Chapter 1

General Orientation to the Study

1. Introduction

This study on an Employee Assistance Programme for the University of the North was initiated as a response to the shortage of employee assistance services at South African tertiary institutions, universities in particular. The research was conducted at the University of the North, which is situated in the Northern Province of South Africa. Universities are seen as centers of excellence, to an extent that people believe that employees of such institutions are not subjected to individual and social problems such as absenteeism, financial problems, substance abuse, and marital problems which negatively affect the work performance of employees.

This chapter is an outline of the research problem as well as the motivation for the study of the problem. The aims and objectives that have guided the investigation are covered too while the research methodology as well as the plan of the entire research project is discussed. In the area of research design, the investigator has spelled out the sampling frame and the sampling procedures employed in the execution of this task. The techniques for the collection of data as well as groups of respondents from whom data were obtained are also outlined in this chapter. The chapter closes with the definition of key concepts that are used in the study.

2. Motivation for the study

As a full-time lecturer at the University of the North, the researcher became aware of personal problems of employees at the university of the North.

The researcher had also observed that certain staff members, both academic and non-academic, were experiencing personal problems and very little if any is ever done to provide assistance to those who may have personal problems. The fact that a fair number of staff members have problems has serious negative academic consequences for the students in that such lecturers may miss classes, fail to give tests and even fail to mark tests and assignments. The failure to perform the above- mentioned tasks goes against the core business of the university which is to produce skilled and competent human resources for the country. Existing social and personal problems among non-academic staff also result in continued absence from work which disturbs the smooth functioning of the university as a system. This seems to be in line with Roman's (1984:73) observation that "employers face the problem of employee alcohol abuse, but do not have the indigenous means of dealing with such personnel".

Another reason for undertaking this study is that Employee Assistance Programme services fall within the realm of organisational development. This study could therefore make an invaluable contribution to the transformation discourse currently taking place in the South African tertiary institutions in general and the University of the North in particular.

Finally, the researcher was personally interested in the provision of social services to the employees as they spend a large percentage of their time at the work place. So the workplace has to provide social services to troubled employees. Franz's (1991:24) opinion is not different, "Universities need EAP's to help them meet the challenges of the 1990's and beyond".

3.   **Problem statement**

Harper's (1995 & 1996) survey of 93 South Africa's top 100 companies found that 45% of companies had an EAP in at least one of their operations. The provision of EAP services in the South African tertiary education institutions movement however, continues to be characterized by a lack of enthusiasm and optimism (Baxter ,1979; Thoreson and Hosakawa 1984; Dugan, 1989:98; Moagi 1994:17 and Molebatsi 1997).

In the United States of America the problem of employee assistance was deftly captured by the following statement, "while there has been a continuing expansion in university based EAPs, research on these programs is limited (Mermis 1989:22; Brunson, 1988:34). Most of the literature on university based EAPs is anecdotal and descriptive (Sullivan and Poverny 1992:3).

The demonstration project of the University of Missouri-Columbia, funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, has also shown the impossibility of a simple transfer of the industrial EAP model to academic settings (Roman 1984:36).

Roman (1984:38) also identified the following three problems in higher education:

- change in higher education has eventuated in a vast expansion of demand for higher education;
- technology has produced substantial differentiation within institutions of higher learning;
- colleges and universities have become more or less viewed within a productive framework.

The number of degrees awarded has become a criterion for organisational growth. At the same time, universities in particular have become producers of knowledge for technological advancement, most clearly demonstrated in colleges of engineering and agriculture and in schools of medicine and business administration.

Whereas most South African tertiary institutions do not have an EAP, Mermis (1990) as quoted by Grosch, Duffy and Hessink (1996:44) estimated that approximately 5% (200) of the colleges and universities in the United States have some type of EAP.

On the other hand, Harlacher and Goodman (1991: 31) maintain that a university setting offers the following traits that provide fertile ground for EAPs:
- a liberal atmosphere conducive to experimentation with non-traditional lifestyles;
- a positive view of alcohol and other drug use;

- work-based isolation, including low-level supervision and faculty visibility;
- subordinates who hold scholarly superiors in awe, and who tend to protect and enable the scholars' behaviour;
- the tenure system and minimal opportunity for advancement; and
- absence of objective performance standards.

Apart from these, research indicates that 10-20% of the total employee population in any corporation or institution are troubled employees (Storm, 1977; Weaver, 1979; Parker and Brody 1981; Miller, Shain and McClellan, 1998). About 5-10% of these employees have problems with substance abuse while another 5-10% have problems around relationships, finances, health and other related problems (Roberts-DeGennaro, 1989:11). Personal problems that afflict employees disturb productivity. Employee problems can manifest themselves in one or more of the following ways: absenteeism, tardiness, late coming, early departure from work, financial problems, and aggression at work.

It should thus be emphatically stated **the existence of social problems amongst employees of the University of the North necessitates the introduction of an employee assistance programme.**

The problem can thus be stated as a lack of EAP services in South African tertiary institutions, resulting in troubled employees' problems being unattended to and thus affecting their productivity and social functioning.

4. Aim of the study

The general aim of the study was to explore the need for a possible implementation of an EAP at the University of the North..

4.1 Objectives of the study

The study was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- to assess whether University of the North employees are comfortable with the changes taking place in higher education;
- to ascertain whether same employees are familiar and comfortable with the university's strategic mission;
- to explore communication patterns amongst and between different employee groups on campus;
- to conduct a needs assessment for an EAP and
- to provide guidelines for the design of the service;

5. Research Approach

The approach that was adopted in this study was the quantitative-qualitative approach. Leedy (1993) as quoted by De Vos (1998:15) attempted to distinguish between a quantitative and qualitative approach in research.

He identified qualitative research methods as dealing with data that are principally verbal and quantitative research methodologies as dealing with data that are principally numerical. Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997: 224-245) share Leedy's view. For them, quantitative approach is focussed on counting and statistically analysing data whereas qualitative research is concerned with describing the factors that are being studied.

The exposition by Leedy, and Sheafor et al appears simplistic. Mouton and Marais (1990:155-156) agree that the two terms are fairly confusing. For the latter authors, the quantitative approach entails an approach to research in the social sciences that is more formalised as well as more explicitly controlled, with a range that is more exactly defined and which, in terms of the methods used, is relatively close to the physical sciences. In contradistinction, qualitative approaches are those approaches in which the procedures are not as strictly formalised.

The quantitative-qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the population that was studied demonstrated heterogeneous characteristics that called for triangulation. The instruments for data collection used in the study were the questionnaire that was completed by the literate respondents while the unskilled employees of the university made their data available by means of focus groups.

- **Assumptions about the problem**

  The following assumptions about the problem can be made:
    - university employees, particularly academic staff are perceived to be immune from personal problems;
    - university employees are comfortable with the changes taking place in higher education;
    - university employees are familiar with the strategic plan of the university;
    - there is limited contact and communication between and among university employees;

    - the university does not have a mechanism to deal with employees' personal problems; and
    - there is a need for an Employee Assistance Programme at the University of the North.

7. Type of research

Barker (1987: 10) defines an applied research as a "systematic study in which the potential findings are to be used to solve immediate problems". The study that was undertaken was an applied study in that the findings may be utilised as guidelines to design an EAP for the University of the North.

8. Research design

According to (Babbie, 1998: 89) a research design addresses the planning of scientific inquiry-designing a strategy for finding out something. Thyer (1993:94) in turn viewed a research design as a blueprint or detailed plan on how a specific study is to be conducted.

The research design that was used in this study was the exploratory-descriptive design. This design was selected because very little research on EAPs was done at South African Universities. The purpose of an exploratory study is to gain new insights into a specific phenomenon (Fouche and DeVos, 1998:124). On the other hand, descriptive designs are chosen if "less is already known, (so) our questions will be of a general descriptive nature" (Grinnel, 1998:221). The nature of this study justified the combination of these designs. Researchers can select any one or any combination of research designs for their particular purpose, regardless of where the designs fit into any particular scheme. The classifications are of mainly academic and educational interest with a view to clear conceptualization (Fouche and DeVos 1998:123).

Secondly, there is inadequate knowledge in South Africa about EAPs at universities and while the knowledge in South Africa about EAPs at universities is scarce, the data that were yielded by this study are descriptive in nature. This study describes the kind of problems that are experienced by employees of the University of the North, what interventions are undertaken and whether an EAP would be a viable alternative to what already exist.

9. Research procedure and strategy

The researcher started with a literature study on Employee Assistance Programmes at universities. Literature on EAPs at universities was obtained from journals, books and the Internet. Completed theses and dissertations as well as related works in the area of Employee Assistance Programmes were obtained from the National Research Foundation. The information service of the University of Pretoria was also utilised.

The literature study was followed by an empirical study in which the researcher designed a questionnaire that was distributed by the researcher to the employees of the University of the North. Literature on needs assessment for Employee Assistance Programmes was utilised to identify key variables for the study and these were used in the design of the instrument (Minelli, Griffin, Davenport, DeBruin and Campbell, 2001:30-32; Minelli et al, 1998:27-28; Collins and Perry-Jones, 2000:769-794; Semenuk, 1996:20-33; Roberts-DeGennaro, 1989: 11-24; Harlacher and Goodman,1991: 20-33; Grosch, Duffy and Hessink, 1996: 43-57; Sullivan and Poverny, 1992: 1-11 and, Balgopal and Stollak, 1992:101-114). Apart from that, the researcher consulted academics and researchers in Employee Assistance Programmes at the University of Pittttsburgh - School of Social Work (Dr Hide Yamatani and Ms Carolyn Maue) who provided expert advise on key criteria in the needs assessment for an Employee Assistance Programme.

The questions on the instrument focussed on whether it was necessary for the University of the North to implement an Employee Assistance Programme for the institution. This information was obtained by distributing the questionnaire to the following groups of people on campus:

- top management (every member's opinion was solicited since this was the smallest group on campus and therefore no sampling procedure took place);
- deans and deputy deans of faculties (there were eight faculties at the time of the study and eight deans and their deputies participated in this study);
- heads of academic departments (academic departments were replaced by disciplines which constitute a school);
- unskilled workers (focus groups were convened) and
- the academic staff as well as the administrative staff members.

Focus group sessions were conducted with the unskilled staff of the university because they did not have adequate literacy skills to complete the questionnaire. The same strategy that was used in the questionnaire design for the quantitative study was used to create an instrument for the focus groups. The instrument was largely based on literature and expert advise from colleagues at the University of Pittsburg School of Social Work.

9.1 Literature study

South African literature on occupational social work and Employee Assistance Programmes at universities and colleges is very scarce. As a result the researcher had to rely to a large extent on literature from the United States of America where the foundations and pioneer occupational social work and employee assistance programs at universities and colleges were first recorded. The academic information service of the University of Pretoria was extremely helpful in accessing material from other South African libraries although most of the literature dates back to the 1980s.

9.2 Consultation with experts

The researcher consulted the following individuals:

Ms E.N. Molebatsi . She was employed by the Center for Human Development as an employee assistance coordinator and she completed a master's dissertation that investigated the possibility of introducing an EAP at the University of the North West in 1997. She observed: "EAPs, if ever they exist at universities, are fragmented and provided on a piecemeal basis. Students do have services that address their personal problems in almost all universities in South Africa, but the same cannot be said about university employees.

It would seem that university management regard their employees as immune from such problems". She thus encouraged the researcher to carry out this study in order to sensitize academic institutions about the existence of social problems amongst their employees.

Mr S. Moema, the director of the Mothusi Mpilo Center who has worked at the Carletonville mines as an employee assistance co-ordinator was consulted as well. He maintained that any institution that employs more than 1000 employees should have an EAP as a matter of principle. He furthermore indicated that South Africa is lagging behind in this area, as compared to other first world countries.

Finally, Dr. L.M. Mogorosi, in the department of Social Work at the University of Venda was of the opnion that the introduction of EAP services at the universities was long overdue. Dr Mogorosi who had conducted research on EAPs in South Africa maintained that a study that was envisaged would contribute significantly to the whole knowledge base of social work in South Africa.

9.3 Feasibility of the study

The study was made feasible because literature about occupational social work in general and about such programmes at universities in particular was available especially since a similar study was conducted at the University of the North West, which has virtually the same demographic features as the University of the North.

The University of the North is currently involved in a transformation process. This study, which received partial funding from the University of the North, would hopefully enrich the transformation discourse at tertiary education level in general and at the University of the North in particular.

9.4 Pilot test of questionnaire

Strydom (1998: 182) said a study of specific entities implies that the researcher should expose a few cases to exactly the same procedures as planned for the main investigation, in order to modify the existing instrument. Rubin (1983: 272) suggested that the researcher should "try the items out with actual subjects from the target population, then rewrite and edit again all items that cause confusion, annoyance, boredom, and so on".

The researcher in line with the advice from the two authors mentioned above, distributed the questionnaire to a single member of the sample who would participate in the study. This exercise was aimed at establishing whether the instrument covered what it was intended to and to avoid repetition as well as ambiguities.

10. Description of the research population, delimitation / boundary of sample and sample procedure

The research population consisted of the employees of the main campus of the University of the North, namely Turfloop near Pietersburg. This included academic staff members, heads of departments, deans, members of the administration as well as executive managers.

At this stage the University of the North had a total of 1781 employees composed of the following categories:

- academic staff -450;
- heads of departments-74
- deans-16
- administrative staff - 556;
- service workers- 775 and
- executive management-10.

The questionnaire was distributed to the entire top management structure. Due to the size of the top management, no sampling was necessary. A random sample of the academic staff (10% of the 450 staff members) was done. That means that forty-five (45) members of the academic staff participated in the study.

In stratified sampling a researcher first divides the population into sub populations (strata) on the basis of supplementary information. After dividing the population into strata, he draws a random sample from each sub population (Neuman, 1994: 205). The population had already been divided in terms of rank, while the composition of the sample was done by means of a sampling frame, namely a list of all academic staff on campus. The sample size in this sub population was forty-five (45), so two digits were needed. The researcher then picked up a random number from the upper left of the table.

The number selected should have as its last two digits that is less than forty-five (45), and that number was 28042. Number forty-two (42) was marked on the sampling frame to indicate that this number was included within the sample. The next number (in the next column and less than 45) was 48, 01 ... until 45 cases were included.

All heads of academic departments were included in the study. Questionnaires were hand delivered to them and a response rate of 47% was obtained. All deans were given questionnaires to complete and a 63% response was obtained. From the administrative staff fifty-six (57) respondents participated rendering a 57% response rate. As all members of the executive management participated, a response rate of 60% was recorded. Two focus groups (from the unskilled workers of the university) of seven members each participated in the study as well.

The administrative staff (556) was systematically sampled to constitute a sample of 56 employees who participated in the project. Systematic sampling was essential for this group because of a large number of variations in rank.

Following the sub divisions in this group would have been tedious and time consuming as there were various rankings and categories, with a minimum of difference between the various categories. To obtain a systematic sample, the researcher began with a random number from the table of random numbers. The closest number that appeared on the sampling frame was taken, and the sampling interval of four was taken until 56 cases had been identified.

11.   Definition of key concepts
11.1   Occupational social work

Occupational social work is defined as " a field of practice in which social workers attend to the human and social needs of the work community by designing and executing appropriate interventions to ensure healthier individuals and environment" (Googins and Godfrey, 1987: 38).

Occupational social work is a significant arena for the delivery of preventive and intervention services. Johnston and Carter (1990: 301) quoted the definition of the National Association of Social Workers' Occupational Social Work Task Force which describes three categories of occupational social work:

"Policy, planning and administration, which involve no direct counseling; examples are co-ordination of employee assistance programs, functions within corporate responsibility departments, training, the formulation of policies for career - path advancement, and the administration of affirmative action programs.

Occupational social work services operate at a macro level and include as some of their services, organizational development and employee assistance programs".

11.2. Employee Assistance Programme

Du Plessis (1991:210) Employee Assistance Programmes refer to programmes aimed at linking employees with personal problems to appropriate resources in order to correct job performance.
An EAP is a workplace-linked counseling system with benefits for both employers and employees (Bennet,1999:1; Specht and Courtney, 1994:70).

Thoreson, Roberts and Pascoe (1984: 183) in turn, defines an EAP is a referral service for all university employees, both staff and faculty, and their spouses and dependents who are in need of professional assistance in solving persistent problems.

The Employee Assistance Programme Association (1999:4) defines EAP as a work-site based program designed to assist in the identification and resolution of productivity problems associated with employees impaired by personal concerns, but not limited to health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress, or other personal concerns which may adversely affect employee job performance.

It is thus clear that these definitions imply that an Employee Assistance Programme is a work based assistance service available to employees regardless of rank and status who experience personal problems of a persistent nature that render the employee less productive than under normal circumstances. This service covers everybody who is linked to the employee, be it an employer, his superior or dependent.

11.3   Faculty

The word "faculty" is derived from Latin *facultas* and is literally defined as ability, natural aptitude and power or authority. Different nations attach somewhat different meanings to the term faculty. Generally, in centers other than in the US, faculty refers to a scholarly discipline such as history, mathematics, law and theology . One, thus hears of the faculty of education, the faculty of government and the faculty of humanities. In many European universities on the other hand, "faculty" refers to a group of related disciplines such as political science and health sciences.

In the US, "faculty" usually refers to the teaching members of an institution of higher education, while other professionals in American post-secondary institutions who are involved in scholarly or scientific research, public service, professional consultation, and institutional administration are sometimes accorded faculty status as well (Knowles, 1978).

Since the American literature uses the concept "faculty" to refer to academic staff, the concept, where it appears in this document, should be construed as such.

11.4   Staff

According to (Bartol and Martin, 1991:355) "staff" is used to refer to personnel staff, individuals who provide assistance to a particular position as required (e.g. an administrative assistant to a division head).

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:1397) "staff" means the people who work for an organization, especially a school or business.

Staff in the American context refers to the non academic employees of the university. However, as far as this research is concerned, "staff" should be understood to imply any employee of the university, be it academic, administrative or support services personnel.

11.5 Tenure

"Tenure", according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (1992:1324) refers to "permanent appointment as a teacher, in a university or some other institution". It is the ultimate rite of passage from acolyte to academe, pursued with gem hard diligence by legions of assistant professors seeking promotion to associate professor and concomitant appointment as "tenured" (Schoenfeld and Magnan 1992:viii).

Tenure is intended to preserve and enhance an institution of higher education's excellence and its function in developing the human intellect. Tenure contributes to this objective by giving a strong measure of security and protection to faculty members; it frees them to teach, inquire, create, publish, and serve with less concern for the immediate popularity or acceptability of their efforts than would be the case if termination of employment were a constant possibility (Schoenfeld and Magnan, 1992: iii).

Academic tenure is "an arrangement under which faculty appointments are continued until retirement for age or physical disability, subject to dismissal for adequate cause or unavoidable termination on account of financial exigency or change" (Shoenfeld and Magnan, 1992:iii). According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1990: 639) security of tenure, usually granted in the civil service and in academic appointments after a probationary period, is considered an essential condition of maintaining the independence and freedom of those services and partisan control.

In simpler terms, academic tenure is a system in various universities that confirms the permanent appointment of university employees, particularly academic employees. The purpose of the system is to maintain high educational standards and to uphold the mission of the university in teaching, research and community service without partisanship.

To summarize, "tenure" is an employment practice used to refer to employees who are in permanent employment of the university or college. This concept is used to refer to both faculty and staff members.

12. Limitations of the study

The following limitations of the study have been observed:

The samples of deans and executive management were too small to warrant a quantitative analysis. The findings could have provided more information if the qualitative approach had been used. However, limited time and differing time schedules of the said respondents made it impossible to convene focus groups.

The respondents complained that the instrument was too long particularly with regard to communication patterns and employee problems. This may have caused inaccuracy of the responses.

The study took place at the time when the university was in the process of restructuring. Some of the respondents were emotionally quite touched by this as jobs were on the line. The accuracy of the responses may have been seriously compromised by this.

13. Classification of the research report
This research report is arranged as follows:

13.1 Chapter 1

In this Chapter, **a general orientation to the study** is presented. It is characterised by the researcher's motivation to undertake the study, general aims and objectives of the study, research methodology and a description of the research population as well as the sampling procedures.

The chapter concludes with a section on consultation with experts as well as definition of key concepts in the study.

13.2   Chapter 2

A detailed discussion on **Higher Education in South Africa: State of the Art** spells out all the policy changes and recommendations that were effected since the dawn of the democratic dispensation.   Of particular importance are   the changes taking place such as the modularisation process, the Council on Higher Education, quality assurance, the Committee on Higher Education, the National Qualifications Framework and the South African Qualifications Authority. Because universities are places of employment as well, labour laws such as the Employment Equity Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act have been discussed.

13.3   Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, the university as an employing organization is discussed. The history of EAPs in industry and how they were adapted to the university environment received special attention.   The discourse in this chapter centers around the functions of a university, characteristics of universities as organizations and the features of in particular, academic staff in the university.

13.4   Chapter 4

The university of the North as an employer and *locus* for research is discussed. Emphasis is laid on the history, mission and vision of the university as well as labour policies of the university. An attempt is made to explore the environment of the university with a view of establishing an Employee Assistance Programme.

13.5   Chapter 5

The nature of Employee Assistance Programmes is the subject of this chapter. Attention is paid to the philosophy, functions and service infrastructure of EAPs. The chapter ends with a brief description of EAP models.

13.6   Chapter 6

The role of the Employee Assistance Programme in a university is discussed. Factors that make universities fertile ground for Employee Assistance Programmes such as dual allegiance, scholarship, issues of mid-life development and a lack of supervision coupled with inadequate performance appraisal systems in universities are fully dealt with.

13.7   Chapter 7

The brief of this chapter is the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data from the empirical findings. Data are presented through tables, pie-charts, graphs and histograms which are followed by a discussion of the findings.

13.8   Chapter 8

A summary of the whole study is presented, conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

13.9   Chapter 9

Chapter 9 presents guidelines for implementing the EAP at the University of the North.