

Chapter 5

Employee Assistance Programmes

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In a society where the scramble for employment has become a way of life and where companies are facing financial and economic challenges and constraints, some form of specialised service is required within the setting to deal with concerns before they escalate or deteriorate. Furthermore, spending most of our working hours and thus most of our lives at work means that we should be happy and satisfied in the workplace. Akabas (in McKendrick, 1990:201) describes work as "the natural life space for adults". Personal problems will inevitably enter the world of work, just as work-related problems are taken home (Googins & Godfrey, 1992:39) – be it an emotional experience or a specific task that requires completion. These issues seem to transcend any boundaries that may subconsciously or consciously be implied.

The workplace takes the form of a community or society and serves those members who form part of that community with its own rules, values, organisational climate and organisational culture. Here workers also engage in relationships with others, adopt roles and routines and complete specific tasks. What makes this community different from the larger community is its task-oriented focus (Googins & Godfrey, 1992:66). The successful completion of tasks is aimed at the fulfilment of the organisation's objectives and is a strategic issue from management's point of view. If there are impending forces that prevent this from happening, it is management's duty to use all means at its disposal to get to the bottom of things. Work and human beings are inevitably connected and an individual's psychosocial functioning determines his/her work performance. Companies have a responsibility towards managing problems that employees experience for the benefit of the employee, that is to resolve his/her problems, and to enhance productivity in the company.

Critical incidents are sudden, unexpected, often life-threatening time-limited events that can inhibit an individual's capacity to respond adaptively. The impact of critical incidents may be debilitating and stems from recurrent intrusive images, persistent fear, displaced anger, guilt and isolation. Extreme critical incident stressors can even result in personal crises, traumatic

stress, and PTSD. In addition to their human toll, organisational crises are disruptive to both corporate business and workplace operations. Productivity, quality, profitability and other key performance measures are adversely affected by such events (VandePol & Beyer, 2009:11). While addressing various technological, operational and logistical issues in the aftermath of a tragedy, it is also advisable to pay special attention to the human needs of affected employees during and after a crisis.

5.2 WORK

Chestong (in Akabas & Kurzman, 1982:8) describes the value of work as "for all persons, however, regardless of background factors, work may provide the most realistic and available means to achieving self-esteem and the most viable course in the quest for meaning in their lives".

Work has different purposes and meaning for different people. Work plays an important role in the fulfilment of people's needs and therefore a variety of reasons exist why people work.

Baily (1990:2–4) mentions the following reasons why people work:

- **The opportunity to earn money**

One of the most important reasons for people to work is to earn a living. Money is a necessity to feed, clothe and provide accommodation to a person and his/her family. Money not only enables a person to provide for his/her basic needs and those of their families but also enables a person to provide security, comfort and enjoyment.

- **Social contentment**

The workplace provides opportunity to meet other people and to develop friendships. "In fact many employees spend more time interacting with their co-workers than they do with their own families" (Steers & Porter, 1991:574). In the work environment people can give and receive understanding and acceptance.

- **Positive emotions**

People get satisfaction from the work they do. Work provides people with a feeling of reparation and self-worth. The fact that a person's skills are needed contribute to the feeling of self-worth.

- **Source of status**

Work provides a certain sense of status and position. People choose a certain work/position because of the respect the community has for it.

- **Personal development**

Most people have an inherent need to develop themselves. The work milieu provides the perfect setting for them to learn, grow and develop.

- **Health**

To work is important for a person's mental and physical health. The satisfaction people feel as a result of achievements at work help them to feel better. People who are happy in their work feel better and are more positive.

- **Self-actualisation**

Work can be the place where the individual can find the opportunity to live out his/her interests, skills and talents.

Furthermore, Akabas and Kurzman (1982:41) mention that "work is the cornerstone of life, which helps individuals and families to live both as private and social beings".

Googins and Godfrey (1992:75) introduce the notion that work has four roles which need to be considered in order to prove its value for intervention purposes:

1. As a social microcosm of larger society
2. As a means of personal/collective identification
3. As a vehicle for intervention in or maintenance of human behaviour systems
4. As a diagnostic tool.

5.2.1 Work as a microcosm of society

This role allows for consideration of the fact that the workplace is part of a much bigger picture – society at large and the world. This means that all macro issues that impact on society in general also inevitably impact on conditions in the workplace.

5.2.2 Work as a means for personal and collective identity

This role allows people the opportunity to develop a positive self-identity. This implies that work allows for the development of its own norms, values, culture and climate that impact on individual and group functioning within the workplace, as stated earlier.

5.2.3 Work as a means of intervention/maintenance of human behaviour systems

This role refers to the skill of supervisors to assist subordinates to develop themselves and grow within the organisation. Often a break or change from a monotonous routine/existence for further development is called for in order to re-inspire employees to reach greater heights.

5.2.4 Work as a diagnostic tool

This role implies that, in planning interventions, each individual's bigger picture must be carefully assessed. This is due to the fact that individual behaviour patterns expressed in the work situation are part of the individual and, therefore, a person is not considered to be one way at work and another way at home. Personal characteristics are an integral part of who we are.

Googins and Godfrey (1992:39–41) make some further assumptions about the workplace.

- The workplace is a community where human needs and problems exist. It is part of a larger community/social system (political, social and economic) that impacts on what happens within the workplace.
- The current structure, culture and design of present-day organisations cannot meet social needs; although issues and problems are not new, effective intervention, as well as recognition and definition of problems, is necessary.
- Professionals (employee assistance practitioners) are in a position to meet some of the needs by virtue of their professional mandate and unique training and skills.

In the workplace, where the employee spends most of his/her time, the employee should experience some work satisfaction in order to be productive and to perform well. War (in Landy, 1989:439) feels that there is more than enough evidence to conclude that work and

the satisfaction of work are centrally involved in determining the adjustment of adults in virtually every culture.

A happy and satisfied employee adopts better after disruption (at work or at home).

Berker (2003:467) defines work satisfaction as "the degree to which an employee has a positive attitude about the employer, the working conditions, relationships with other workers and those served and future opportunities".

Berker (2003:467) further defines work performance as "the productivity, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of service with which an employee fulfils the requirements of the job".

Although there are different opinions about the relationship between job performance and work satisfaction, the researcher holds the view that the higher the work satisfaction the higher the job performance. Berker (2003:467) mentions that the relation between increased job satisfaction and better work performance has not been proved. McCarth (2000:35) mentions however that there is no clear evidence supported by research findings; the conventional wisdom holds that worker attitudes and behaviour are related, meaning that increased job satisfaction is perceived to be a factor that contributes to improved work performance.

Organisations providing EAPs for their employees can contribute to increased work satisfaction by improving work conditions and helping employees work through personal and work-related problems, thereby hoping to have a positive impact on the work performance of the employee by making conditions to perform more favourable.

5.3 INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE

Ribner (1993:333) mentions that "because of the critical importance of work. Any disruption in the homeostasis of the workplace may have a profound impact on the worker". The emotional impact of an incident can be critical "when dreams and way of life are threatened with extinction" (Ribner, 1993:333).

Most systems are constantly in a state of change, which allows for growth and development. At the same time, the system requires structure and stability. Compton and Galaway (1984:123) state that "at the same time that a system is constantly in a state of change, it must maintain a dynamic equilibrium". Problems occur within the system owing to its inability to cope with the stress and tension created by the change. As a result, the system is unable to maintain order and functions in a state of chaos. Problems seem to be the system's way of responding to the overwhelming chaos.

Because the boundaries of the system are semi-permeable, they sustain change within the system. It is this same boundary characteristic, however, that allows one system to influence another. We therefore presume that changes in the work social system influence the family social system, and problems within the family social system influence the work social system. The same holds true for all of the other systems of which individuals form a part. An employee, as part of the work system, therefore cannot be adequately understood in isolation of his/her roles within the other social systems to which he/she subscribes.

It is important to acknowledge that changes may be positive or negative. For this reason the employee's general life-satisfaction and happiness have a positive impact on his/her work; similarly an employee's general discontentment with life and his/her resentment influence his/her work performance negatively. Good working conditions, therefore, simply cannot guarantee a problem-free production environment. It would be impractical to expect employees to leave their personal problems at home, and it would be naive to believe that the problems resulting from the workplace will remain separate from the employee's personal life.

Bruce (1990:37) mentions that "no employee stands alone, unchanged by the events and actions around him or her. Employees have lives outside the world of work. In those lives family and friends make demands on time and energy". The influence –of social problems experienced by employees within their other social systems– on the workplace is further explored below. According to Kessler and Stang (2006:20), "employees who have suffered even temporary mental or emotional illness may have difficulty meeting his job requirements". The influence of social problems usually manifests itself in a range of different reactions due to our individual responses to stress and our own uniqueness. The resulting impact on the workplace however, can be narrowed down to five broad categories:

5.3.1 Poor work attendance

Absenteeism is a common response among workers as a result of social problems and stress. It may be reflected in the workplace on a variety of different levels (Remanathan, 1992:235–236)

- **Lateness**

Employees such as single parents are often late. Perpetual lateness may be a sign that they are not coping with the pressure of being the sole responsible adult. Single parents usually require visible support by means of flexi-time policies. This is often enough to significantly improve work attendance.

- **Excessive use of sick leave**

Sick leave benefits have a direct financial cost to any company, as the company pays salaries to employees who are productive for certain times. Excessive use of sick leave, owing to vague ailments such as flu and diarrhoea, may be indicative of the employee experiencing some kind of crisis. Women in domestic violence relationships often conceal the real reason why they are off sick, due to the physical injury sustained being at the hands of their own partners. They fear the employer's and their co-workers' reaction to the truth.

- **Long-weekend syndrome**

Often employees take sick leave on a Monday or Friday to create "long-weekends". Doing this on a regular basis is usually indicative of a substance abuse problem.

- **Temporary absence from the workstation**

This type of absence is often also linked to substance abuse. Addicts usually require a "quick fix" to remain functional. Sleeping on duty may also be viewed as being absent from the workstation. Depending on the person's job description, this could cause the company considerable loss of income, both in production and in other areas such as theft and loss of clientele.

5.3.2 Drop in productivity

When people find themselves in a crisis, they often become preoccupied with their situation. The employee is, therefore, unable to focus on the task at hand. His/her productivity declines correspondingly. A drop in the employee's productivity may manifest itself in a variety of ways (Carson & Butcher, 1992:280; Kessler & Stang, 2006:21–22):

- **Inability to concentrate**

Preoccupation with personal problems makes it difficult for the employee to concentrate on his/her work, which then takes much longer than before to complete. As a result, his/her productivity may decrease and the employer's production costs increase.

- **Erratic job performance**

This is often related to substance abuse. Quick visits to the bathroom, being absent from the worksite for extended periods and long coffee breaks, together with highs and lows in production, are often indicative of substance abuse problems.

- **Complaints from co-workers**

When an employee's personal problems affect his/her ability to work, his/her co-workers inevitably pick up the slack, to ensure that the task is completed. They usually do not want to be associated with collective poor job performance. This results in a "Catch 22" situation for the co-workers. The troubled employee is then not confronted with the consequences of his/her poor performance, which perpetuates the cycle. It also makes it difficult for early intervention because the initial symptoms are hard to detect. Eventually, colleagues and co-workers become resentful about the extra workload, which they carry, and begin to complain to their supervisor. Complaints from co-workers should be taken seriously, especially when the complaints are from different sources, and the matter should be dealt with in a highly sensitive manner.

- **Complaints from clients**

Poor turnover and quality of work are of concern to clients. Often this is when management first becomes aware or suspicious of problems with the employee. Because the troubled employee is often forgetful, unable to meet deadlines and sometimes negligent, clients often become angry and frustrated in their dealing with him/her. In most

cases, the cost of early detection is far less to the organisation. Waiting for a crisis to occur within the workplace is usually extremely costly.

5.3.3 Deteriorating interpersonal relationships

Prolonged personal problems usually affect the employee's relationships with his/her co-workers, especially the people with whom he/she works closely, who begin to notice that all is not well. This is usually frustrating for the problem employee, his/her co-workers and his/her supervisor. Carson and Butcher (1992:291) identify some interpersonal problems that may occur in the workplace.

- **Overreaction to real or perceived criticism**

Employees in crises are usually hypersensitive and believe that they are constantly being judged. Because one is acutely aware of one's shortcomings during a period of crisis, reactions to criticism are usually out of context. For this reason it is extremely difficult to associate this response alone with underlying social problems. It is, therefore, imperative that this response be viewed within the context of the employee's overall behaviour and job performance. The impact of this behaviour on co-workers and supervisors, who constantly have to deal with an over-sensitive person who is not working according to his/her full potential, should not be underestimated. Frequently, co-workers and supervisors suppress their frustration until the problem reaches a level where they are unable to sustain the additional pressure any longer, and they begin voicing their anger and resentment.

- **Unwarranted grievances**

The hypersensitivity of people in a crisis is apparent in their moodiness, irritability and resentfulness towards co-workers and management. Often this manifests itself through the instituting of petty grievances against others. This results in a complete waste of resources. The problems experienced by one member in a section have the potential to lower the morale of the entire group, should the problem behaviour not be confronted.

5.3.4 Health issues

Issues related to personal and family health also often impact and the employee's work performance:

- **Depression**

Depression typically occurs when the employee is completely overwhelmed by a whole range of social problems. People who suffer from depression usually have a loss of interest in life in general, and are unable to function due to chronic fatigue and psychomotor retardation. This impaired functioning impacts the workplace and co-workers significantly, and is exacerbated by the human response to alleviate the person's responsibilities. If this situation goes unattended, eventually co-workers will become frustrated and intolerant of the employee.

- **Physical illness**

The prolonged illness of a spouse or child requires considerable emotional investment by the employee, as he/she is expected to over-function in maintaining family relationships. This has the potential to be both emotionally and physically draining for the employee. The concern and worry felt by the employee often results in him/her being preoccupied with things outside of work, such as increased medical bills, or he/she may be too exhausted to focus on the task at hand. In a technical environment, the consequences can be significant. In power generation plants and factories, for example, accident rates are often linked to the company's insurance premiums. Increased accidents, therefore, result in increased premiums, which are then added to the cost of production.

5.3.5 Societal issues

Organisations can only exist with society's sanction. Therefore, society demands that its organisations fulfil a responsible role as a member of that society. Within society there exist many social problems and human rights issues that require comprehensive and integrated solutions. This implies that, although organisations are not solely responsible for the solutions, they are required to form partnerships with other societal systems, such as non-government organisations, educational institutions and community groups. Their response to these issues will be a direct reflection of their commitment to broader social values and business ethics:

- **HIV/Aids**

Employees, unions and management alike feel the impact of the HIV virus on the workplace. According to Harris (1990:25), "the workplace has become a public arena where the facts and fictions of Aids were publicly debated". The reason for this debate, however, is the result of an emotional or a fear response that individuals may infect each other within the workplace. To counteract the impact of Aids, on the workplace and society, a more humane approach needs to be developed. Masi (2000:321) states that "by the year 2009, 17% of the workforce will be showing symptoms of Aids and at present 27% of the workforce is infected with the HIV virus, with 3–4% actually being ill with Aids". In South Africa it is indicated that the prevalence of HIV in 2008 among young adults (age 15 to 24) was 8,7% and for adults (age 25 to 49) the prevalence was 16,8% of the population. Although there is no specific workforce statistics available, this indicates that a significant number of adults who play a leading role in the workforce are infected. These statistics reveal a gloomy picture. Company policies need to address not only individuals' fears, but also their grief when co-workers and colleagues succumb to the disease. It has also become the responsibility of the workplace to promote safe sex practices and monogamy. Organisations should also address long-term issues such as the impact of losing trained staff to the disease. Cost-saving practices to the employer, in terms of financial gain, would be difficult to measure. Profitability at this point could probably be calculated in terms of the cost of having an HIV/Aids infected workforce versus the cost of prevention. It must be noted that every system within society has to take some responsibility for combating the HIV/Aids epidemic. Employers would be well served to explore partnerships for effective interventions and policies.

- **Retrenchment**

With the downswing in the South African economy, many companies are looking at streamlining their workforce to increase their efficiency and cost effectiveness. Companies need to be aware, however, that retrenchment has a direct impact on societal problems, such as increased unemployment, substance abuse, suicides and family murders. They owe it to the person being retrenched and his/her families to implement retrenchment in the most considerate way possible. It is the responsibility of the organisation to assist the employee with career counselling and skills retraining to facilitate his/her reintegration in the workforce.

- **Discrimination**

The *Employer Equity Act* no. 55 of 1998 prohibits that any worker be discriminated against by virtue of ethnicity, race, gender or disability. Unfortunately, we are not as yet living in Utopia, and incidents of discrimination are bound to occur, despite legislation, as the workforce becomes more and more diversified. It is up to the organisation to ensure that it complies with the regulations specified in the Act. Inappropriate responses could result in grievance procedures being brought before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). These hearings are costly and a waste of valuable resources, however, this is nothing compared to the cost of the negative publicity a company receive should it be found to be guilty of discriminatory practices. The damage to the company's reputation would be far more harming.

- **Sexual harassment**

According to Prinsloo (2006:74), sexual harassment can be defined in three different categories based on conduct:

1. Physical conduct ranging from touching to sexual assault and rape, and including a strip search by or in the presence of the opposite sex
2. Verbal conduct, including innuendoes, suggestions, sexual advances, comments with sexual overtones, sex-related jokes or insults
3. Non-verbal conduct, including gestures, indecent exposure or the display of sexually explicit material.

The *Domestic Violence Act* no.16 of 1988 classifies sexual harassment of a worker as prohibited. As a result, employers have a legal responsibility to respond to this issue, in a proactive way. Failing to do so could result in costly legal battles, as employees will seek restitution through the CCMA.

- **Crime**

With the high incidence of crime in South Africa, many employees become victims of crime. Female employees and security guards are especially vulnerable. Victims of crime often suffer traumatic stress, resulting in anxiety and paranoia, which hampers job performance and effective interpersonal relationships with co-workers. Owing to the high frequency of crime, failure to provide accessible counselling for victims ultimately results

in a complete breakdown of employee morale, and reduces productivity and company performance irreparably.

There is a host of problems that affect the employee and his/her work performance. These problems may be personal in nature, brought about by outside societal factors, or they may be a result of the work environment itself. Much of the concern of the employer is their effect on the cost of production, service delivery and efficiency.

5.4 EAP AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

EAPs are "job-based programs operating within a work organization for the purpose of identifying troubled employees, motivating them to resolve their troubles, and providing access to counselling or treatment for those who need those services" (Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1990:18). The EAP, according to PPC International (PPC Clinical Practice, 2004:2), is a management tool paid for by the employer with the expectation that the utilisation of the programme will decrease absenteeism, accidents, tardiness and mistakes and will increase productivity. The purpose of the EAP is to prevent, identify and treat personal problems that often adversely affect job performance. The purpose and the expectations of the EAP are accomplished through an integrated system of policy and procedures, management consultation and personal, confidential counselling that is easily accessible to all employees and members of their households.

EAPs have evolved and are still evolving, in response to influences within and outside the workplace, into a diverse service group with distinctive structures and services.

An EAP is an instrument used to improve the quality of life of employees, by giving them the necessary support to resolve personal and work-related problems. The purpose of EAPs is to improve the well-being of employees and to improve the effectiveness and productivity of the company.

According to the standards committee of EAPA South Africa (1999:4), EAP is a worksite-based counselling service programme, designed to assist in the identification and resolution of productivity problems of employees impaired by personal problems or concerns including health, alcohol and drug abuse, family, marital, financial, legal, emotional and stress-related

or personal problems that adversely affect the employees' job performance. The Standards Committee of EAPA South Africa (2010:1) defines EAP as "the work organizations resource, based on core technologies or functions, to enhance employee and workplace effectiveness through prevention, identification and resolution of personal and productivity issues." EAPA South Africa's definition for EAP changed from a more reactive approach in 1999 to a more preventative and proactive approach in 2010.

According to Oss and Clary (1998:5), an EAP is "a confidential and professional service provided as an employee benefit which complements and extends in-company resources in the constructive and supportive management of people impacted by concerns in their personal and work lives".

The intended beneficiaries of an EAP are both the employees working for the employing organisation and the company as the employing organisation. The focus of counselling is not personal restructuring (e.g. psychotherapy) but rather helping the individual to cope and adjust to work and non-work issues that are affecting his/her performance.

EAPs evolved over the years to provide a better and a more effective service for the individual and the employing organisation. According to Hartwell, Steele, French, Potter, Rodman and Zarking (1996:804), EAPs evolved from industrial alcoholism programmes to the EAP of today with a broadened scope of employer involvement. The EAP evolved into a multi-service programme aimed at addressing all kinds of personal problems including illicit drug use, and family and mental health problems that affect job performance and the general personal welfare of workers. Tirbutt's (2005:47) definition of an EAP illustrates the broader scope of employer involvement and multi-level programmes: "A 24-hour helpline backed up with the ability to access face to face counselling service, with a heavy emphasis on stress management but also extending to legal, financial and other personal and work related matters. EAPs normally offer management referral and provide employers with management consultancy data on accurate utilisation statistics."

There is a growing trend to engage with an EAP in the pro-active prevention of absence and to link it with occupational health. Employers are increasingly demanding that EAPs be integrated with health/life balance issues and the promotion of a healthy workplace. The position of the EAP is changing from that of an out dated service to forming part of a bigger

more extensive service, focusing on employee well-being. A further trend in EAP, according to Tirbutt (2005:48), is that management is more pro-active in making referrals to EAPs rather than simply waiting for employees to refer themselves. Such formal referrals lead to an increased usage of programme services and increased knowledge on the diversity, purpose and function of the programme.

5.4.1 Models in EAP

The intense competition among external EAP service providers has raised the availability and quality of services in the market. According to Oss and Clary (1998:7), the EAP is likely to develop in several directions. EAP services are expanding and compete for the coverage of the largest proportion of the labour force. This competition forces EAP service providers to develop programmes and services that fit the needs of the company at a competitive price. The demands of the workplace effect the growth and development of EAPs, changing the characteristics to fit the need of the workplace. Stress and cultural influences, the use of alcohol and illicit drugs and behavioural health problems could impact on the need for EAP services in the workplace. Originally the EAPs focused on the individual troubled employee, his/her supervisor and how to manage the problem and restore performance in a reactive way. EAPs have recently started to take a more preventative focus, participating in workplace risk management activities and attempting to mitigate the workplace risk factors.

Society in general also has an influence on the development of EAP services (Burke *et al.*, 2006:290) Not only in America but also in South Africa, people are becoming aware of EAP services. A big proportion of the workforce has access to EAP services and this proportion grows annually. Owing to the employee's awareness and usage of the service, adaptations are made to fulfil the needs of the individual employee using the EAP service. The workforce is aware of the existence of EAP service and demands a quality service.

PPC International (PPC Clinical Practice, 2004:3) provides two models for EAPs:

- Assessment and referral model
- Brief counselling model.

Both EAP models include comprehensive, customised programming that integrates policy and procedure development, benefits administration, management training and consultation,

employee communications and programme implementation customised to best meet the needs of the client organisation. The assessment and referral model provides one to three sessions to clarify, define and assess the problem, after which the employee is referred to a provider in the resource network when appropriate. This model relies heavily on the use of employer group health benefits, private medical insurance or governmental resources.

The brief counselling model provides one to eight sessions within a solution-focused brief therapy model. With this model 75% of problems can successfully be resolved within the EAP and only 25% need to be referred for treatment outside the EAP.

The external EAP service providers are in a position, and compete, to deliver services for the needs of the company and they, therefore, offer a variety of programmes. According to Burke, Carruth and Pichard (2006:291), the most commonly used programme is delivered by an external service provider in the full service programme. EAPs, according to Tirbutt (2005:47), "unlike mere help lines", offer face-to-face counselling in addition to telephone advice. The more sophisticated versions also offer services such as career guidance, retirement preparation, management consultancy advice, stress management, bereavement counselling, relationship counselling, training in various areas and absence management. They also interpret data in order to identify trends and problem areas in the market and plan strategies and interventions to address these issues. "The focus is thus on delivering a range of services."

Full service contracts delivered by an external service provider in terms of an EAP usually includes up to eight emotional counselling sessions per employee and direct family members per problem. This is usually a more expensive programme. External services providers usually give companies the option of a cheaper programme. This programme is called a fee-for-service or pay-as-you-go programme (*Careways Procedures Manual*, 2005). According to Tirbutt (2005:46), the pay-as-you-go option is appealing to small and medium businesses that cannot afford the full service programme. This programme entails that the company pays a retainer fee and thereafter is billed for the services delivered. By giving these options companies can choose a programme "tailor made" for the company's workforce needs and budget.

5.5 EFFECTIVE EAPS

5.5.1 Goals of an EAP

Thompson (1990:164) mentions the following goals of EAPs:

- *Identifying* employees whose personal problems negatively impact on their work performance. Supervisors should identify employees whose work performance deteriorates.
- The *motivation* of employees to seek help and to accept help for their problems. Sonnenstuhl and Trice (1990:2) mention that supervisors should confront employees with evidence of poor performance, to guide them on how to improve work performance and motivate them to make use of the EAP.
- The *assessment* of the employee's problems, personal resources and the development of an action plan to support the employees. Bruce (1990:137) is of the opinion that referral to the EAP should not be considered a punishment. It must be seen as a natural consequence if an employee consistently fails to follow through with plans that are part of performance monitoring.
- The *support* of the employee to make use of services that he/she needs to live a healthy and productive life.

5.5.1.1 Essential elements of an EAP

According to Arthur(2000:550–551) and Quick and Tetrick (2007:293–294), there are certain essential elements that distinguish an effective EAP from other EAPs. Such an EAP is distinguished by its integrated approach and its systematic design that mesh the administrative and social systems of the organisation and its environment.

The essential elements consist of:

- A systematic survey of the organisation to determine the nature, causes and extent of problems perceived by individuals, taking the viewpoints of all stakeholders and functional specialists in the organisation into account
- Continuing commitment and support from top management to provide counselling, advisory and assistance services to troubled employees on a non-judgmental, non-cost, confidential basis
- A clear written set of policies and procedures that outline the purpose of the EAP and how it functions in the organisation

- Close co-operation with local unions
- An effective programme of production and publicity of the EAP to all employees as potential clients, emphasising in particular its confidentiality, access and scope of issues covered
- Training of supervisors on the role of problem identification
- A linked programme of education and training on the goals and methods of EAP for all staff members focusing on the identification of the "troubled employee", and for the individuals responsibility for wellbeing on the roles of managers, supervisors and shop stewards within the design and implementation of the EAP and the duties and capabilities of counsellors, including any limitations on their activities
- A procedure for contact with the EAP and referral to counselling, details of procedures for self-referral and (if appropriate) managerial referral(in cases of managerial referral, employee consent for referral needs to be obtained)
- An explicit policy of confidentiality of employee information
- Maintenance of records for programme evaluation purposes
- A definition of problem assessment procedures, including diagnosis routes, unlimited confidentiality guarantees, scope of counsellors' training and their accreditation, competencies and organisational knowledge
- A protocol outlining the extent of short-term counselling and longer-term treatment and assistance
- A statement of macro and micro linkages with other services in the community or with specialist resources or support mechanisms
- A procedure for follow-up and monitoring of employees
- An administrative channel for the feedback of aggregated statistics on the age and short- and longer-term outcomes of EAP, generated by the providers of the programme
- An evaluation procedure of individual and corporate benefits of the EAP on the most impartial basis practical.

These elements are essential ingredients for an effective EAP whether it is an internal or external programme.

Other than these essential elements that an effective EAP should consist of, there are certain core technologies distinctive to EAP services. Roman and Blum (1988:22) and EAPA SA

(1999:15) discuss these core technologies and mention that they are pertinent to effective employee assistance:

- Consultation, training and assistance services for managers, supervisors and union stewards, who seek to manage the troubled employee, enhance the work environment and improve employee job performance, outreach and education for employees and their family members about the availability of EAP services
- Confidential and timely problem identification/assessment services for employee clients with personal concerns that may affect job performance
- Use of constructive confrontation, motivation and short-term intervention with clients to address problems that affect their work performance
- Referral of clients for diagnosis, treatment and assistance, as well as case monitoring and follow-up services
- Consultation to the employer organisation to encourage the availability of employee access to health benefits covering medical and behavioural problems, including but not limited to alcoholism, drug abuse, mental and emotional disorders
- Consultation to the employer organisation in establishing and maintaining effective relations with treatment and other service providers and in managing provider contracts.
- Identification of the effects of EAP services on the employer organisation and individual job performance.

More recently EAPA SA (2010:1–16) mentions certain core technologies that are fundamental to a successful EAP. The core technologies entail the following:

- **Training and development**

Organisation stakeholders (managers, supervisors and unions) should be trained, developed and assisted to effectively manage the employee who is experiencing problems, enhancing the work environment and improving job performance.

- **Marketing**

EAP services should be promoted to management, supervisors, employees, unions and family members.

- **Case management**

Timeous risk identification, assessment, motivation, short-term intervention, referral, monitoring, follow up, reintegration and aftercare service should be offered in a confidential manner to employees with personal and work-related issues in order to improve work performance.

- **Consultation with work organisation**

After identifying trends from personal and organisational issues, the work organisation should be addressed to proactively address the issues

- **Networking**

Through networking effective relations can be established and maintained with service providers and internal and external role-players.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**

Consistent monitoring and evaluation of EAP services in terms of value or success or impact for the work organisation and the individual job performance are crucial.

The elements of an effective EAP and the core technologies of an EAP are closely linked and overlap in some ways, but both indicate guidelines that are necessary for an effective EAP. The elements and core technologies can be used to evaluate if an EAP is effective and consists of the important fundamental aspects that enable it to deliver effective services.

According to Hartwell *et al.* (1996:804), EAPs can be administratively affiliated with the human resources, medical or other department of the company, functioning either as an internal administrative unit or as an external contractor, depending on the needs and resources of the company. Essentially there are two models in EAP service delivery. Services according to the in-house model are delivered by personnel employed by the company. Often there is direct control by the occupational health or human resource management departments. The external model makes use of an external service provider company specialising in EAP services. It has a network of counsellors to provide services for a variety of large and smaller employer clients alike.

Developments in EAP are affected by stringent economic climate and confidentiality issues have predisposed delivery methods to be increasingly performed by external contractor providers.

5.6 EAP'S ROLE IN MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Traditionally, EAPs will be the first port of call if an employer has a crisis in the workplace. The majority of EAP service providers have a programme in place to address workplace trauma. Stephenson and Schneider (2006:35) mention that the demand on EAPs has increased dramatically in terms of addressing emotional and mental health demands of the customer organisations and their employees in response to large scale natural or man-made disasters. This response is often a generic response and usually includes critical incident stress debriefing.

Vineburgh, Ursano, Gifford, Benedek and Fullerton (2006:14) mention that, with events such as 9/11 (the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001), Hurricane Katrina and the avian flu pandemic, it was realised that trauma response was not sufficient and could be improved. They ask the question how employers and their employees can be better served before, during and after a disaster and acts of terrorism. They conclude that the focus should be more on managing the overall event rather than just reacting to the impact of the event. The focus, therefore, moves more towards CISM.

CISM is stated to be "a comprehensive, integrative, multi-component crisis intervention system. CISM is considered comprehensive because it consists of multiple crisis intervention components, which functionally span the entire temporal spectrum of a crisis. CISM interventions range from the pre-crisis phase through the acute crisis phase, and into the post-crisis phase. CISM is also considered comprehensive in that it consists of interventions which may be applied to individuals, small functional groups, large groups, families, organizations, and even communities" (MedicineNet.com).

CISM is the comprehensive approach to managing critical incident stress (CIS). PPC International (PPC clinical practice 2004:41) mentions that the comprehensive management of traumatic stress includes the following components:

- Critical incident education

- On-scene support
- Defusing
- Demobilisation
- Debriefing
- Individual consultation
- Follow-up debriefing
- Post-trauma counselling

Robinson (2004:29) mentions that it is a multi-component approach to staff support that incorporates education, individual support, group meetings (including CISD), organisational consultation, family support, referral and follow up.

The EAPA SA Standards document (2010:11) indicates that one of the standards to consider in designing, implementing and evaluating an EAP is clinical services. As part of an effective EAPs clinical service, trauma management should be offered. The goal of trauma management should be to respond to traumatic situations timeously in agreement with organisational policies and procedures. The objective of trauma management should be to provide trauma defusing services for the immediately affected employees, to provide debriefing for traumatised employees and to influence policies and procedures relating to trauma management. The motivation for trauma management is to lessen or prevent long-term difficulties or dysfunction for both individual employees and the organisation.

The researcher is of the opinion that EAPs play a pivotal role in the managing of trauma in the workplace. The fact that EAPA SA indicates that trauma management should form part of an EAPs scope of clinical services signifies that trauma management forms part of an effective EAP service offering to clients. Trauma management integrates with other services provided by EAPs and assists the company to address problems experienced by individuals and the organisation on various levels. Owing to the expertise of an EAP, the company can ensure that the trauma employees are exposed to and that impacts on their psychosocial functioning and work performance is correctly assessed and managed:

- **Organisational screening**

Stephenson and Schneider (2006:44) suggest that prior to a critical incident the organisation should be assessed in terms of group resilience, adaptive functioning,

mutual social support of the group, management support, resources in terms of providing shelter and physical care as well as emotional care, existing structure of dealing with critical incidents and internal role players.

The organisational screening should also include a surveillance of potential risk factors. This includes a clinical and organisational assessment of mental health issues, substance abuse issues and skills of employees, and identifying all potential medical, organisational and mental health resources to address possible reactions after an incident.

Vineburgh *et al.* (2006:14) mention that the organisational screening should include the assessment of possible threats to an organisation, the level of employee preparedness, the overall health, performance and leadership functions necessary to sustain organisational resilience in the face of disasters or terrorism attacks.

EAPs can translate knowledge about appropriate disaster behaviour into workplace health interventions to foster human continuity and organisational resilience.

- **Consultation with management**

After the organisational screening, management should be informed about the outcome of the organisational screening, and possible risks should be highlighted. This gives an idea of the employee population in terms of physical and mental health issues, possible reactions, resources and concerns in the event of a critical incident (Stephenson & Schneider, 2006:45).

According to Vineburgh *et al.* (2006:15), this information can assist the EAP to provide a contingency plan for possible critical incidents and disasters. It will further assist management in developing a policy on conduct in such an event, integrating certain professionals (e.g. security) as change agent partners, mobilising a task team and communicating strategy to employees.

- **Psychological first aid (PFA)**

The role of the EAP will also be to explore the efficiency of debriefing and alternative approaches to organisational crises intervention. Current literature agrees that PFA is a favoured alternative approach to CISD and forms an integral part of CISM.

"Psychological first aid (PFA) consists of a systematic set of helping actions aimed at reducing initial post-trauma distress and supporting short- and long-term adaptive functions" (Ruzek, Brymer, Jacobs, Layne, Vernberg & Watson: 2007:17). According to VandePol, Gist, Braverman and Labardee (2006:123), PFA "is by intent a more flexible approach to assessing impacts, determining viable points of productive assistance, and generating helping strategies specifically geared toward the express needs and expectations of the organisation being served and the employees affected. As such it is consultative rather than clinical and advocates assistance rather than intervention."

PFA is constructed around eight core actions (Ruzak *et al.*, 2007:17):

- Contact and engagement
The PFA providers are challenged to rapidly establish contact with traumatised employees and to develop a positive relationship.
- Safety and comfort
Practical help must start by ensuring immediate physical safety, providing physical and emotional comfort and promoting a psychological sense of safety.
- Stabilisation
When traumatised employees are emotionally overwhelmed, it may be important to attempt to calm them down and to reduce their distress.
- Information gathering
Because the focus is on immediate assistance for the traumatised employee, information gathering in the context of PFA focuses mainly on the identification of immediate needs and concerns, for example immediate post-trauma circumstances, on-going threat, physical illness, need for medication, severity of experiences during the disaster.
- Practical assistance
Assisting traumatised employees with current or anticipated problems is crucial. On-going adversities and continuing problems resulting from the disaster can add significantly to the stress levels of survivors, distract them from self-care and maintain distress reactions.

- Connection with social supports
Assistance with re-establishing contacts with primary support persons or other sources of support (e.g. family, friends and community helping resources) is an important PFA action.
- Information on coping support
Although PFA is not focused on treatment of psychological problems, the PFA contact provides an important opportunity to influence coping behaviour of affected employees by providing brief education about the incident, stress reactions and coping.
- Linkage with collaborative services.
It is likely that affected employees might need additional assistance following a PFA contact, the contact is used to link survivors with appropriate services.
The objectives of PFA are practical and palliative rather than therapeutic (VandePol *et al.*, 2006:124), focused on the initial intervention after trauma and referring for more specialised care if needed.
- Specialisation or speciality partnerships
Universal approaches such as defusing and debriefing are widely accepted as a standard way of care and can be adapted by any provider to suit the needs of the client. It has become evident that ordinary approaches to crisis response are not fully addressing the needs and issues of employees. Specialisation or speciality partners focusing only on providing CISM help organisations to plan, assess, respond and react to critical incidents in the best way, and provide constant access to the best information available and the best practices, no matter what the circumstances or situation.

The role of the EAP is to provide a specialised service or to establish a working relationship with a specialised partner in the field of CISM in order to be in a position to provide the best possible service to the clients. According to VandePol *et al.* (2006:126–128), an EAP with a specialised CISM service or a specialised partner should be able to deliver the following:

- Training, information and preparation to inform best practice
- Consultation and assistance with contingency planning
- Access to tools, techniques and instruments
- Rapid access to trained and capable response staff

- Access to evidence-based tools and techniques for responding beyond the crises situation
- Evaluation, follow up and impact analysis.

Effective CISM is focused on normalising the abnormal in the quickest possible time to prevent any unnecessary discomfort to the employee, the company and family members and to restore functioning and productivity.

5.7 VALUE OF AN EAP

The value of an EAP is mostly determined in terms of normalising the reactions employees display after a critical incident and improved psychosocial functioning of the individual, meaning that the focus is on showing less symptomatic discomfort. Effectiveness is also measured in terms of restoring and stabilising the organisation, that is, being fully functional and productive in the quickest possible time. It is usually difficult to measure these factors and to determine the direct impact of an incident and the result of an intervention in the process of restoring the individual's and organisation's functioning.

There is, however, evidence from the literature that EAP intervention in terms of critical incidents is effective.

Critical incident stress response(CIR) refers to an integrated, comprehensive, multi-component crisis intervention approach for addressing the psychological consequences of critical incidents. CIR usually forms part of a EAPs CISM strategy that focuses on the appropriate intervention for a specific critical incident. Over the past 25 years, a general model of CIR group debriefing has been developed that can be used to accelerate recovery from traumatic workplace events (VandePol *et al.*, 2006:119).CIR can accomplish psychological closure, prevention and mitigation of traumatic stress, and promote return to normalcy, benefiting the individual, organisation and the community at large.

According to a review by the National Institute of Mental Health (2002:2), "Early, brief, and focused psychotherapeutic intervention can reduce distress in bereaved spouses, parents, and children".

What is not a debate anymore, however, is that the use of CISM or other kinds of psychological early interventions cannot successfully *prevent* the experience of PTSD, according to research reported by Bryant (2007:22) and Feldner, Monson and Friedman (2007:86). But once someone has developed PTSD or acute stress disorder, there are treatments with empirical evidence of their clinical efficacy.

Many employers provide access to CIR services because it is the "right thing to do" and thus may not require a formal business case to justify providing the services (Claussen, 2009:49). CIR services are provided primarily for the reason of improving the clinical recovery of the individuals affected by the trauma or crisis experience. In the process of this recovery, however, there can also be other outcomes that can benefit the organisation as well. The business value for employers of the proper use of CIR services from EAPs is most likely to be found in the outcomes of reduced worker health care costs, reduced disability claim costs, reduced workers' compensation claim costs, reduced worker absence days, and reduced worker turnover because an increasing number of employees can successfully return to work after being on disability due to experiencing a traumatic event (Smith & Rooney, 1999:341). Some businesses provide access to CIR services as a form of risk management and to reduce their legal exposure to workplace-related traumatic incidents (Tehrani, 2002:474).

EAPs strive to improve employee productivity and organisational performance. According to Holtyn (2006:8) and the results of the exclusive return on investment study conducted among wellness managers in America, workplace wellness programmes improve employee morale, reduce company healthcare costs and increase productivity on many levels.

The employee assistance workgroup (EAP workgroup) was established in 2007 to develop recommendations for improving the coordination and integration of EAPs, as well as examining best practices and evidence-based approaches to design and deliver effective and efficient EAPs (Rothermel, Slavitt, Marlo & Dan, 2008:2).

According to Mercer (2007:201), EAPs aligned with an overall health and productivity strategy can perform a critical role in identifying individual and organisational risk factors that may decrease performance. A report by Wyatt (2007:19) suggests that organisational response to health and productivity challenges will increase revenue, market value and shareholder returns.

Rothermal *et al.* (2007:8) mention that an EAP that is aligned with organisational values and vision measurably enhances business operations, the overall employee experience and the community's perception of the company.

EAPs add value in the following three ways (McCleod and McCleod, 2001:187; Rothermel *et al.*, 2007:8–9):

- EAPs leverage the value of the organisation's investment in its workforce by:
 - Encouraging employee engagement
 - Improving employees and their dependents' abilities to successfully respond to life challenges
 - Offering employees and dependents short-term problem resolution services or referring them to mental health treatment services
 - Developing manager and employee competencies in dealing with workplace stress and improving team performance.
- EAPs address the cost of doing business by:
 - Reducing workplace absenteeism and unplanned absence
 - Decreasing workplace accidents
 - Lowering employee turnover and related replacement costs
 - Facilitating safe, timely and effective return-to-work for employees after short-term and extended absence
 - Reducing healthcare costs
 - Increasing efficient use of health care through early identification, care management and recovery efforts.
- EAPs mitigate business risk by:
 - Reducing the likelihood of workplace violence or other safety risks
 - Managing the effect of disruptive incidents in the workplace, such as violence, injury or other crises, and facilitate a swift return-to-work after adverse workplace events
 - Supporting disaster and emergency preparedness and minimising disruption after such an event
 - Smoothing the adjustment to mergers, acquisitions, site closures or other workforce change events
 - Reducing the likelihood of legal action or liability

- Promoting and supporting drug-and alcohol-free workplace policies and programmes.

According to the American Psychological Association, successful organisations more and more realise that taking care of employees is not only the right thing to do, it also makes good business sense as some of the employers demonstrate that investing in employee health and wellbeing leads to business success (Newman, 2007:17).

5.8 CONCLUSION

Trauma and critical incidents area part of everyday life and affects employees and organisations on a daily basis. EAPs play a pivotal role in the world of work and providing an appropriate intervention for trauma. Both employers and employees benefit from EAPs as they provide easy access to intervention for a range of problems and traumas that effect employees and organisational performance.

Although it is at times difficult to prove the impact of an EAP, it is clear, according to the literature, that it has a positive effect on employees affected by critical incidents. Companies also benefit as EAPs help to reduce absenteeism and presenteeism, health care costs, staff turnover and accidents at work. This leads to a decrease in the time employees and companies are affected and leads to increased productivity.