his normal self.*
- *Participants 1: We have been to a couple of in-house training on how to check for guys for attendance, look at absence on Mondays/Fridays, coming under the influence, signs to look out for.*
- *Participants 2: No referral agent training. What we were shown is the company policy and procedure and the EAP referral form.*
- *Participants 4: No, you move into the role of supervisor and you do not get in-depth training on how to work with people. We do training courses but this is*

*basic to help you slot into the job. On the job you encounter real life situations and you feel you do not have what it takes.*

- *Participants 9: Have not been involved in EAP training. Have been involved in management training where a focus was also on how to identify troubled employees, etc.*
- *Participants 10: No formal training. I had training whereby we had to do courses on problem solving, performance management, quality, safety, and all those courses. These courses did not specifically help to use the programme, even though they would touch on should you have employees who gives you trouble in terms of absenteeism, poor performance, but not to help you as a supervisor to identify if someone has a problem or are performing poorly. It is now with my experience that I can see if a person's performance is not good.*
- *Participants 8: Had no formal training, just the company (PNP) in terms of helping you with hearings, ext. Training would have helped and is critical. I have supervisors reporting to me who are also not sure how the programme works. I sit in on hearings and sometimes also chair hearings. It is strange how people get referred, a recent guy was referred and never attended and committed an offense again. If supervisors are trained a bit more it could prevent such things from happening again.*

### 5.3.2 **Interpretation of data on supervisory training: Company One**

This theme is linked to the second and third areas of the interview schedule. From the responses it seems as if the majority of the participants were exposed to training in their capacity to manage the productivity of subordinates. The training programme referred to by these respondents are called “managing employees effectively”. The programme manager at the worksite describes this programme as follows:

*“It is a course which gives basic information on how to deal with employees incapacities, how the disciplinary processes work and how EAP services support the supervisors and managers in maintaining good discipline, performance and attendance”.*

Participants 1, 3, 6, 7 and 11 of Company One regard this training as sufficient to enhance their skills in using the EAP effectively. This group of participants was able to identify aspects of the referral process and identification of troubled employees through behavioural patterns in this more generalised training programme. There is a perception that the training allows them to address policy requirements in the event of employees presenting with performance challenges in a humane and fair manner.

Participants 2, 4, 9, 10 & 8 were of the impression that training offered did not address their needs as referral agents using the programme. These participants were of the opinion that this programme did not provide them with the skills of how to deal with people when they are troubled and when faced with real life challenges. They often feel at a loss of effective people management tools. They see an indirect link with employee performance challenges through other courses but regard it as insufficient in guiding referral agents on how to use the programme effectively. This perception thus ties up with the view that more specialised training would give supervisors and managers the tools to help troubled employees more effectively.

### 5.3.3 **Quotations from discussion on supervisory training: Company Two:**

- *Participants 1: The training did not address my questions about the EWP and how I can effectively use it. “referring to the section covered in the Industrial Relations training”*
- *Participants 2: In my opinion there is a need to equip first line managers today with some of the most recent issues and developments and social issues people are bringing to work with them.*
- *I think it would be of great value as part of the induction plan in each business. Participants 3.*
- *I picked up my knowledge of the program through my own exposure to it. Participants 4.*



- *We had training twice for managers on how to use the program. It was a few years ago. It took us through the benefits of the program and how managers can use it. A further need would be to give some feedback on success stories. Participant 5*
- *I have not yet been exposed to training but the helpdesk has been very helpful and the process went smoothly. Participant 8*
- *Within the Industrial relations training EWP was covered and the three hour session was helpful. Participant 9*
- *The intranet has clear guidelines on how to use the program. Participant 6.*
- *It should be part of every manager's compulsory training. Managers should have an understanding of emotional challenges. Participant 12*
- *If there is more training for managers they would use it more appropriately. Maybe that is where the key lies. Train people how to use it more effectively and not only when they do not have a choice – put in the human side a bit more. Participant 4*

#### 5.3.4 **Interpretation of data on supervisory training: Company Two:**

Participants varied in their perceptions of their exposure to supervisory training and the value of the training they have been exposed to. Participants 5 and 9 refer to specific “EWP training for managers” which took place a few years ago. They found this training valuable at the time. There have been suggestions by participant 2 that training today should include social issues that people are bringing to work with them, especially the younger generation who enter the job market. These issues include substance abuse, an understanding of the impact of different life events on individuals and a broader understanding of pathologies. Participant 12 were particularly perturbed by the lack of sensitivity with which she saw managers at a management forum discussed issues around bipolar disorder.

Generally participants have been exposed to a “module” on EWP within their IR training. Participant 9 is of the impression that this was sufficient to help them understand and use the EWP when confronted with troubled employees. The clustering of EWP training with the general Industrial Relations training may however mean that EWP as an independent component is not covered sufficiently. Participant 3 was of the opinion that EWP training should be part of the induction plan for each business unit. A very valuable comment made in the second mini-conference where the results of this research were presented, was the reasons why participants experience a lack of supervisory training. In many cases supervisory training is not receiving the attention that it should have while in other situations the actual participation in training sessions is problematic. This phenomenon creates the question whether the time is ripe for alternative training models.

#### 5.3.5 **‘Theory regarding supervisory training’**

Tiner (2006:25) is of the impression that supervisory training remains an essential element of the training curriculum offered by Employee Assistance Programmes. Many EAPs however seems to find it hard to deliver a regular programme of training that will not only improve supervisors and managers awareness of EA services but will help them to better understand how to use the programme as a vital tool in dealing with troubled employees. Cagney (2006:18) supports this view and is of the impression that supervisory training, which prepares supervisors to become an effective early intervention and prevention agent, has been either abandoned or minimised in many EAPs.

Cagney believes that despite supervisory referrals and constructive confrontation being some of the core components of most EAPs, there have been problems with implementation and practice from the very beginning. As a result supervisory referral rates appear to run well below estimates of the prevalence of problems in the workplace. These types of referrals seem to be relatively high in newly implemented programmes but it generally decline rapidly thereafter.

Management consultation and supervisory training are part of the components that distinguish EAPs from common mental health services. Supervisors and managers refer employees to the programme due to a pattern of deteriorating work performance established through observation and documentation. Traditionally, supervisors and managers were trained to confront employees with evidence of unsatisfactory job performance and coach them on ways of improving their work while also emphasising the consequences of continued poor performance. Cagney is of the impression that this model however do not seem to interconnect with the reality of many current programmes. The issue of documentation also seems to be neglected and confrontation is rarely related to job performance. Instead, confrontation is often preceded by a triggering event.

Beidel (2006:29) take the value of supervisory training to another level by referring to the connection between the EAP's mission and the organization's business objectives. Whether viewed as a traditional performance management resource or a work-life enhancement, the EAP contributes to the organisation by providing a resource to deal with performance issues when all other strategies seem to fail.

#### 5.3.6 **Conclusion:**

The theory related to supervisory training uses terms like constructive confrontation, identification of deteriorating performance through observation and documentation and management consultation as being unique to the field of EAPs. These terms are very specific to training programmes designed for referral agents and its significance may be lost when it becomes part of a more generalised training programme, hence the experience by the majority of the respondents that they were not trained on how to use the programme effectively. The existing theory seems to highlight a decline in referral agent training in general and cite this as one of the reasons why there seems to be an international trend towards a drop in supervisory referrals.

## 5.4 **Progressive discipline**

### 5.4.1 **Quotations from discussions on progressive discipline: Company One**

- *As a line manager, we try to call them up one by one and talk to them, give verbal warnings, explain that performance is bad, time keeping is bad and motivate them to talk to us if they need assistance and that we can refer them to the EAP. Participant 1.*
- *We first try to help someone and refer them to the EAP for assistance. If no positive change, we will call employees and make them aware that they are not pulling their socks and then we will start following the steps. There are three or four steps, depending on the offenses. Participant 1.*
- *My first step is that I personally counsel the guy, give him advice and give him a date to review the situation. I then monitor his as time goes by, it may be going well during review period. If three/four months along the line we pick up pattern again, talk to him. He may be finding excuses, blaming others but we suggest he need to find professional help. We then refer to EAP. Participant 12. You identify there is a problem, find that the employee's performance is affecting operational requirements. You sit the employee down and may go down the counselling route. You often find that there is an underlying problem and then approach the EAP. Participant 4.*

### 5.4.2 **Interpretation of data on progressive discipline: Company One**

Progressive discipline is linked to the fourth and fifth area of investigation in the qualitative component of this research. Participants described a process of problem identification, informal discussions, verbal warnings, written warnings and eventually final written warnings. They seem to keep in mind the employee as a human being who sometimes, during the course of their working life has personal problems that may impact on his/her performance.

All participants in this part of the investigation seem to have a sound knowledge of their company's principles of progressive discipline. They follow this process when they are encountering deterioration in employee work performance. Offences seem to be clustered into categories, depending on its severity.

- Category 1 (counselling)
- Category 2 (counselling and first written warning)
- Category 3 (final written warning)
- Category 4 (dismissal [excessive absenteeism, mistakes that can close business, drunk at work])

Discussions with the troubled employee are a tool that is used throughout the progressive discipline process and it creates an ongoing opportunity for the employee to address his problems through the necessary means. EAP services are offered at any stage of the discipline process and depend on the nature of the performance problem as well as the referral agent's management of the process.

#### 5.4.3 **Quotations from discussions on progressive discipline:**

##### **Company Two**

- *The EWP is one of the management tools. I very seldom choose the IR process. Our IR consultants would often ask whether you used the EWP. It is generally seen as more humane. Participant 6.*
- *I think the EWP should not supplement or derail performance management and the latter should still continue. I however think it becomes a very important tool in the performance management process. Participant 2.*

- *“Indien ons nie die roete gegaan het nie sou sy die IR proses moes deurgaan. Ons het die meer menslike roete gegaan. EWP en IR het hand aan hand gegaan. Participant 8.*
- *The EWP is an integral part of the industrial relations process. Participant 12.*
- *One of the processes is that you must inform them and tell them they have access to EWP. EWP is offered in the document that they sign and I read it out to them so that there is clarity on what they sign. Participant 5.*
- *I had my disciplinary processes in place but the EWP actually reverted all the others which I should have followed. Participant 1*

#### 5.4.4 **Interpretation of data on progressive discipline: Company Two**

Participants from Company Two describe an Industrial Relations process that clearly defines and guides the performance management process. The company has a five-point rating scale and if a person obtains a score of two and lower, he/she must be put on formal poor performance management with a referral to whatever mechanism to help the individual. This can include the referral to the EWP. The company follows a standardised performance management process and the manner it is set out in the Industrial Relations process is seen as methodical, clearly describing the relevant steps from the first to the final. Participant 11 described the process she followed to include the following steps:

- Step one: an informal discussion that was documented and signed by the affected employee.
- Step two: a formal enquiry that led to a first written warning valid for six months.

- Step three: a second formal enquiry with a final written warning valid for six months. This process involved union representation for the affected employee with a senior staff member as the judge.
- Step four: a formal enquiry leading to a dismissal.
- Step five: internal appeal process.
- Step six: (external process), use of the CCMA.

Although the above reflects a clearly defined process, participants seem to vary in their approach to its use. The views of participants (see quotes from participants' 2 and 8 and 1) differs significantly with one holding a view that the role of EWP should be complimentary and not replacing the Industrial Relations process and the other had the experience that the option to use the program prevented them from either starting or following through the IR process. Participants are of the opinion that a referral to the EWP, or at least a suggestion to use it becomes an almost essential part of the whole performance management process and if not considered, it can cast doubt that the employer has done everything in their power to address the problem, (see quotes from participant 6, 5 and 12).

#### 5.4.5 Theory regarding progressive discipline

McGill (1994:45) describe the progressive disciplinary process as consisting of the following commonly known processes:

- *The oral warning.* This process is immediate and is generally used for first or minor offences in the workplace, or when a worker has failed to respond positively to a correctional discussion.
- *The written warning.* This action alerts the employee to the consequences if they fail to make the relevant changes following the oral warning. It is also used in the event of more serious offenses. A step not described by McGill but that is generally used in the corporate environment is the final written

warning, giving an employee a further opportunity to change the problem behaviour.

- *Suspension*. This action removes the employee from the worksite and is generally used for offenses of a serious nature.

Cascio (1998:535) adds the following dimensions to the process and indicate that discipline should be;

- *Immediate*, so that there can be no misunderstanding about why discipline was imposed.
- *With warning*, as employees need to know what the consequences of undesirable work behaviour will be.
- *Consistent*, for discipline to be perceived as fair.
- *Impersonal*, not to allow for favouritism by disciplining some employees and not those whom they seem to favour.

#### 5.4.6 **Conclusion re progressive discipline**

Both companies seem to have a sound progressive disciplinary process with clear guidelines of what offenses necessitate what response within the disciplinary process. The categories as described by the participants are similar to those described in the relevant theory. These are:

- Category 1 (counselling)
- Category 2 (counselling and first written warning)
- Category 3 (final written warning)
- Category 4 (dismissal [excessive absenteeism, mistakes that can close business, drunk at work])

The referral to the EAP is not really tied to any specific category and the programme is offered at any stage deemed appropriate. The referral agents' attitudes, employee openness to the process as well as the nature of the



problem determine how the progressive disciplinary process and the company EAP is used as interrelated units to help employees improve impaired performance.

## 5.5 Identification of deteriorating work performance

### 5.5.1 Quotations from discussions on identification of deteriorating work performance: Company One

- *Person present with excessive absenteeism, lack of concentration on the job, withdrawn to themselves, if you give them an instruction they are unwilling to carry it out. The person may come late and leave the line early. You can see if they have been drinking the night before. Participant 2.*
- *... employee is leading to the route where absenteeism is higher and work is not consistent. Participant 7.*
- *If I find that a person keeps missing a defect we record it and have a discussion with the person and show them where they went wrong. Participant 11*
- *... if you pick up this person is absent every Friday. Participant 10...*
- *... while in their job they slack and make mistakes. Participant 3.*
- *You identify there is a problem, find that the employee's performance is affecting operational requirements. Participant 4.*
- *I watch the patterns of absenteeism and his performance on the job and get feedback from team leaders. Participant 5.*
- *Person has been one of my high-flyers. Despite giving him off, his work was just going down. He could not cope with the thought that his wife was going to divorce him at some stage. He started abusing alcohol a lot. Participant 12*

### 5.5.2 Interpretation of data re identification of deteriorating work performance: Company One

This theme refers to the fourth and fifth area of investigation in the qualitative enquiry. Company One is a production orientated plant and impaired performance by individuals in many sections have a direct impact on the production of motor vehicles. Work teams have very clear output requirements and as a result, performance is closely monitored.

Within this company reference is made to **indicators of decline** in work performance rather than **perceived personal problems**. This element helps managers and supervisors to remain factual in their dealings with employees and not falling into the management trap of becoming a therapist rather than a manager of good performance. Examples of deterioration in performance are:

- employees missing a defect;
- a pattern of absenteeism and excessive sick leave;
- performance affecting operational requirements;
- lack of concentration on the job; and
- consistent pattern of arriving late and leaving early.

Responses by participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 12 present a more personalized approach to the decline in work performance with a focus on employee relational problems and substance use outside of the workplace. It is not within the scope of this investigation to determine the impact of this approach and the researcher will rely on the views highlighted in popular literature indicating that this is the less appropriate approach.

5.5.3 **Quotations from discussions on identification of deteriorating work performance: Company Two**

- *The employee was absent more frequently and could manage consistency only for short periods of time. She would come later and leave work early. Participant 11*
- *This is a call centre environment and we found an employee swearing at a client, not understanding the client's context. Participant 9.*
- *The quality of the work deteriorates. We are operating in a letter-writing environment to clients and regulatory bodies. You can pick up a lack of focus through a superficial response and bad grammar. Participant 6*
- *It manifest itself in poor attendance, this is probably your most frequent warning sign. Adherence to schedule is another challenge. Participant 2*
- *It also comes through in people's tone of voice on the phone, being listless, lack of energy and losing their temper easily. This is a call centre space and we can pick it up easily. We then have clients demanding to speak to a manager. Participant 2*
- *Employee became emotional and made many mistakes. Participant 8*
- *You can pick it up in the posture changing, their energy levels down, leaving work early and an increase in mistakes. Participant 12*
- *Over time you see people slip and slip and they don't see that their performance is dropping. Participant 5*
- *I would say that their personal problems impacts very hard on production, their attitude, especially those people in a financial crisis. Participant 1*

#### 5.5.4 **Interpretation of data: identification of deteriorating work performance: Company Two**

Participants within Company Two are generally of the impression that employee personal problems contributes significantly to a decline in their work performance. They identified a cluster of behaviour that is often visible when a decline is setting in. Typical behaviour is a lack of consistency and follow-through on tasks that needs to be performed. The quality of the work they produce can also deteriorate, with mistakes being made due to a lack of concentration. Participant 5 is of the opinion that junior staff members are especially vulnerable to having their personal problems spilling over to their workplace.

Within both the call centre environment and other product specific departments, the experience is that employees' attitude within the workplace are significantly affected by their personal problems. Their behaviour often becomes erratic and they present with short-temperedness. Within a call centre environment, employees' ability to interact with clients on the telephone is an integral part of the product they deliver. Deterioration in performance can often be identified through their tone of voice, the quality of the conversation and an inability to manage the needs of the caller. This can result in an increase of customer complaints.

Different forms of absenteeism is also identified as one of the most frequent warning signs of deteriorating work performance with the depletion of all forms of leave early in the leave cycle, arriving late for work and leaving work early as the most prominent pointers.

#### 5.5.5 **Theory regarding identification of deteriorating work performance**

When people experiences personal problems, it does not automatically earn them the title of troubled employees. It is only when an employee's personal problems interfere with his/her work performance that it should become a concern for a supervisor or line manager.

Cascio (1999:586) reflects on the historical changes in the role of supervisors when dealing with troubled employees. In the traditional alcoholism treatment programme the supervisor looked for symptoms of alcoholism and then diagnosed the problem. Under the modern EAP however, the supervisor is responsible only for identifying declining work performance. If normal corrective measures fail, the supervisor confronts the employee with evidence of his or her poor performance and offers the EAP.

Examples of a visible deterioration of work performance are:

- Insubordination;
- Conflict with other employees or with the supervisor;
- Reduced output;
- Increased errors or defects;
- Unexcused absences;
- Unexcused tardiness;
- Leaving workstation without permission;
- Dress code violations;
- Safety rules violations;
- Concealing or consuming drugs or alcohol on company premises; and
- Involvement with the law, garnishing orders or drug trafficking.

#### 5.5.6 **Conclusion re identification of deteriorating work performance**

The referral agents who participated in this study seem to focus on the decline in work performance rather than a premature or timeous involvement in employees' personal problems. Company One is a production-orientated environment and employees need to be on-site according to a structured schedule. Deterioration in work performance will immediately put pressure on the team, and especially the team leader. It would almost certainly have an impact on the daily targets of the

team. As a result the structure of the work environment supports the early detection of impaired work performance.

The company has a zero-tolerance policy on substance abuse. When an individual shows signs of intoxication, the relevant on-site tests are done, the relevant disciplinary steps taken and a referral to the EAP is made, with or without any other signs of deteriorating work performance. The following two statements from participants refer to the above statement:

- *If person comes to work under the influence of alcohol, he will be sent to the programme.*
- *If a person is found in possession of substance or has a work-related problem, action needs to be taken.*

Although Company Two has a different industrial focus, deterioration in performance can also be identified relatively early in its presentation. The organisation works according to strict return dates. If these are violated, it can result in complaints from customers and penalties may need to be paid. Team managers are thus monitoring their team performance and are able to identify individuals who fall behind consistently.

## 5.6 **The referral process**

### 5.6.1 **Quotations from discussions on the referral process:**

#### **Company One**

- *Participants 7. The employee may feel it is a disgrace to be send to the EAP and we have to convince him it is not an ugly place and privacy and confidentiality is protected. He is worried that other workers may find out.*
- *Clients may think that going to the social worker will affect them negatively and will contribute to them being disciplined at a later stage. Participant 1*

- *It depends on the situation whether just counselling or whether a combination of counselling and EAP. Participant 4*
- *...outside the EAP the normal performance process will follow...Participant 6*
- *I call person in with his team leader, discuss deterioration and offer EAP. If they say no, we leave it at that but start monitor. If enough facts, we call him back, talk about performance and offer EAP again. If he still refuses, it is his choice but we will start the disciplinary process with counselling, first written warning and final written warning. Participant 3*
- *If someone refuses to use the programme, we cannot force him. Participant 9*
- *If they do not cooperate they can get into trouble... I will take the necessary disciplinary steps which can lead to dismissal. Participant 2*

#### 5.6.2 **Interpretation of data regarding the referral process: Company One**

The referral of troubled employees into the EAP seems to be guided by the type of problem the employee present with, the employee's willingness to participate and his/her trust in the confidentiality of the process. Participant 7 are of the impression that employees sometimes regard it as a shame to be sent to the EAP and that they are particularly worried about privacy and confidentiality. While the latter two concepts are generally included in the marketing strategy, as well as the policy statement of any EAP, employees may still question the level of privacy they will enjoy when using a programme sponsored by their workplace.

The referral into the EAP remains a personal decision by the employee. During the course of discussing impaired performance, the line manager would suggest the use of the EAP as a formal or informal process. Participant 9 suggests that he would call in the employee, refer to the deterioration of performance and suggest the use of the programme. For him, the use of the EAP does not replace the normal disciplinary processes. He experienced that sometimes troubled employees would initially refuse the use of the programme. However, when they are confronted with a final written warning, they are more likely to agree to a referral. Participant 2, 3 and 11 regard the referral into the EAP as a first step that may prevent a disciplinary

process from taking place while participant 12 regards it as a tool that, if used in conjunction with the disciplinary process, may prevent the implementation of severe action steps. While individual participants have slight differences in how they use the referral process, it seems that there are broad guidelines within which all these differences take place.

Participants generally agree that the interrelatedness of the disciplinary process and the referral to the EAP is largely guided by the nature of the problem. Someone found under the influence of substances will for instance receive a final written warning as well as a formal referral to the EAP. When a mild deterioration of work performance is detected the person may be counselled first and if failing to improve, the use of the EAP is suggested.

### 5.6.3 Quotations from discussion on the referral process: Company Two

- *Typically we do one-on-ones monthly and when there is a personal issue affecting their performance, we recommend the EWP and more often than not they do. Participant 2*
- *A person should be very careful under what circumstances do you force someone to go to the programme because the minute you force the person, you breed a whole lot of negativity. Participant 4*
- *I used the helpline for all the referrals I did. The people on the phone were good, understood the urgency of the issue and tried to be as compassionate as they could be. They asked appropriate questions to lead them to the correct therapist. Participant 5*
- *There is generally an informal or a formal discussion about performance before referral. It is not necessarily a documented process. Participant 12*
- *The referral process is well-defined and explained on the group-net. Participant 10*



- *Die verwysingsproses het glad verloop. Ek het die tolvrye nommer geskakel en hulle was baie behulpsaam. Indien ons nie die EWP roete gegaan het nie sou sy die IR roete gegaan het. Ons het die meer menslike roete geneem. EWP en IR het hand aan hand gegaan. Participant 8*
- *The referral to the EWP is generally problem-related. Participant 6*
- *We first need to get consent from the staff member, if he accepts to go there it is the management's duty to get the contact numbers, we contact our helpdesk and they set an appointment in place for us. Participant 1*
- *As employer we have the onus to ensure that you try all means before you go the end route of dismissing someone for poor performance. The referral is a powerful tool where a neutral person comes in. The referral puts feeling into the process of poor performance management. Participant 3*

#### 5.6.4 **Interpretation of data regarding the referral process: Company Two**

The referral to the EWP is presented as an integral part of this company's Industrial Relations process. The EWP is seen as an important management tool that puts a more humane touch to the whole Industrial Relations process. There seems to be an expectation within the IR process that a person be given the option of a referral to the EWP and that it may be an indictment to the management style if they fail to do so. For some participants like 1 and 12 the referral to the EWP can potentially revert the IR processes while others like participant 2 see these processes as running concurrently.

The decision when to refer an employee to the EWP seems to be dependent on the nature of the problem as well as the judgement of the particular manager and is not an option linked to a specific step in the Industrial Relations process. This referral is also dependent on the acceptance from the employee as the individual still has the right to refuse it. Participant 4 experienced the referral to have been forced on the specific employee as part of the IR process. For this participant the

interrelatedness of the two processes had a negative spin-off and the value of the program has been diluted. Participants 2 and 6 indicated that the EWP as a resource is discussed with employees within their monthly one-on-one discussions. It is when a person who clearly has personal problems impacting on their performance, does not take up the option, that the manager step in and make the referral.

**Concerns about confidentiality have been highlighted as an element that negatively affects referral into the wellbeing programme.**

Participants 5, 12, 1 and 8 find the helpdesk very helpful and experienced professional guidance when phoning to refer an employee. The guidelines to follow when making a referral are also available on the internal intranet site. A few participants find this helpful while the majority of them found the actual referral through the helpdesk as more effective.

**5.6.5 Theory regarding the referral process:**

Sonnenstuhl and Trice (1995:20) is of the opinion that employee education is important to familiarise employees with the EAP policy and programme. If employees are unfamiliar with the scope of the EAP, they are likely to be resistant and not trust the value of the programme. Employee education can take place on more than one platform. The traditional form of training would be having groups of employees together for lunchtime training sessions. Training can also be incorporated in orientation programmes for new employees. Line managers and supervisors also play an important role in educating employees on the scope and value of the programme. What is important is that the training covers all the important elements that will help employees to “buy in” to the value of mental health services, as well as developing an understanding of how it is offered by the workplace.

Rue and Byars (1989:235) discusses the general counselling process and the referral of the troubled employee as an interrelated process. They indicate that the confrontation between the supervisor and the troubled employee should consist

primarily of three steps; a performance review, referral to counselling and assistance, and a discussion of the consequences of the employee's actions. Their discussion thus refers to a general guideline of basic elements that should be part of the referral process. Sonnenstuhl and Trice (1995:28) takes this argument a step further and uses the concepts of constructive confrontation and progressive discipline interchangeably as skills used by the line manager/supervisor to address performance challenges of troubled employees. They refer to it as follows:

*“For constructive confrontation to be effective, a supervisor may need to hold a number of discussions with an employee whose performance is unacceptable. In the confrontational part of the initial discussion, the employee is given the specifics of unacceptable work performance and warned that continued unacceptable performance is likely to lead to formal discipline. In the constructive part, supervisors remind employees that practical assistance is available through the EAP. Subsequent steps in the process depend on the response of the employee. If performance improves, nothing happens; if unacceptable performance continues, several more informal discussions may follow.”*

The constructive part of these discussions conveys emotional support for the employee's wellbeing while the confrontational part restates the expectations of work performance. These two concepts thus create a healthy balance between care for the employee as well as protecting the financial bottom-line of the organisation.

#### **5.6.6 Conclusion regarding the referral process**

The referral process for both companies seems to be influenced by factors like the nature of the problem, employee willingness to participate and the process as adopted by specific line managers/supervisors. What is important is a sound knowledge of the company EAP policy and procedures. This knowledge base will help both employees and line managers/supervisors to use the programme effectively within the performance management process. The concepts of constructive confrontation and progressive discipline should be a central part of the training programme for line managers/supervisors.

## 5.7 **Documentation**

### 5.7.1 **Quotations from discussions on 'documentation': Company One**

- *Participants 11. We keep record cards and I could pick up a pattern and called him in. After a couple of discussions we pick up what the problems are and refer him into the EAP.*
- *We work on an hourly score card and you can see from the foreman's feedback that this person cannot make it and you then know that something is wrong. Participant 5*
- *We do not necessarily have documented records of performance challenges but try to fill in as much as possible on the EAP form. We keep records of absenteeism and sick leave, etc. Need to pick up a pattern before referring to the programme. Participant 6*
- *I do keep documentation of the performance challenges. Participant 3*
- *The seniors want to see my performance like looking at absenteeism, how you are doing in the job, including the productivity. We report monthly on how many people were absent, how many people have you counselled, how many received warning forms, how many minor accidents happened in the department. Participant 10*

### 5.7.2 **Interpretation of data on documentation: Company One**

Participants mentioned the importance of documentation, as part of the progressive disciplinary process. Documentation allows the supervisor/line manager the opportunity to pick up a pattern of consistent work performance challenges and discuss these with the troubled employee.

There seems to be some discrepancy amongst the perceptions of some participants 6 and others like 11, 5 and 3 as to whether performance challenges are documented or not, as seen in the quotations above. The form of documentation

furthermore does not seem standardised amongst different departments and the focus is rather on having a system that fits in to the operational requirements of the specific department. What seems to be the synthesis within the description of documentation for these respondents are the purpose of documented evidence. Participant 10 made an interesting comment on documentation when he stated that documentation is not only for the purpose of tracking employee performance, but that it also serve the purpose of departmental performance reporting to senior management.

Documentation is also not described in much detail in these discussions, but because of the importance thereof, the researcher is highlighting it as a separate theme.

### 5.7.3 Quotations from discussions on 'documentation': Company Two

- *Participants 3. You get a five-point rating scale and if a person gets a two and lower, he/she must be put on formal poor performance management with referral to whatever mechanism to help that person.*
- *The IR processes are methodical. You have to do one, two and three and there are no emotional support build into these. Participant 11*
- *You get a form that you must issue to the person to say that they have or are about to exceed their sick leave. One of the expectations is that you must inform them and tell them they have access to EWP. Participant 5*
- *We have informal or formal discussions about performance before referral. It is not necessarily a documented process. Participant 12*
- *You can go back to your discussions on record and show them where they indicated "things are not going well at home, ext". Then you can offer them the EWP as a lifeline. Participant 1*
- *In this case we looked at his time recording system against mine and it did not add up. I prepared an IR process but due to circumstances I referred him to EWP before going through the disciplinary process. Participant 6*

#### 5.7.4 **Interpretation of data on documentation: Company Two**

Participants from Company Two showed inconsistency in their views towards documented performance management processes before referral to the Employee Wellbeing Program. Participant 12 specifically indicated that the formal referral of employees is not necessarily linked to a documented process.

All participants however link the formal referral of troubled employees with the Industrial Relations process. The latter, by nature, is a documented process as any labour dispute without clearly recorded processes, will be harmful to the employer. Participant 11 referred to the IR process as methodical with clearly defined steps following each other. When the referral thus takes place as part of the IR process, documented evidence of performance challenges should thus be available.

#### 5.7.5 **Theory regarding documentation**

According to Marr and Roessler (1994:107) reduction in work quality occurs because the individual fails to notice the pattern of deterioration. They are made aware of it through feedback from supervisors or line managers. The supervisor should however confront the employee with specific evidence of poor performance. Rue and Byars (1989:235) is of the opinion that reviewing available documentation with the employee is a healthy approach as he/she realises through this that there is documented evidence of poor work performance. Without the necessary documented evidence, the employee can challenge the factuality of statements made by the supervisor/line-manager.

Boghosian (2006:10) is of the opinion that workplace productivity, liability and morale depend to a large extent on the quality of people's communication. In the event of dealing with a troubled employee, it is even more important that there be no confusion about what constitutes poor performance, when incidences occurred and what the expectations for improvement are. Flanagan and Finger (2000:271)

make a further important comment about written records. As the “Access to Information Legislation” allows individuals to have access to any recorded details about them, it is just good practice that these records be objective and not prejudicial in any way. It is also good practice to ask employees to sign the records at meetings.

*Documentation is a fact of organizational life for most managers. While such paperwork is never pleasant, it is necessary, and in the case of performance-related incidents should conform to the following guidelines:*

- 1. Describe what led up to the incident – the problem and the setting. Is this a first offense or part of a pattern?*
- 2. Describe what actually happened, and be specific: that is, include names, dates, times, witnesses, and other pertinent facts.*
- 3. Describe what must be done to correct the situation.*
- 4. State the consequences of further violations. (Cascio 1998:536)*

#### **5.7.6 Conclusion re documentation**

It may be problematic if documentation of declined work performance is not standardized within an organisation. This may lead to some employees being overseen for some violations while other employees are disciplined for similar offenses. Documentation also strengthens the case of any line manager/supervisor who needs to confront an employee with evidence of impaired performance.

It is one of the guiding principles of any good EAP that constructive confrontation should be accompanied by documented evidence of declined work performance. Training programmes that focus on skills development for referral agents should ideally have a significant coverage of the importance of documented evidence. The researcher is also of the opinion that standardisation within organizations would contribute significantly towards fairness and effectiveness of the practice.

## 5.8 Financial implication of decreased productivity

### 5.8.1 Quotations from the discussions on the financial implication of decreased productivity: Company One

- *Participant 3. The team leader must stand in for the absent person and I have to stand in for the team leader, who is going to do my job?*
- *Participant 9. The process is set up for you to have a specific amount of people working in one area. If one person is absent, the link is broken and the other employees cannot meet their targets because it is set up to accommodate a specific amount of team members to fulfil that task.*
- *...you are not achieving a stable production, your absenteeism has gone high, so it is a chain reaction and the next number must work double high because this person is absent and they must do two people's job. Participant 12.*
- *Must put team leader in that position and the team leader cannot look after the amount of people he's got and check the quality and relieve those people to go to the toilet and see if they are doing the standardized work. Participant 2*
- *Sometimes we have to do reworks to make up for the scraps and this must be done through overtime work. Thus have rejects that cannot be used, use new parts to rebuild the part and have to pay people overtime to build the part. We look at about thousands and thousands of rands. One component may cost you R800 and sometimes you have 10 per month, so you talk about R8000 only on one line and you have 9 different lines. Apart from the parts being scraped, what about the labour costs. Then you have a smash-up and you smash the tool because the guy did not put the component in correctly. It then damages the machine and it can go up to R30 000. Participant 1*
- *We are in the financial department and we pay suppliers. If we do not pay suppliers in time, they can stop delivery and stop production on the plant, especially big suppliers. Participant 12*
- *We have a TATT time. Within each process the line moves within 99 seconds and if you delay and you stop a line for about five minutes, 99 seconds is like a minute and a half, so you lose like four vehicles in about five minutes. This is quite a severe impact. Participant 11*



- *...it puts a lot of pressure on the rest of the department to make sure that the work is done and we then have to work overtime and other people who stand in for others start falling behind on their own work. Sometimes even have to get in a temp. It means the company has to pay extra on salary as the person absent produce a sick note and also have to pay the temp. Participant 6*
- *It is not a one-player environment, it is a team environment and absence will affect the whole team. If one person do not pitch you have another person who must do two people's work. If you have two break-downs the person must fix his own and then move on to another person's breakdown. These result in down-time – thus having a knock-on effect, meaning you are not building cars and thus losing money. Participant 8*
- *If I have to build 100 cars I have to and not 95. Loss of production means loss of customers, up to 5 customers per day. Cars are made per order and not to store. It is detrimental to sales and we are thus not meeting market demand. We do have an annual market share and if I do not meet daily targets, the company cannot meet market sale. One customer means they speak to others, thus a loss of future customers. One vehicle cost about R200 000 and you thus struggle to make a profit. Participant 7*
- *Engine cost between R50 000 and R60 000 and if I damage it, replacement is expensive. You also play with people's lives, especially customer lives. Replacement is also not too easy as it work in a sequence. I buy parts from other departments and if I damage I have to buy it again. It causes delays and we work on a TATT time on one and a half minute for a vehicle to come off the production line. If I stop for 10 minutes it affects the delivery of 6 cars. These are SUV's of about R300 000 rand each. Participant 3*
- *(If we were having a score of 280 and we only made 260, we are missing 20 units and we have to work overtime for 36 people for an hour at time and a half. It works out to a lot of money. Participant 2*

### 5.8.2 Interpretation of data on financial implication of decreased productivity: Company One

The participants overwhelmingly are of the impression that decreased productivity has a substantial impact on the productivity of the organisation. The organisational risks are identified and presented in four significant sub-themes:

- **Increased absenteeism of troubled employees puts pressure on team leaders and supervisors** whose role it is to oversee the quality and delivery of their production line. These senior members then have to stand in for absent members and this compromise their supervisory role. Absenteeism also puts added pressure on other members of the team who generally are present and produce work of a good standard. These members build up resistance, as they feel overwhelmed with the extra pressure being put on them.
- **Absenteeism and faults on the production line have a significant impact on the delivery of parts and eventually the delivery of vehicles to the public.** The unit costs to these vehicles can easily be estimated in excess of R300 000 per unit. The damage of parts as a result of decreased concentration levels of a troubled employee is also costly and this cost can vary from between R800 to about R60 000 . These losses are dependent on whether loss results from a damaged part that needs replacement or whether machinery has been damaged in the process.
- **Labour costs also increases in all departments that was covered through this study.** In both the production driven sections and the non-production driven sections absenteeism of members puts pressure on other members to work overtime or result in the hiring of temporary staff. This increases labour costs significantly and departmental budgets as well as the overall financial stability of the organisation is affected.
- **The impact on customer relations is also noteworthy in this context.** Within the non-production driven units, the non- or late payment of suppliers may result in them stopping the supply to the company. Lack of supplies has a direct impact on the delivery of vehicles to the public. Participants from the production-driven section of the company is also of the view that they risk losing customers if they are unable to deliver vehicles as per orders, thus decreasing the profits of the

organisation and negatively affecting the company's market share. Faulty parts can also put the public's lives at risk and this will filter through to the image of the company being negative affected.

### 5.8.3 **Quotations from the discussions on the financial implication of decreased productivity: Company Two**

- *Participant 1. Most months we sit with a lot of write-offs of which the company has to bear the costs. Yearly write-offs are in the region of millions in this area and that is merely due to a lack of concentration.*
- *Participant 7. We build relationships with our clients and they expect us to perform according to set deadlines. It can cost up to R90 000 a month in lost contracts and the department can close down as a result.*
- *If we put someone in the wrong investment portfolio and they lose money as a result, we have to refund him the loss. Participant 8*
- *We work with regulatory bodies as there are funds involved. The company's reputation will be damaged and you cannot measure that. Participant 6 and 12*
- *We accept risk on behalf of the company as we underwrite policies for people. Mistakes can put the company at risk of millions of rands....It is important for people to have good focus, feel confident about the decisions they make and know that they have followed all the steps and feel comfortable about these steps. Participant 5*
- *If an individual are paid 5 days late and their debit orders bounced, there is costs involved. We have to refund them for their bank charges. It is thus not only the actual embarrassment but also the costs attached to this. Participant 4*
- *If we have to quantify time, I had to use my time in heart to heart discussions with the employee about productivity both if she is late or do not arrive in time. Participant 2*

#### 5.8.4 **Interpretation of data on financial implication of decreased productivity: Company Two**

Participants from Company Two were all in agreement that lower performance has a significant impact on the financial bottom line of the company. They were able to identify the financial inference on different levels. These are:

- *The cost of paying the salary of an absent employee.*
- *Overtime worked by other employees to compensate for the absent worker. These workers than often lack the concentration or time to focus on their own tasks effectively. In some instances the expense of temporary staff also needs to be taken in consideration.*
- *The salary paid to a manager who spends a significant amount of time counselling a troubled employee instead of focusing on his other tasks.*
- *The cost of actual mistakes ranging from the following:*
  - *Salaries that are paid late may result in people's debit orders being rejected. The company becomes liable for this cost.*
  - *Mistakes on life cover pay-outs that can result in millions of rands of losses. Placing a client in the incorrect portfolio may also mean that a person loses money and the company becomes liable to pay this person back. This can range between R1000 to R100 000.*
  - *Penalties from regulatory bodies for missed deadlines and poor quality. This is currently charged at a fee of R3000.*
- *Missing deadlines that can range from R3000 to R90 000 per month in penalties or lost contracts. In the case of lost contracts it may mean that the department can no longer be sustained and people may face the risk of job losses.*

- *The company's reputation also suffers due to the damage in its brand name and it compromises their position with their competitors. This cost is often not measurable but generally substantial.*

#### 5.8.5 **Theory regarding the financial implication of decreased productivity**

The impact of lower productivity has been recognized and assessed in the South African job market for some time already. This is illustrated by the newspaper article (Rapport Loopbane 2 July 2006). Within this article, published in 2006, the financial impact of absenteeism per day for an employee earning R5000.00 a month was estimated at about R200 direct cost and R600 if indirect costs are included. At the time it was estimated that absenteeism cost the South African economy at least R20 milliard per year. Coppens (1997:10) further reiterates that any costs of absenteeism and low productivity above 4% of the general payroll can be regarded as excessive, (see section 1.3.2 of report). The responses from participants in this study correlates with these published results and provides an even more detailed breakdown of the types of financial losses a company can incur as a result of production losses.

The responses of participants also highlighted the strain that absent team members put on the supervisory role. When they have to stand in for absent team members, they divert from their core functions. Rue and Byars (1989:14) describe the role of a supervisor/line manager as follows:

*"The work of a supervisor is often categorized into five areas: planning, organizing, staffing, motivating and controlling. Planning involves determining the most effective means for achieving the work of the unit. Organizing involves distributing the work among the employees in the work group and arranging the work so that it flows smoothly. Staffing is concerned with obtaining and developing good people. Motivating involves getting employees to put forth maximum effort while doing their job. Controlling determines how well the work is being done compared with what was planned".*

The supervisor/line manager thus has a significant responsibility, as well as a vested interest in the performance of the team and the individuals operating in the team. If their attention is diverted into having to perform the tasks of their subordinates, they are not able to execute their supervisory role effectively and the productivity of the team suffers as a result.

#### 5.8.6 **Conclusion re financial implication of decreased productivity**

It can be concluded that the financial impact of a decrease in productivity is significant for companies. Some of these costs can be easily measured, especially in production driven environments. Other costs may not be as easy to detect through the supervisory monitoring process. Losses occur at different levels and from the information obtained from participants, it is evident that losses in one department almost always have a spiralling effect, impacting on the delivery of final production units.

Supervisors and line managers are part of the key links to sustain the profitability of the company through healthy production lines. These staff members should be valued, supported and equipped through the relevant resources and training to help them optimise their function. Rue and Byars (1989:12) say that the primary measure used to determine a supervisor's success or failure is the productivity of the supervisor's work unit. Successful supervision requires the knowledge of, and ability to use, a multitude of skills.

5.9 **The social impact of lower performance and changes after participation in the EAP**

5.9.1 **Quotations from discussions on the social impact of lower performance and changes after participation in the EAP: Company One**

**Impact:**

- *It impacts a lot and there end up being no team work. We get complaints from the team and the person tends to fight with everybody. Participant 10*
- *Person with personal problems tend not to mingle with other people. Participant 6*
- *You find that the person with personal problems pulls himself away from the crowd and is not so social anymore. Participant 5*
- *People he works with tend to think he is a bad person and he experience that everybody is nitpicking on him. Participant 11*
- *Generally people socialize in groups but not the unhappy ones. Participant 1*
- *People withdraw and prefer not to be in the company of others. Generally we all need someone to talk to and open up. Participant 12*
- *People with problems will abuse whatever is available at social gatherings and destroy the social togetherness. Participant 7*

**Changes after participation:**

- *Once the person started on the program, you can see a change in his social performance. Participant 10*

- *You notice a big change, the person will socialize again and will not indulge in the wrong things. Participant 6*
- *We can see a change as they start mixing with the rest of the group and the guys who had an alcohol problem do not run away over lunchtime anymore, they start attending meetings like union meetings, ext. Participant 5*
- *I can pick up a difference and if you are monitoring and talk to other people, you get feedback that the person is doing much better. Participant 11*
- *People become more interactive with other people. Participant 1*
- *I see a change – before the person would not participate in social functions and now they are able to attend these functions without having to use alcohol or anything else. Participant 12*
- *We do see the change. Sometimes we expect change immediately and do not understand that it is a process. Sometimes our supervisors do not always understand what to look for and that is why training is important. We must have an understanding not only how to refer, but also understand how change takes place. Participant 8*
- *Previously troubled employees tend to be more relaxed and at social gatherings can pick up on other troubled employees and talk to and motivate them to use the program. Participant 7*

### 5.9.2 **Interpretation of data: Company One**

Participants from Company One are overwhelmingly of the opinion that people who experience personal problems do have a negative impact on their work teams. This impact varies from isolation from the team, conflict with team members, and avoidance of social functions because of their own fear of abusing alcohol at these events and in some instances negatively influencing team members when being disciplined for bad performance.



All the participants being interviewed was of the impression that employees' participation in the program yielded positive results for them. They reported an improvement in employees' interaction with team members. Previously troubled employees are generally more willing to participate in social events and are able to enjoy themselves without indulging in alcohol. Participant 7 also witnessed previously troubled employees being able identify other team members having problems and motivate them to use the program.

5.9.3 **Quotations from discussions on the social impact of lower performance and changes after participation in the EWP: Company Two**

**Impact**

- *Because of mood changes in individuals, we often came close to physical fights in the building. People are generally friends, but at that time your jokes are not welcome. Participant 1*
- *You see isolation from other people over lunchtimes. Participant 1*
- *At a team level there is a lack of sympathy for the person, a lack of understanding. So it affects team dynamics. Participant 2*
- *Because other team members feel the pressure, they become angry with the person and pick on him/her. They expect the manager to do something about it. Participant 5*
- *It has a huge negative impact. We do a climate survey where we test what the staff feels and it comes up in a big way because people are pressurized and they need to focus. They thus need everybody to pull their weight. Participant 5*
- *For staff it may appear that management is not doing anything about the troubled employee and they will be irritated by it. Participant 11*

- *It causes frustration for the team because although they understand what the person goes through, they do get to a point where they say this is just not on anymore, we have been picking up the slack for the person not being here but it is becoming too much. Participant 4*

### **Changes after participation**

- *She can still become emotional but she deal with things better, it is as if she has a stronger cry. Participant 12*
- *With the person I referred, I could see his mood changed. Participant 1*
- *After a few counselling sessions, we can see a difference. It differs depending on the type of problem, with financial problems change can be seen quicker. Participant 9*
- *I have seen with one individual, where team members came and said that they notice change and are now showing more compassion to the person. Participant 5*
- *You do see a change as the person's emotional state changes and what they portray in the team is more positive. Participant 4*

#### **5.9.4 Interpretation of data: Company Two**

Generally, when a staff member's performance is compromised, the rest of the team is pressurised by fulfilling duties earmarked for the troubled member. Frustration is sometimes geared towards the manager whom they perceive as not doing enough to address the issues. Participant 1 witnessed withdrawal from the team and exhibited increased emotional sensitivity.

Participants from Company Two were overwhelmingly of the opinion that individuals who were able to address their personal problems through the Employee Wellbeing

Programme, have a positive impact on their social environment. In some instances these employees were able to identify other troubled employees and suggest the program to them. This indicates that the person who was once cut off from the other members of the team is now a lot more tuned into the needs of other members.

#### 5.9.5 **Theory regarding the social impact of lower performance and changes after participation in the EAP/EWP**

Within both the workplaces where the research took place, employees generally operate in work units. Different units/departments are responsible for performing specific tasks and individual output translate into departmental output for which a line manager or supervisor takes overall responsibility. Within these units workers forms primary relationships with those they share a common purpose with (Schellenberg 1974:221). From the responses derived from participants from both work organisations there are evidence that employees with personal problems often seems to withdraw from these social groups they previously identified with. Their lower performance also puts undue pressure on other team members and the frustration that derives from this may cause further distance in their relationships within their primary work teams.

#### 5.9.6 **Conclusion regarding the social impact of lower performance and changes after participation in the EAP:**

The social impact of employee under-performance is not easy to measure in monetary terms. However, from the feedback received from supervisors and line managers it is evident that they experience it as having a significant impact on teams and how teams operate. It seems that as much as what individuals are influenced by their social environment, the environment is influenced by the individuals operating within it.

## 5.10 Expectation of improved performance versus observed change:

### 5.10.1 Quotations from discussions on expectation of improved performance versus observed change: Company One

#### **Expectations:**

- *It depends on the person. Some people we send are not serious about their problems and some are put on the right track and some do not want to participate. Participant 2*
- *I expect that the individual's problems can be addressed in the best possible way and that he can understand that it is in his best interest. Participant 9*
- *As a manager I expect the person to participate in the programme and that they benefit. The person must understand the seriousness of his actions and must be able to turn himself around. Participant 8*
- *I can only help a person to a certain level. If I refer him to a professional, I expect professional help. I am thus expecting positive change. Participant 12*
- *I expect them to come back and improve their time-keeping, their performance, their wellbeing and their family life. Participant 1*

#### **Observed change:**

- *I definitely see an impact, example, one person was on the verge of termination due to alcoholism, I referred him ..... he is now a new man. Participant 5*
- *It is also my experienced that people change. I also like the fact that after attending the programme, they are monitored through the EAP. Participant 6*
- *For people with a liquor problem, you can **see** the improvement. The people with personal problems, it is hard to see whether there is an improvement. Participant 10*
- *I have seen positive changes in the people I have referred. I think it is a positive system. Participant 11*

- *People come back and they perform better, their time-keeping has improved and you find they no longer have something heavy on the chest. Participant 1*
- *Generally I can see a change in people's productivity after participating in the programme, example, and no absenteeism now and only take leave when he must. Participant 12*
- *Definitely improvement. I am busy now with someone with .... problems and I referred him and can see a major improvement in his work and his attitude towards work. I see a positive change in the majority of people, not all people but generally. Participant 9*
- *We do see the change. Often as supervisors and managers we do not always understand the goals of the programme. Sometimes we expect change immediately and do not understand that it is a process. Sometimes our supervisors do not always understand what to look for and that is why training is so important on this programme. Must have an understanding not only how to refer but also understand how change takes place. Participant 8*

#### 5.10.2 **Interpretation of data re expectation of improved performance versus observed change: Company One**

All participants were clear that upon referral to the EAP they expect positive change from troubled employees. Of interest is a view held by most of the participants that change is dependent on the motivation levels of the referred employee (participants 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10). These views underlie the notion that change is not externally determined but is dependent on an internal motivational process taking place within the individual. It is a view that supports the development of emotional insight, a term that refers to a deep understanding of your personal challenges. Participant 12 expressed an awareness of his own limitations when employees present with personal problems and regard the programme as consisting of professionally-skilled people who are able to provide the relevant mental health services. Participant 8 has an expectation that the EAP should not only address mental health issues, but should also address performance issues so that individuals can understand the link between their problems and performance. Participant 11 elaborated on the link

between the EAP and job requirements and stated that time frames for employee participation as well as his progress should be clearly communicated to referral agents.

There seems to be an overwhelming perception that positive change takes place when employees participate in the EAP. Participants generally have a positive view of the impact of the EAP. They are able to detect visible change in work performance and commented on an improvement in attitude, attendance and levels of responsibility. Not all employees seem to have responded positively to the programme, yet it is interesting to see that participants as mentioned above regard the lack of positive responses as failures that lie with the individuals rather than with the quality of the programme.

#### 5.10.3 Quotations from discussion regarding expectations of improved performance versus observed change: Company Two

##### ***Expectations:***

- *I understand I cannot get feedback about the sessions, but I would like to know at the end of it, did the person feel that the outcome was valuable. Participant 4*
- *My expectation is that the person can learn something from the program and that they could talk in a protected environment. Participant 5*
- *My expectation is that employees get the relevant help, to change their perception of the problem. Participant12*
- *From a business perspective we want to see improvement. If the trend was absenteeism or poor performance, we will monitor to see changes in the trend. Participant 1*
- *I do not really want to know what the problems are and what was being done about it, all I want to see is tangible improvement in performance. Participant 2*

- *I would like to see the person's problem being solved. The program must be able to touch the emotional side of the employee. Participant 9*
- *My expectations are that the person would receive help and that his performance and the quality of his work would improve. Participant 6*

**Observed change:**

- *The employee could share and unlock painful experiences. Participant 11*
- *The people I referred to the program at least came out with another view of their problem. The program is not the solution to everything but it helps you to get perspective and you can make other choices. Participant 3*
- *The person I referred improved her performance, she tries harder and is more able to keep to her due dates. Participant 7*
- *An employee I referred had previous suicide attempt, person became more empowered as a human being and was very thankful for the assistance. Participant 12*
- *I have seen positive changes in the individuals and they are keen to talk to me about it. Participant 5*
- *All the cases that I have referred went well. Participant 9*
- *There have been definite change, it is up to the person what they make of the program. The program is short, maximum 8 sessions and if a program has build up for years, it may not be enough. Participant 10*
- *In this case the intervention was too late to change the route of the person's relationship problems but work-wise there have been changes and the person would come to me and give me feedback. Participant 1*
- *I had a person here the other day that I referred a year ago, this was one of the success stories. Person could talk about her experiences and how she is definitely more empowered now. Participant 2*

- *Change happened much quicker than what I thought. I was surprised. The employee soon realized what she had to do and became more empowered. Participant 8*
- *In this instance the referral prevented the problem to progress further and limited its impact on her performance. Participant 10*

#### 5.10.4 **Interpretation of data re expectation of improved performance versus observed change: Company Two**

There seem to be a very realistic expectations of what the program can offer. Participants 4, 12 and 9 verbalised expectations of a professional clinical intervention that would have a positive impact on employee emotional wellbeing as well as performance. Participants 6, 2 and 1 expects improved performance, a decrease in mistakes, improved attendance and enhanced participation in teams. There has been an expressed need for effective communication without violation of confidentiality that will assist them with their managerial evaluation of performance.

There has been an overwhelming impression that the program helps and they have seen positive changes taking place. Participants 4, 7 and 11 found that not all participation of referred employees did not result in improved performance in the workplace. In these instances, the reasons cited were an incorrect referral to the program as well as the presence of chronic substance abuse problems. In one of these cases, the participants were also of the impression that although the employee did not manage to sustain sobriety, the process created an opportunity to deal with deep-rooted issues. There is a view that coincide with views from company one that the program works best if the individual opens him/herself to the process. They also show insight that different pathologies respond differently to clinical intervention and that a blanket approach is not possible.

Although there has been some instances where positive change did not take place, all participants are of the opinion that the program is able to and generally has yielded positive results. As with Company One, participants are of the opinion that



the motivation levels of the referred employees remain the most important element for positive change.

#### 5.10.5 **Theory regarding expectation of improved performance versus observed change**

Van den Berg (1995:845) reflects on international studies that reported on significant changes in people's work performance after participation in their company's EAP. Equitable Life Assurance found the absenteeism of alcoholic employees dropped from 8% to 4% after EAP referral to and treatment by alcohol programmes. 3M Company data suggested that 80% of the employees who used the EAP showed improved attendance, greater productivity, and enhanced family and community relations.

The McDonnell Douglas study, often quoted as an example of a cost-effectiveness study, also determined that alcoholism treated through EAP was more effective (Masi 1994:158) (*see more detailed discussion in chapter one of this report*).

Langlieb and Kahn (2005:1104) is of the opinion that research is overwhelmingly demonstrating that treatment of mental health problems leads to an improvement in work productivity and reduction in utilisation and costs of general medical services. One study looking at the impact of treating people with depressive symptoms indicated that treated individuals' days of missed work because of illness was only one-third as great when compared with those with persistent depression. Another study cited by the same authors focusing on patients with depression indicated a 5% decrease in outpatient visits and an 85% decrease in hospital days when receiving the relevant treatment.

#### 5.10.6 **Conclusion re expectation of improved performance versus observed change**

The viewpoints of respondents from these worksites seem to echo the views from different authors that the participation of troubled employees in mental health

programmes can yield positive results. Because people's personal problems can potentially present itself in behavioural terms, the worksite becomes vulnerable to this presentation in the form of lower productivity.

An overwhelming number of participants are of the impression that there has been visible change in the work performance of most employees after participation in the programme. These participants have insight only into the work performance indicators of individual employees and not the presentation of behaviour in their personal space.

There is also a positive relationship between the above view and the data gathered through the quantitative component of this study. Eighty four percent (84%) of the respondents participating in the quantitative component of the study indicated that there has been an improvement in their work performance since participating in the EAP, 67% indicated that their coping skills improved, 77% indicated that their attendance improved, 48% indicated that mistakes within the workplace reduced and 45% indicated work related accidents reduced. This view is supported by the respondents participating in the quantitative component of the study where there is also an overwhelming perception that positive changes in work performance is visible for most of the employees they have referred into the EAP.

## 5.11 Consistency of change

### 5.11.1 Quotations from discussions on the consistency of change:

#### Company One

- *Within my five years I have never experienced someone having changed and falling back again. Participant 10*
- *I never had a person relapsing and the guys who went through the program responded well. Participant 6*

- *I had a person who relapsed after eight months and I had to talk to him to help pick him up. Generally people are able to sustain their changed behaviour. Participant 5*
- *All the people I have seen I saw a positive change. It also depends on how the group leader manage the person and the amount of effort you put into helping the person. Participant 11*
- *A group of them is ok, you can see the difference. Some people do fall back after a few months. I do not think it is a weakness of the program, rather it depends on different people. Participant 1*
- *People are more empowered but it is also a matter of choice. Most of the people who changed through the program were able to sustain that change. Participant 8*
- *When an employee is referred to the EAP and they can confidentially help other people, you have a strong changed person. They do sustain change and are able to identify other people with problems. Participant 7*
- *What I see is that people tend to maintain their positive attitude. You do get the individual who relapse, but that is in the minimum. Participant 9*

#### 5.11.2 **Interpretation of date on consistency of change: Company One**

Participants from this company have an overall perception that positive change they have observed taking place within individuals are consistent. Participant 9,1 and 5 have experienced some relapses and in most of these cases the affected employees were referred back into the program. As with the view expressed under “observed change”, there continue to be the opinion that relapses are as a result of individual motivation levels rather than the quality of the program.

Participant 7 is of the opinion that employees who are able to sustain their change manage not only to uphold their improved performance but are also able to be of

assistance to other troubled employees. By implication they are thus more empowered and can act in an advocacy role for the program. Participants 11 and 4 agree that consistent change is more likely if the aftercare support from the supervisor/manager or the program is good.

5.11.3 **Quotations from the discussions on the consistency of change:**  
**Company Two**

- *I have seen the sustainability of change to be forever. Once you break that barrier it becomes sustainable. Participant 12*
- *In this instance I have seen no regress. Internal empowerment took place. Participant 8*
- *Going forward the client was still faced with major challenges and if she did not receive help that that point she would have had a major breakdown. Participant 5*
- *The person had a good experience after two – three sessions. The person had consistent change. Participant 11*
- *There had been consistence and the person's performance was taken up a notch. The insight the person obtained cannot be abandoned. Participant 3*
- *In this case I felt the person started losing it again. I am talking to the person again. Participant 6*
- *In the case I referred it was negative as the person never believed she had a problem in the first place. Participant 4*
- *Consistency of change depends on the person and the situation. Participant 10*
- *Consistency of change depends on the support the person receives. Participant 9*

#### 5.11.4 **Interpretation of data on consistency of change: Company Two**

Participants from this company seems to share the views of those from the first company to a large extend. They are generally of the opinion that employees who are able to make positive changes to how they deal with personal problems are able to sustain these changes. Participants 11, 8 and 12 share the view that when an individual develop insight, they break the barriers to their own limitations and as a result, changes of a more permanent nature takes place.

Participants 4 and 6 experienced that the referral did not yield positive change for the troubled employees. As is the view of participants from the first company, they are of the opinion that the lack of success is as a result of the employees' levels of motivation as well as the situation they find themselves in and not a weakness in the program itself.

#### 5.11.5 **Theory regarding the consistency of change**

Wright, (2008) reiterated that the short term solution focussed model in itself is a positive and goal directed approach intended to make a difference on a long term basis. The ability of the therapist plays a paramount role in this regard. Some of the important elements in the approach that can be highlighted are the fact that it is solution focused rather than problem focused as is the case with the more traditional approaches. As a result, people are empowered over a shorter period of time. Some people are generally more ready for change than others. However when employees has been formally referred and stand a chance to lose their job, they feel bad and are often more ready for change. The empathy reflected by the therapist can contribute to more sustainable change. Some problems can effectively be addressed through the solution focused approach while some problems need a longer-term intervention.

Kgalema, (2008) is of the impression that sustainability in change is made possible by the creation of insight that allows the employee to understand themselves and

their work environment better and the realisation that personal issues is spilling over to the workplace. The existence of the program creates a sense of emotional security and trust that the workplace has put in place a program to take care of them.

Movuka, (2008) she also reiterates to a large extent the reflections of the above practitioners. She focused extensively on the role and skills of the therapist, the ability to hold the boundary between self and the client, ability to encourage them, reflect on their progress and explore their ability to deal with future relapses. Exploration of the learning for the client throughout their experience, to help them recognise what got them to a better space, thus giving them a tool to hold on to, is an essential skill of the solution focused therapist to ensure sustainability. She is also of the impression that the readiness and determination of the client to maintain changed behaviour plays a significant role.

Reflections from the three practitioners interviewed ties in closely with the existing literature referred to in this report. It reiterates the fact that the counselling approach is scientifically grounded and thus able to facilitate sustainable change.

#### 5.11.6 **Conclusions regarding the consistency of change**

The findings of this research project indicate a view that changes taking place through EAP therapeutic intervention shows a high level of consistency. In the cases where changes were not sustainable, participants had the view that it was individual failures rather than program failures. Due to the structure of EAP's, the solution-focused brief therapy is the intervention of choice. The views of practitioners in the field correlate with the available literature, indicating that this intervention and the structure of the EAP's is geared towards a strength based approach and can effectively address many personal challenges.

## 5.12 **Qualitative Comparative Analysis:**

The researcher included this reflective section as it creates the opportunity to compare the views as shared by two different groups of participants from two different companies in two different provinces in South Africa. The only similarities between these two groups of people are:

- They made use of the same vendor company for their EAP/EWP service.
- The individuals in both groups are responsible for performance management of subordinates.
- They have used the program from both a subjective (experience value) point as an objective point (not direct recipients of the clinical service for the purpose of this study).

The researcher will highlight the themes used for this discussion and briefly highlight the similarities as it presented itself in the study:

### 5.12.1 **Supervisory training:**

Both groups of supervisors/line managers highlighted a lack of regular referral agent training and where it has been part of a broader Industrial Relations training program, some individuals within both groups were of the opinion that it takes away the significance of this developmental aspect. The view that the training should include elements helping managers understand the presentation of relevant mental health problems, why and how it present itself in the workplace and a reasonable understanding of recovery processes, creates opportunity. This study highlighted that this group of employees (line managers and supervisors) have a wealth of experience due to their positioning in the organisation. The Wellbeing Industry will thus benefit by developing a designated focus on them as the interface between the program and the employee population in general.

#### 5.12.2 **Progressive discipline:**

The groups from both companies presented a sound knowledge about their company's progressive disciplinary processes. Interestingly individuals from both companies varied in how they define the relationship between the disciplinary process and referral of employees into the program. Both groups do not relate to a specific stage in the disciplinary process when a formal referral will take place, and referrals generally take place at any stage in the process.

#### 5.12.3 **Indicators of decline in work performance:**

Both groups of participants could relate to specific workplace indicators. Labelling of these indicators is generally guided by the nature of the industry but all seems to have a significant impact on service delivery, financial bottom-line of the company and the functioning of work teams.

#### 5.12.4 **The referral process:**

Both groups of participants are of the impression that the referral process is mainly guided by the nature of the problem. Within both groups there are differences in opinion, with some individuals being of the impression that the referral into the program can replace or revert the disciplinary process, and others who regard the two processes as running concurrently.

#### 5.12.5 **Documentation:**

Despite the fact that Industrial Relations processes should by its nature be well documented, there seems to be a lack of consistency within both groups of participants regarding the importance of documentation of performance problems. Documentation styles is also not standardised and differs within participant groups.



#### 5.12.6 **Financial implication:**

For both groups of participants the financial implication of performance challenges is huge. Generally these cost factors is grouped in:

- Staff costs
- Cost of service failure
- Reputational costs
- Penalties, and
- Direct accidents / mistakes

#### 5.12.7 **Social impact:**

Both groups of participants are of the opinion that employee personal problems impact significantly on work teams and if not addressed, create a compromised image of the effectiveness of management. There is also a consistency in views shared that employees who participated in their EAP shows improved social skills.

#### 5.12.8 **Observed improvement in performance after participation in the EAP:**

Participants from both companies have expectations of improvement when they refer employees into their company EAP/EWP. Both these groups have generally observed positive change in individuals who participated in the program. Of further interest is the fact that participants from both companies are of the opinion that the failure to respond to the therapeutic intervention has been due to a lack of personal commitment rather than a failure of the program. Participants generally understand the importance of confidentiality and the need for effective communication/feedback has been raised in both groups at this backdrop.

Generally, both groups of participants hold the views that change is consistent for the majority of referred employees. Reference is made to the ability to break personal barriers and develop real insight. These individuals often become trusted resources to the company.

### 5.13 TESTING FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

The researcher utilized Guba's model from Krefling (1990:221) to test the information for trustworthiness. Guba's model focuses on four elements of trustworthiness and they are, truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

- *Truth-value / Credibility* focuses on whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants and context. Truth-value was established through triangulation of data sources, in this instance groups of individual interviews with line managers/ referral agents from two different corporate clients. The semi-structured nature of the interview schedule allowed for the same areas being investigated with all participants.
- *Applicability / Transferability* refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other context and settings or with other groups. In this instance it can be tested by comparison of the characteristics of the participants to the biographical information available. All participants are line managers directly responsible for the performance of work teams in their organizations. The consistency of data between the two sets of participants also contributes to the concept of applicability. The foregoing section (5.11) reflects consistency of data for the two groups of participants in all the areas being explored.
- *Consistency / Dependability* considers whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context. This study utilised different data collection methods and chapter six deals with the process of triangulation of these data-sources. The study further duplicated the three main data collection methods with two corporate clients, thus contributing to the dependability testing of the data. This process thus supports the view of

Krefling (1990:221), suggesting that a stepwise replication technique must be build into the design of a qualitative study to enhance dependability. One of the weaknesses of this study is that very limited statistical information has been received from the second corporate client as the majority of the respondents were not comfortable to give their permission to do so.

- *Neutrality / Confirmability* refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the participants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations and perceptions. In this instance the researcher do not have control over the impact of other programs operating within the two corporate companies and how these impact on employee performance. The triangulation of data sources (two sets of participants from different companies with similar characteristics) however confirms viewpoints of the impact of personal problems of employees on organisational bottom-line and the ability of the EAP/EWP to make a positive contribution.

#### 5.14 **Conclusions:**

The qualitative component of this study resulted in a rich exploration of the experience of line managers who use the company EAP/EWP as a tool in their performance management process. The interviews highlighted a need for a designated training focus for managers. The view has been highlighted that a lack of training often results in the incorrect use of the program, as well as unrealistic expectations. There is also a viewpoint that the lack of a basic mental health understanding contributes to insensitive behaviour and attitudes amongst line managers.

The value-add potential of the program has been raised strongly by both groups of participants and they were able to refer to many examples to support this view. This view is particularly important when measured against the potential risks of lower performance as highlighted by both groups.

The consistency of viewpoints of both groups of participants also serves to strengthen the value of the information gathered through this part of the study.

The following chapter will focus on the return on investment calculation of data as well as triangulation of different data-gathering methods. It also includes the findings of previous similar studies, thus using the literature study as a fourth set of data-collection /data-validation.

## CHAPTER 6

### TRIANGULATION OF DIFFERENT DATA SOURCES

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this research project a quantitative-descriptive (survey) design is used and data were collected through a combination of **questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and analysis of statistical data**. The literature review also reflects on different studies in the international arena indicating a positive return on investment for EAP's. The researcher uses triangulation as an approach within this study and the infusion takes place at the point of data collection. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection from different research populations using the EAP allows for the generation of information from different role-players in the program. Data is gathered from both subjective and objective sources. Creswell (1994:7) is of the impression that triangulation uses an assumption that any bias inherent in any particular data source and research approach can be neutralised when used in conjunction with other data sources, researchers and research approaches. His view is supported by authors like LaSala (1997:55) who indicate that the credibility of client satisfaction surveys can be strengthened through the use of multiple data sources. Creswell further indicates that triangulation in its most common form:

- Seeks convergence of a study's results.
- Is complementary, in that overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon may emerge (peeling off layers).
- Can be used developmentally, wherein the first research approach is used sequentially to help inform the second approach.
- May provide contradictions of the results between the two research approaches and may provide a fresh perspective, and
- Adds breadth and depth to a single research study.

The researcher in this instance used data triangulation. According to De Vos (2005:362) this refers to more than one data source within a single study, in this instance the use of interviews, archival materials and semi-structured interviews. The researcher made use of the dominant-less-dominant design of triangulation as described by Creswell in De Vos. As indicated in section 1.6 of this report, the study also has elements of a mixed-model approach. Although programme evaluation as a comprehensive study lends itself to the two-phase model because it can accommodate a qualitative evaluability assessment leading to a more sophisticated quantitative impact evaluation, this study looks at the latter part (impact study) of evaluative studies mainly. The intended structure was planned around an essentially quantitative study based on testing a theory with a small qualitative interview component in the data collection phase. What transpired is a study consisting of all the intended parts but with the qualitative component generating a significant amount of information that not only reflect consistency with data generated through the quantitative measures but also generate up to date information on the industrial risks of compromised work performance. Although qualitative research in the context of return on investment studies will continue to be frowned upon, in this study it shows itself as having the potential to generate a rich source of opinions and thoughts that cannot be detected through a quantitative exercise. Noteworthy are also the striking similarities in thoughts and opinions of participants from the same company and also between participants from the two different companies.

De Vos (2005:370) is of the impression that different phases of program evaluation are more aligned to either of the two research approaches and that cost-effectiveness and cost benefit analysis is generally geared towards the quantitative approach. The therapist in this study however in this study uses triangulation of the two approaches. This study started off with the Dominant-Less Dominant Model where the quantitative component is presented as the dominant approach. During the data collection process the information obtained from the qualitative component of the study proved to be of significant value and the researcher is of the impression that it serves as an important voice for the experience of middle to senior management of the contribution of the EAP/EWP to the company bottom line.

This research study thus also leans towards a Mixed-Model style and within the data collection and data analysis phases, the data from both approaches are presented for its informative significance and correlative value.

This chapter focuses on the comparison of the data and identifies areas of strong correlation and well as areas where the correlation of data is not as strong as anticipated.

The comparison of data will be graphically illustrated and is a combination of four sources, namely the employee questionnaires, the interviews with referral agents, statistical analysis and a literature review. The chapter will also cover a brief description of the first three sources which entailed active data-gathering in this study.

The researcher will first give an illustration of the statistical data received from company one. Unfortunately, the permission received from respondents from company two did not allow for effective use of this medium as data-source. However, the researcher is of the impression that sufficient data has been generated to indicate the value-add of the program.

## 6.2 RETURN ON INVESTMENT CALCULATION ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE: STATISTICAL DATA – COMPANY ONE

### Absenteeism Indicators

Respondent	Days absent 2007 (prior intervention)	Days absent 2008 (post intervention)	Estimate cost difference per year for absenteeism	ROI per Absenteeism savings
1	17	2	R4095	R15.5 per R1 spend
2	1	3	R550 (increase)	No savings
3	26	3	R6325	R23.16 per R1 spend
Respondent	Days absent 2007 (prior intervention)	Days absent 2008 (post intervention)	Estimate cost difference per year for absenteeism	ROI per absenteeism savings
4	12	0	R3300	R12.05 per R1 spend
5	30	10	R5430	R20.56 per R1 spend
6	1	0	R273	R1.03 per R1 spend
7	7	0	R1911	R7 per R1 spend
8	26	2	R6552	R23.73 per R1 spend
9	2	18	R4368(increase)	No savings
10	7	6	R273	R1 per R1 spend (no savings)
11	3	0	R819	R3 per R1 spend
12	4	5	R273(increase)	No savings
13	30	27	R7371	R27 per R1 spend
14	25	1	R6552	R24 per R1 spend
15	1	2	R273(increase)	No savings
16	23	3	R5460	R20 per R1 spend
17	16	9	R1943	R7.11 per R1 spend
18	9	9		No savings



19	40	14	R7098	R26 per R1 spend
20	11	2	R2457	R9 per R1 spend
Return on investment calculation as per individual absenteeism records:				R14.68 <b>saving</b> per every rand spend ( <i>where <b>absenteeism decreased</b></i> )

(Table 6.1: Statistical Data focusing on Absenteeism : Company One)

### Disciplinary actions

Respondent	Disciplinary action 2007 (prior intervention)	Disciplinary action 2008 (post intervention)	Estimate cost difference per year for one disciplinary action (3hrs overall per person [employee/line manager & HR officer])
1	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
2	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
3	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
4	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
5	None	None	None
6	Yes	Yes	None
7	None	None	None
8	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend

9	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
10	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
11	None	None	None
12	Yes	None	R8.30 per R1 spend
13	None	None	None
14	Yes	Yes	None
15	Yes	Yes	None
16	Yes	Yes	None
17	No	No	None
18	Yes	Yes	None
19	Yes	No	R8.30 per R1 spend
20	No	No	None

(Table 6.2: Statistical Data focusing on Disciplinarys : Company One)

### 6.2.1 Discussion of data

Statistical data has been received for 69% of the respondents from Company One and none from Company Two. The above ROI calculations are for individual performance differences only and are not measured against the overall program costs. It is however measured against the annual fee of R22 per person.

An increase of absenteeism was present for three of the respondents while one respondent maintained the same amount of absenteeism for the two periods reflected. Only one of these respondents showed a significant increase in absenteeism. The study did not cover an investigation to the nature of this absenteeism. Two other respondents showed a minimal decrease. Thirteen of the respondents showed a decrease in absenteeism and for this group of employees that relates to a decrease of seventy five days between the periods 2007 and 2008.

With an average daily rate of R273, this saving for this limited group of employees relates to a saving of R60 128, However the cost of absenteeism for the few people who showed an increase were R5191,00 and thus reduced the overall savings to R54 937. The above costs only refer to the visible cost of paying someone for work not done. It is not calculating the salient costs attached to salaries of employees and line managers who have to stand in for the absent worker.

For the employee who shows the greatest reduction in absenteeism the savings reflects R7371 vs. R168 per year (@R14 per person) or R264 (@ R22 per person). The return on investment on one variable only is thus significant. Even in the cases where there has been an increase in absenteeism in the second period, there has been a decrease in disciplinary procedures, thus showing a saving in another variable. For disciplinary action to take place, taking in consideration the involvement of three staff members, namely the employee, direct manager/supervisor and HR officer, the hourly rate of each staff member calculated against the hours spend on the activity, indicates a cost on activities not directly linked to company production. At an average daily rate of R273 per person multiplied by three hours' involvement (preparation, paperwork plus actual session(s), the cost of one disciplinary can be estimated to R2 457. This is a very conservative calculation as the hourly rate of line managers and HR officers may vary from that of the employee and the actual time spend can be significantly higher.

### **6.3 Return on Investment Value Calculation for Company One**

Client company one provided the most comprehensive amount of information related to this study. A significant amount of employees gave permission for statistical performance related information to be made available and as a result a three-tire comparison is possible. Following is an attempt to calculate the overall return on investment value of the EAP for this company for the period.

- Company spend about R1m annually on their entire EAP program: This includes:

- An on-site clinic with medical and counselling facilities.
  - 24 hr call centre access.
  - Corporate Wellbeing Consultation services
  - A 1-8 session model for psycho-social counselling (the main focus on intervention for this study).
  - Legal and financial advice services.
  - HIV/AIDS work-base program.
  - A management referral and consultation support program.
- The company success indicators on EAP participation indicated 78% success rate.
  - 65% of the respondents for this research who used the programme over that period indicated that their performance were affected by their personal problems.
- The average income (as per respondents to this study) is R6000 per month = R72 000 annually.
  - International benchmarks indicate that organizations loose 28 – 35% of a troubled employee's income due to lower productivity.
    - R72 000 divided by 28% = R20 160 (lower limit loss)
    - R72 000 divided by 35% = R 25 200 (higher limit loss)
  - Savings to company.
    - R20 169 x 1060 = R21 379140 @ 28% productivity loss
    - 25 200 x 1060 = R26 172000 @ 35% productivity loss
  - ROI @ 28% productivity loss = R2.03 for every R1 spend
  - ROI @ 35% productivity loss = R2.51 for every R1 spend

#### 6.4 **Return on Investment Value Calculation for Company Two**

Client Company Two provided less comprehensive information related to individual employee performance recorded. Only three employees gave permission for statistical performance related information to be made available, and as a result the

data would not have been significant. Following is an attempt to calculate the overall return on investment value of the EAP for this company according to overall program performance for the period.

- Company spent about R2 970 000 annually on their entire EAP program:  
This includes:
  - An on-site clinic with medical and counselling facilities.
  - 24 hr call centre access.
  - Corporate Wellbeing Consultation services .
  - A 1-8 session model for psycho-social counselling (the main focus on intervention for this study.
  - Legal and financial advice services.
  - HIV/AIDS work-base program.
  - A management referral and consultation support program.
  
- The company success indicators on EAP participation indicated 78% success rate.
- 72% of the respondents for this research who used the programme over that period indicated that their performance were affected by their personal problems.
- The average income (as per respondents to this study) is R10 053.00 per month = R120 636 annually.
- International benchmarks indicate that organizations loose 28 – 35% of a troubled employee's income due to lower productivity.
  - R120 636 divided by 28% = R33 778 (lower limit loss)
  - R120 636 divided by 35% = R 42 222.60 (higher limit loss)
- Savings to company at 72% success rate:
  - R33 778 x 1687 = R56 983486 @ 28% productivity loss
  - R42 222.60 x 1687 = R71 295267 @ 35% productivity loss
- ROI @ 28% productivity loss = R1.81 for every R1 spend
- ROI @ 35% productivity loss = R2.30 for every R1 spend

## 6.5 Triangulation of data sources illustrating strong correlations

### **Relationships: personal and social**

*Questionnaires:* Seventy one percent (71%) of respondents in Company One indicated that participation in the programme showed improvement in this area. Forty two percent (43%) of respondents in Company Two indicated similar results (42% of this company indicated that their relationships were never affected).

*Interviews:* Participants overwhelmingly indicated that personal problems affected employee social relationships. Isolation from the team, increased conflict, avoidance of social gatherings and increased emotional sensitivity has been identified. There is also a perception that employees show a significant improvement after participation in the program.

*Statistical analysis:* This area could not be verified.

*Theoretical comparatives:* Stout and Mc Cullough (1994:2) is of the opinion that relational problems respond well to Solution Focused Brief intervention, the therapeutic model used within the EAP field.

### **Observed decrease in work performance before participation and observed improvement after participation**

*Questionnaires:* Sixty five percent of respondents in Company One indicated that their personal problems affected their performance at work. For Company Two the result was even more significant with 72% of respondents indicating that their performance was affected. Thirty five percent of respondents in Company One also reported an increase in their absenteeism at work while 86% of respondents from Company Two indicated that their attendance was negatively affected. There has been a significant reporting of improvement after participation in the programme for both companies with 84% of respondents from Company One and 71% of respondents from Company Two reporting improvement.

*Interviews:* Participants From both companies were able to identify very tangible indicators showing a decline in employee work performance. These ranges from missing defects, absenteeism and excessive sick leave, late coming and leaving work early, lack of concentration, not meeting operational requirements, negative

attitude impacting on teams and customer service thus resulting in an increase in complaints. The financial implication of this is significant ranging from team leaders/supervisors having to stand in for absent workers, thus not being able to concentrate on their supervisory role effectively, spending time on staff counselling and disciplinaries. Faults affecting delivery of products (up to R300 000 per final products), damage to parts ranging from R800 – R60 000, mistakes on life cover pay-outs that can result in millions of rands losses, penalties from regulatory bodies and from missing deadlines, reputational damage and increase in labour costs has been cited by participants. Participants from both companies are of the impression that there has been visible improvement in performance after participation in the programme, increased levels of responsibility and team relationships. Employees who recovered successfully also seem to be more in tune with the needs of others and can handle increased levels of responsibility.

*Statistical analysis:* Statistical data received for company 1 indicated a reduction in absenteeism of 175 days (291 days absent before participation reduced to 116 days after). While this data was not retrieved for Company Two, because too few respondents gave permission, the data received via the questionnaires and interviews shows a significant correlation.

*Theoretical comparatives:* Shear (1995:21) found in a study at Burlington Northern that amongst other indicators that supervisory job performance rating increased for employees who used the EAP. The same study showed a decrease in absenteeism, accidents/injuries, medical costs and worker compensation. Collins (1998) in Csiernik 2004:26 in a study at Chevron Corporation also found that there has been a reduction in accidents, improvement in productivity and staff retention for employees who participated in the EAP.

### **Performance counselling and disciplinary action**

*Questionnaires:* In Company One 32% of respondents indicated that they have undergone performance counselling before participation in the EAP while 42% were disciplined. For Company Two the figure was equally significant with 57% indicating performance counselling and 25% had disciplinaries.

*Statistical analysis:* From the statistical data available for Company One 70 % of the respondents who gave permission for this data to be made available had

disciplinaries before participation in the programme. Post intervention the number has been reduced to 20%.

### **General areas of improvement**

*Questionnaires:* Respondents from Company One indicated significant improvement in the following areas: personal relationships (78%), work relationships (77%) work performance (84%), attendance (77%), self-esteem (74%) and coping skills (67%). For Company Two improvements were in personal relationships (100%), work relationships (86%), work performance (72%), self esteem (58%) and coping skills (100%)

*Interviews:* Participants from both companies are of the impression that participation of troubled employees in the EAP yielded positive results for the majority of people. They have witnessed positive changes in performance, time keeping, attendance. Attitude, approach to life, personal empowerment, ability to communicate and quality of life of most of the employees.

*Theoretical comparatives:* The Editorial Board (1993) in Csiernik 2004:26 indicated that the Mc Douglas study in the United States showed an improvement in attendance, retention rates and medical costs for EAP participants. Shear (1995:21) reflected on studies showing an improvement in attendance, accidents and injuries, performance and medical costs. Stephenson and Bingaman (1999) in Csiernik 2004:26 with a study at the United States Postal Services shows a benefit to costs ratio in the first year of 1.27 : 1 and 7.21: 1 in year five of the programme.

### **6.6 Significance of triangulative comparisons**

This research study makes use of different comparative analytical processes.

#### **Comparisons are drawn between the following sets of data:**

- Triangulation of data-sources using the dominant-less dominant model with the quantitative component being set out to be the dominant and the qualitative component being the less dominant component. The quantitative process is presented through questionnaires and statistical analysis while the qualitative process is presented through semi-structured interviews. As



the study unfolded, the qualitative information proved to have more significance than what was originally anticipated and eventually elements of a mixed-model approach unfolded. Triangulation at this level has to a large extent neutralised the possible bias inherent in any particular data source.

- Comparative analysis also happens between the two corporate companies utilised in this study. Both the qualitative and the quantitative information are compared for its similarities and its lack of similarities in trends.
- The final set of comparative analysis is presented in this chapter and investigates the comparisons of data between the two quantitative strategies (questionnaires and statistical analysis), the qualitative strategy (semi-structured interviews) and the literature study (reflecting on previous studies yielding similar results).

The above sets of analysis have shown significant correlations, thus contributing to the credibility of the data being generated. Correlation of data has been significant in the following areas:

- **Between data sources:**

- Relational problems within a personal and social context. Both the questionnaire and interview sections have shown that personal problems impact on relationships and those individuals, who participated in their company EAP/EWP's have improved significantly in this area. This data correlates with available literature. Within Company Two the quantitative data however did not reflect a strong impact on relationships while the qualitative data for the same company did reflect a strong view on this.
- A decrease in performance when experiencing personal problems is an area with cost implications for companies and has been cited by the majority of respondents in the quantitative component of the study as well as participants in the qualitative component. The literature review also reflects on different studies and views that personal problems can potentially affect employee work performance.
- Improvement in work performance after participation in the program is another area where there is a strong correlation in the information generated

through questionnaires, statistical analysis, interviews and the literature reviewed. From a cost savings point of view this is an encouraging set of information, reflecting on a positive spin-off for workplaces if employees choose to address their personal problems.

- A strong correlation also exists between the area of performance counselling and disciplinary action from the quantitative component of the study (questionnaires and statistical analysis) as well as the qualitative component. Once again there is a strong indication that addressing personal problems have a positive spin-off on this key performance indicator.
- The general areas of improvement referring to personal and work relationships, work performance and skills development also shows a positive correlation between all data sources (questionnaires, interviews, statistical analysis and the literature review).

- **Between company correlation:**

- Quantitative:
  - The impact of personal problems on work performance is a key area with cost implications for any company. The data generated from the two different companies shows a strong correlation with 72% of the respondents in Company One being of the impression that personal problems impacted negatively on their work performance compared to 65% of the respondents in Company Two holding a similar view.
  - Improvement in work performance after participation in the company EAP/EWP also shows a positive correlation with 84% of respondents from Company One indicating that their performance improved after participation compared to 70% of respondents from Company Two.
  - Seventy four percent (74%) of respondents from Company One indicated that they were undergoing performance management of disciplinary action before participation in the program compared to 71% of the respondents from Company Two.
  - Overall perceived benefits from participation in the program that shows a positive correlation between the responses from the two companies are:

- Personal relationships (78% improvement for Company One and 100% improvement for Company Two).
- Work relationships (77% improvement for Company One and 86% for Company Two).
- Work performance (84% for Company One and 72% for Company Two).
- Self-image shows a 74% improvement for Company One and 58% improvement for Company Two.
- Coping skills shows a 67% improvement for Company One and a 100% improvement for Company Two.

The majority of the above indicators have cost implications for corporate companies and are measurable. The strong correlation between data from the two different companies can further be seen as adding truth value to the findings. These findings also correlate with information gathered through the literature review. The improvement in self-image and coping skills also contribute to an understanding why there are a general perception amongst participants in the qualitative component of this study that change is mostly consistent. *Improvement in these areas refers to a deeper level of insight-development for the individual involved and as a result the person tends to hold on to these changes long after the intervention.*

○ **Qualitative:**

- Within the qualitative component of this study the participants from both companies held very similar views on all themes identified. The themes could be classified under three broad areas, namely opportunities for program development through themes like *supervisory training, progressive discipline, the referral process and documentation of decline in performance*, cost implications through themes like *indicators of decline in work performance, financial implications, social impact and observed improvement after participation in the EAP/EWP* and finally *consistency of changes that took place through the intervention.*

The consistency of viewpoints from these two groups of participants and the amount of information being generated through this part of the study creates a view that a qualitative exploration of the value of an EAP/EWP may be as useful in a cost benefit analysis as what a quantitative exercise would be. Supervisors and line managers using the program as part of their performance management strategy, holds the value of an outside observer as well as a beneficiary of the program. Their contribution as a data source to this study holds enough significance as an independent resource.

### 6.7 **Conclusion:**

The data generated through different sources for this study has shown significant similarities. The researcher is of the impression that the correlation of views as described above is as important to this study than the actual figure in savings. The return on investment figures as illustrated in the report also confirms the hypothesis, claiming that participation in the EAP result in improvement in their psychosocial problems, thus improving their work performance. The next chapter will look at recommendations that will assist future studies to become more prevalent in the industry rather than just the academic field.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

This study started off with an intention to measure the rand/cent savings a company receives from employees' improved performance after making use of their EAP/EWP to address their personal problems. The initial intention was also to build a qualitative data-source into the study as a **lesser** component to the overall exercise. As this study unfolded, the content and amount of information being generated through the qualitative component presented itself as more than having a comparative function against the quantitative constituent of this study. It has also presented itself as an independent unit, creating an entry point into the thought processes, needs and views of line manager and supervisors as objective beneficiaries of this program. The triangulation of different and inter-company data sources allows for an analysis of data generated through different methodologies within the same organisation, as well as similar methodologies within different organisations. This chapter concludes the findings of this research and offer recommendations for future return on investment studies.

#### 7.2 Conclusions

Hudson in De Vos (2005:376) argues that despite the great interest in return on investment studies, it continues to be difficult to accomplish in the caring professions and will remain like this until people can understand and use the fairly simple concept of measured change (see section 1.8.3 of this report). Within both the quantitative and qualitative approaches used in this study, change in relationships (personal and work-related), change in performance indicators and essential life skills to facilitate inner transformation has been reported.

The **qualitative** data also overwhelmingly reflected a negative impact of employee personal problems on work teams and how it challenges the perceived effectiveness

of line managers. The statistical data received from Company One also provided valuable confirming information focusing on the changes in absenteeism and staff counselling and disciplinary patterns. The absence of similar data from the second company contributes to the argument that data management significantly enhance the effectiveness of programme evaluation.

Within both companies, the majority of respondents were of the opinion their work performance were negatively affected by their personal problems. There is a difference in the opinions whether this performance necessarily include absenteeism patterns and Company Two presented a stronger impact on attendance than is the case in Company One. Respondents from Company Two were generally of the opinion that their personal problems did not have an adverse effect on their personal relationships, however they do report an improvement in these relationships after participation in the program. One of the weaknesses of a study of this nature using employees who participated in the program as an essential population is the fact that those who left the company are not included in the measurement. As a result, it is possible that less-successful case studies are excluded from the measuring process. The self-reporting nature of this information remains a challenge. However, the general consistency of viewpoints amongst respondents from the same company as well as between the two different companies, to a large extend are able to neutralise the bias that can creep into this type of data generation.

The participants selected for the qualitative component of the study were also the line managers/supervisors responsible for the referral of the respondents into the EAP/EWP. As a result their views of changes in attitude and work performance added objectivity to the views as presented through the self-reporting component.

The **qualitative** data highlights some important issues. These are:

- There is a need for more consistent and comprehensive training amongst supervisors and line-managers as referral agents of this program. Participants were generally clear about the difference between their role and that of the clinical profession providing serviced in the program. However, they expressed a need to not only understand how to use the program, but also have an

understanding of mental health issues as well as a realistic understanding of how change present itself after therapeutic intervention and how they can best support these individuals. A question posed at the formal presentation of this report on 23 April 2009 opened the debate for alternative forms of management training that will enhance their participation. This view also considers the possibility that failure to attend training plays as much a role as a lack of training offered.

- Participants generally had a positive view of the impact of the programme and were consistent in their views that where employees were not able to make or sustain positive change, that this was due to personal dynamics rather than a failure of the program. As a result the manner in which the intervention is offered is seen as being sufficient.
- Participants in this part of the study also present the employee population closest to monitoring of workplace productivity. As a result, their views on troubled employees' interference in production and the resulting financial implication are of significant value to this study. These costs implications are visible, however it is not always measured against the presentation of personal problems in the workplace. The consistency of viewpoints amongst participants from both companies adds further value to the view on the financial and reputational risks of lower employee performance and opens a debate on the relationship between the company EAP and industry-related risk management strategies.
- Participants in this component of the study presented different and sometimes conflicting views about the process leading to a referral of troubled employees into the programme. They presented equally different views on the importance of documentation. The lack of consistency in these areas further highlights the need for consistent and comprehensive management support through training and coaching programs.
- Participants from both companies' holds strong and positive views on the consistency of changes taking place in troubled employees after participation in

the program. These views are consistent with the notion that Solution Focused therapy, the model used in this program and in EAP models generally, is able to bring about long-lasting change in an active, involved and time-efficient way (McCullough-Vaillant 1994:1).

- There is also consistency in the views amongst participants on the impact of troubled employees on their teams. Team cohesion can be adversely affected and the ability of management to intervene are generally scrutinised under these circumstances.

The information generated from the three main data sources for this study, namely the questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews as well as the statistical data from company one correlates with the findings of the studies referred to in the literature review. While different variables are used in the different studies, there is a general indication that troubled employees who address their problems through constructive intervention (in these instances through the company-sponsored EAP/EWP), most often becomes valuable assets to their companies again, thus minimising the financial and reputational risks they pose when performance is negatively affected.

The next section provides recommendations applicable to data-management for future cost-benefit studies.

### 7.3 **Recommendations**

Employee Assistance Programmes, as well as more comprehensive Employee Wellbeing Programmes through their operations, generate vast amounts of data. This data varies from trends related to mental health, physical health, financial health, strengths and challenges of management teams, ext. While crystal reporting is a key function of any data management system in the EAP field, there remains an untapped potential to use the existing data for different analytical purposes including cost benefit / return on investment studies.



One of the challenges conducting a study of this nature for academic purposes, is the fact that it is lengthy, reliant on the permission from both vendor companies, corporate clients and the individuals who are part of the research population. Even when the relevant permission is received, the researcher(s) still have to be very cautious about conducting the study in a non-intrusive manner. One of the challenges of this particular study has been the fact that while the majority of respondents from one company were comfortable with statistical data being made available, respondents from the second company were not comfortable with this and as a result, this information was omitted for one set of respondents.

There is a general trend amongst vendor companies to provide corporate clients with quarterly reports, providing valuable information regarding utilisation, program activities, presenting physical and mental health trends and outcomes. Return on Investment information should ideally be part of these reporting structures rather than isolated studies conducted for academic or corporate purposes. This can be possible if the generation of data is structured to serve this purpose. The following recommendations can create the environment where studies of this nature can be made easier.

### 7.3.1 **Baseline Assessments**

All EAP and EWP contracts should include baseline assessments at the inception of the program. These assessments would provide profiles of employee health and wellbeing and how it translates into productivity indicators in the workplace. These assessment models should thus include individual and group assessment components as well as organizational trends like absenteeism trends, medical benefit utilisation trends, performance management trends, and ext.

### 7.3.2 **Individual Assessment Tools**

Individual assessment tools used at the pre-intervention phase should include targeted questions that allows for the exploration of contractually agreed upon performance

indicators. In 2007 the researcher looked at the assessment tools of two local and one international EAP vendors and found that assessment tools are generally not designed to generate return on investment data. Because of the clinical nature of the intervention, the focus is on the generation of clinical data with limited exploration on how it impacts on work performance indicators.

### 7.3.3 **Post Intervention Assessment Tools**

Post-intervention assessment tools should be part of any intervention and be designed to measure change in contractually agreed-upon indicators.

### 7.3.4 **Management Consultation Models**

Management consultation models should also include targeted assessment of performance indicators with pre and post intervention components. The data generated through these interactions can potentially be used independently in return on investment (ROI) studies or in conjunction with self-reporting data generated through individual assessment tools. It's strength as an independent data-source is seen through the consistency of viewpoints between line-managers from the two client companies used in this study.

The input from clinical service providers (not used in this study), can also be used as independent or complimentary data sources in ROI studies.

Access to statistical data for analytical purposes should be agreed upon at program inception. This data source is very objective but is also reliant on good record-keeping within the company. The qualitative data-generation in this study showed inconsistency in the views of line managers regarding the importance of record-keeping. For statistical data to be used effectively in a study of this nature, it is thus essential that record keeping systems be in place and adhered to by all relevant role players.

### 7.3.5 Programme Evaluation

Programme evaluation components with its relevant time-frames needs to be agreed upon at the point of inception. The IMPE (Integrated Model of Programme Evaluation) as discussed in De Vos (2005:368) provides a workable structure through which evaluation can take place. A needs assessment/baseline assessment provides a clear indication of the challenges prevalent in the company that needs to be addressed. It thus allows for targeted interventions as opposed to a “one size fits all” approach. An evaluability assessment of the program should also be done at the onset. This should be two-fold, namely:

- The architecture of the product, referring to the systems in place on the side of the vendor that enables evaluation. The data-management system operating on the side of the vendor is one such example.
- The data-management system / level of record-keeping on the side of the corporate client, including absenteeism and disciplinary action records. Access to these records for evaluation purposes should be agreed upon.

Utilisation evaluation is currently one of the areas of evaluation already included in quarterly reporting to corporate clients. Client satisfaction evaluation is also not a structurally difficult component but is often neglected due to time constraints. Components of impact evaluation is also included in current reporting and is usually presented in general terms like “problem areas improved”. It is only when this data is analysed in terms of its effect on work performance indicators and measured against program cost elements that cost-effectiveness evaluation takes place.

Access to statistical data for analytical purposes should be agreed upon at program inception. This data source is very objective but is also reliant on good record-keeping within the company. The qualitative data-generation in this study showed inconsistency in the views of line managers regarding the importance of record-keeping. For statistical data to be used effectively in a study of this nature, it is thus essential that record keeping systems be in place and adhered to by all relevant role players.

### 7.3.6 **Data Management System**

The design and maintenance of a good data-management system is thus crucial to the evaluation of an EAP program. Because a program of this nature intervenes on a very crucial area of human life its interventions can potentially be harmful if not monitored for effectiveness. It also operates in a business environment as a soft-skill intervention and as a result is vulnerable to be discarded during financial crunch times. An effective evaluation system build into the design of the program can ensure that defects be detected and addressed. It further allows for its purpose and impact to be communicated through a business orientated vocabulary, appropriate for boardroom discussions.

### 7.4 **Implication of this study for practice**

This study in essence highlights the importance of program evaluation for accountability and developmental purposes. The mental health intervention in the lives of vulnerable people through workplace programs like an EAP as well as in the broader social context where social workers plays a role needs to be evaluated on a regular basis. This is important because it is only through clinical supervision and program evaluation that mental health practitioners active in these fields can sustain accountability. The financial investors of programs of this nature will continue to ask whether programs operate in the manner it is intended to and whether the outcomes is desirable.

Difficulties encountered in this study highlights the importance of evaluability measures to be build into the design of each program. It emphasizes the need for EAP coordinators as well as social workers in the broader societal context to have program evaluation skills. The need for program accountability will not fade away, instead the demand for feedback of this nature will grow and in financial crunch-times it will become even more important for programs of this nature to proof its' value through impact analysis.