

Chapter 9

Guidelines for the implementation of an EAP at the University of the North

9.1 Introduction

The findings from the literature and the empirical study do indicate that bringing about a change or innovation in a university can be a mammoth of a task (Googins and Godfrey, 1987:157; Baldrige, 1984:51-64). Chapter 5 of this thesis as well as the empirical findings do confirm that the University of the North is a unique work environment and that this idiosyncrasy needs to be considered in the implementation of the Employee Assistance Programme.

9.2 Strategy for implementation

Wrich (1977) in Thoreson and Hosokawa (1984:171) identified four models that constitute a major thrust of EAPs in higher education and have been used over the years by industry to address problems of chemical dependency and alcoholism of employees:

- concealment, which is not really a formal programme at all;
- alcoholic identification, which involves finding alcoholics in the work setting;
- job performance, which is broader based but still focuses on alcohol and drugs; and
- the EAP model, which focuses exclusively on job performance.

The model of service delivery in universities and colleges appear to fit rather exclusively under the third and fourth model (Thoreson and Hosokawa, 1984:171) with a preponderance of universities and colleges using the fourth model. The researcher would suggest the fourth model to be adopted by the University of the North. This suggestion however implies that performance appraisal systems and supervisor training should be in place.

A combination of the EAP and the job performance model constitute, in the researcher's opinion the broad brush approach. According to Googins and Godfrey (1987:23) this approach offers assistance with any problem that affects the whole performance of employees of all ranks. Such problems may be work-related such as interpersonal conflict, stress, job dissatisfaction, discriminating practices, unfair labour practice and job misplacement.

It is also important to note that the academic environment offers a new set of dimensions to EAPs in higher education and these dimensions invoke adaptations which involve the application of internal university and college resources to resolve problems, an educational-preventive focus and systems level intervention.

The following is a list of elements in higher education that are common to all EAPs across universities, industry and governmental agencies (Dickman et al, 1985:39-51; Thoreson, 1977:56-72; Googins and Godfrey, 1987:124-130) . The elements include:

- an emphasis of job performance returned to normal functioning;
- a formal orientation programme for supervisors;
- a method for measuring the cost-effectiveness of the EAP;
- a method for developing linkages with appropriate referral agencies, both within the university and the community;
- the development of a system that will ensure support of upper level administration; and
- the development of an advisory structure that will provide direction and support for the EAP constituency and upper-level administration.

Thoreson (1977:56-72) also identified unique elements to the implementation of EAPs in higher education. They include:

- a dual emphasis on the clinical-remedial and developmental components of a health care system;
- an emphasis on early intervention as a component of secondary prevention;
- the likelihood of needing a longer start-up time in the development of an effective EAP;
- the need to establish an EAP that is sensitive to the characteristics of a particular university community;
- the need to adapt orientation training to the particular sector of the university in which the training is being conducted and to be based upon considerations of all components in prevention-primary, secondary and tertiary.

The following guidelines for the implementation of an EAP at UNIN are therefore provided:

9.2.1 Establishment of an advisory committee

Putting together a broad based, representative committee is an important step in the implementation of the EAP (Masi, 1977:19-27; Hosokawa, 1990:127; Googins and Godfrey, 1987:164; Minelli et al, 2001:31) point to several of the issues that are of special significance. Firstly, she notes the need for EAPs in higher education to invoke collegiality or “ownership” through the appointing of an advisory committee composed of constituencies who constitute the programme users. Constituencies whose participation in the planning process should be considered include academic administration, faculty unions, personnel, the institution’s legal counsel, the campus health officer, the grievance officer and the faculty council or senate representatives.

For the University of the North, the researcher would recommend that every interest group/ structure/ union/staff association should be represented in the advisory committee. These structures should themselves elect people to serve in the advisory committee. Otherwise the committee may face political bottlenecks which may eventually stifle its operation. Management should also be represented on this committee. The committee should however be made of persons of various expertise, particularly with a financial background since the establishment of an EAP would inevitably result in “costs” for the institution.

9.2.2 Policy formulation

The advisory group should canvas very widely and specifically from their constituency on issues of EAP policy. The policy formulation process should involve every one from all members of the university community. It is advisable that the policy formulation process be decentralised to faculties and schools and the latter should forward their inputs to the advisory committee.

9.2.3 Winning the favour of the vice-chancellor

Winning the favour of the vice-chancellor or the chief executive officer of the institution as well as other stake holders is vital if the programme is to succeed and “top management must be interested and supportive if the programme is to succeed (Schooling, 1984:101). Schooling (1984:94) scrutinised all successful programmes in universities and they were found to have the following elements:

- they were all established to meet a presumed need;
- there was an initiating individual or group;
- support and approval of the appropriate authority or authorities was obtained, either tacitly or overtly;
- budgetary resources, if required, were allocated or committed;

- survival of the programme is attributable to either administrative indifference or conscious administrative direction.

The advisory committee needs to ensure that all these elements are in place.

9.2.4 Conducting a cost-benefit analysis

In this period of shrinking resources, closure of non-performing units and outsourcing of non-core activities of the university, administrators are not likely to put money where the returns cannot be guaranteed. Now a well prepared cost-benefit analysis can ensure that money leaves the firm grip of university administrators.

Cost/benefit assessment calls for comparison between the cost of programme operation and estimated amount of benefits (or saving) it can generate (Dickman et al, 1985:39-51; Thoreson, 1977:56-72; Googins and Godfrey, 1987:124-130)

The total direct costs incurred by the programme can be categorized into two major groups: fixed costs and variable costs (Anderson, Sweeney and Williams 1982). The fixed costs are items that are unlikely to change annually during the operation of the operation of the programme (for example the administrator's salary, malpractice insurance and overheads). The variable costs are more than likely to change according to the number of EAP clients as well as other factors (for example, staff salaries, supplies and materials).

The total benefits attributable to EAPs can be divided into two major categories- tangible and intangible benefits (Dunn, 1981). The tangible benefit is represented by measurable positive effects of the EAP that are directly related to its programme objectives for example, improved work performance, reduced absenteeism and reduced accidents. The intangible benefits include employee's psychological and attitudinal changes and they are difficult to translate into Rand figures.

The following questions reflect the major intent of a cost-benefit analysis (Dickman et al, 1985:39-51; Thoreson, 1977:56-72; Googins and Godfrey, 1987:124-130):

- what are the total costs of EAP operations in reference to fixed and variable costs?
- what is the total amount of savings (benefit) as a result of EAP effects in the areas of work performance, absenteeism, paid health insurance claims, workmen's compensation payments as well as sickness and accident payments?
- what is the ratio between the cost and the benefit? In other words, on average, for each one rand investment to the EAP operation, how much is returned to the company as a saving or benefit?

9.2.5 Funding

The committee may also have to find financial resources to kick start the programme. Various strategies could be implemented in getting funding, such as:

- establish if there is some money lying somewhere for an obsolete programme;
- fund raising through a conference on an EAP related theme;
- prepare funding proposals to outside sponsors;
- channel funds from a weak programme/service into EAP.

Even if the afore mentioned techniques can be considered creative ways of funding the EAP, providing rendering assistance to troubled employees makes business sense. This investment in employees is a concrete manifestation of the company's social responsibility.

9.2.6 Programme model selection

Hosokawa (1990:131-135) maintains that factors to be considered constitute a sizable checklist: the primary academic mission of the university, size of the institution, institutional history and current issues, availability of social service resources on and off campus, degree of health insurance coverage for chemical abuse and mental health needs, degree of unionization, eligibility requirements for programme services, administrative structure of the institution, physical layout, and policies and procedures that currently impede or facilitate personal problem identification or resolution.

9.2.7 Nature of the Programme

For the University of the North a combination of the external and the internal model seems to be appropriate. This is the kind of result from the empirical findings where there was no unanimity as to the model of the programme. Majority of the respondents preferred an on-site facility for their colleagues and subordinates and an off-site facility for themselves.

As far as the researcher is concerned, however, the external model would be ideal. The reason for choice of this model is that the University is currently engaged in restructuring which has resulted in the outsourcing of the non core activities of the institution. Provision of EAP is also not a core activity of the University and can be externally provided. The second reason is that of ensuring maximum confidentiality of the service. Besides, the empirical findings as well as the literature indicates that externally provided EAP services have a higher number of self-referral than internal programmes (Blum and Roman, 1989:259-312), and are less costly (Spitzer and Favorini, 1993:350-370).

9.2.8 Types of services to be provided

The University of the North is in a rural environment, situated 30 km East of Polokwane. Polokwane is a capital of the Northern Province and has a variety of resources in terms of alcohol centres, Alcohol Anonymous, mental health services, social work services, Aids services, and financial as well as legal services. These services are also found in Mankweng (though in limited extent) which is the township where the University of the North is situated. These services are provided by state departments, non governmental organizations and the private sector. Hosokawa (1990:129) had this kind of community in mind when she said: "If community resources for a variety of personal problems are available, a screening and referral mode may provide the most flexibility in meeting diverse and changing needs". The researcher would therefore also recommend a screening and referral mode kind of model for the University of the North.

9.2.9 EAP staffing decisions

Throughout the history of Employee Assistance Programmes, a variety of professions provided direction and leadership for the operation and expansion of programmes (Trice and Schonbrunn, 1981:171-198). From the early days of social secretaries (women trained as nurses and teachers), other professions including company physicians, recovering alcoholics, occupational social workers, occupational health nurses, personnel officers and psychologists have comprised the staff of EAP (Sonnenstuhl and Trice, 1990).

The researcher would however agree with McKibbon (1993:60) that holding a master's degree and having received training in psychology and social work would be ideal for personnel in the EAP service. Tanner (1991: 71-83; Kurzman, 1993:32) however said social work is the profession of choice for EAPs.

9.2.10 Administrative location

Geographical location and physical site factors can exercise influences relevant to programme design in several ways. For example, concerns related to confidentiality may be more frequently voiced on the closely knit campus in a small community, while the larger commuter campus will require considerably more attention to faculty outreach efforts (Vigilante, 1993:191; Hosokawa, 1990:128).

EAP services are sometimes seen as a form of personnel services by administrators, to be placed under human resource personnel (Hosokawa, 1990:130; Balgopal and Stollak, 1992:94). The researcher would agree with Hosokawa, Balgopal and Stollak about the administrative location of the programme, but then suggest that the physical location of the programme be detached from the administration building for purposes of confidentiality and impartiality in the eyes of the consumers of the service.

9.2.11 Management-union model

The model advocated for the University of the North is the management sponsored model since the unions have been weakened by restructuring and their membership have diminished to such an extent that they cannot finance an Employee Assistance Programme. The reason why an off-site facility is advocated is that the findings of this study indicate that off-site facilities facilitate a high rate of self-referral (Compare Grosch et al 1996:44).

9.2.102 Training of academic administrators in referral procedure

People in managerial positions such as heads of departments, executive deans, directors, heads of sections in the administrative section of the university as well as the support services need to be trained in identification of impaired performance and referral to the service.

Contrary to what literature says, supervisor confrontation can be utilised effectively in academic environments as long as performance or appraisal instruments such as a peer review system are in place.

The empirical findings from this study also confirm that contrary to what literature alleges, academics at the University of the North do not spend their time in isolation as evidenced by the face to face communication that exists. This kind of communication pattern can be utilized to identify employees with personal problems and suggest a self-referral or mandatory referral.

9.2.14 Performance appraisal system (academic staff)

Performance appraisal system is a yardstick used to measure performance of employees. In an academic environment, the findings from this system can be used to measure whether employees are doing well in which case some incentives have to be provided. If it is found that employees are not doing well training can be recommended. If it is found that poor performance is as a result of personal problems a referral to the EAP can be ideal.

9.2.15 Marketing the programme

Quite a number of avenues can be utilised to market the existence of the EAP. The University of the North has the following instruments at its disposal, that could be utilised effectively to market the programme:

9.2.15.1 **Masa**

This newspaper is published once a month basis/ weekly. It is read by academics, managers as well as other members of the University community. The only group that does not read this is the service workers. An advert on the availability of the service could be placed in this newspaper in English and Northern Sotho to be available to the service workers.

9.2.15.2 **Turf Update**

Turf Update is a weekly newsletter of the University that can be used to advertise the programme.

9.2.15.2 **Radio Turf**

This is a community radio station with approximately 48 000 listeners. It covers a 100 km radius. It is mainly concerned with local issues. It is a dual medium radio station (English and Northern Sotho) It cost R660.00 for 66 ads for 20 working days to place an advert on this station. It gets so much subsidy from the University and could therefore afford an advert on this campus.

9.2.15.3 **A public lecture**

An open public lecture could be utilised for marketing the programme. My experiences with public lectures at this institution, however is that they do not attract a lot of academic staff. So, utilisation of this marketing strategy should be in addition to other such strategies.

9.2.15.4 Workshops

Workshops could be conducted with various structures within the university such as schools, faculties and other interest groups such as trade unions and staff associations. These can filter through to service workers.

9.2.15.5 Conferences

Academic meetings and conferences can also be utilized to spread the message about the existence of Employee Assistance Services.

9.2.15.6 Brochure

A brochure could be distributed and placed at strategic places such as the University library, administration, restaurants, University Hall. This brochure should be written in both English and Northern Sotho.

9.2.15.7 The Internet

Information about the University EAP could also be placed on the university web site..

9.3 Evaluation of the programme

The programme needs to be closely monitored to ensure that it attains the goals and objectives that were set out at initiation. Of importance in the assessment of the programme is to pay particular attention to the following operational issues:

- penetration rate;
- utilization rate;
- impact of the programme on absenteeism and productivity as well as
- the return on investment of the programme.