COUNSELLING IN WORK PLACE SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

Counselling as a helping service is designed to provide an interacting relationship where the counselor attempts to help an individual to better himself in his present and future decisions or problems. This negates the assumption that counselling is only for the school setting. The paper discussed the counselling needs of individuals in the work place setting, as educational, vocational, personal-social, pre-retirement and retirement counselling needs. Suggestions were propounded amongst which is that there should the a qualified and trained counsellor in each Human resource development department of any workplace so that workers can be assisted to lead a harmonious and productive life and for efficient service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of counselling individuals in organizations other than the school setting is receiving increased attention in recent times due to the increased complexities of life individuals finds themselves in. Counselling in the work place is seen as a collaborative problem-solving process between the counselor and a worker/client which focuses on identifying and discussing the client's sustainability, establishing with client realistic or employment or career goals, identifying the solutions and corrective action needed to achieve these goals and implementing a plan of action aimed at labour market integration, or business initiation. Counselors working in settings other than the school should assists in their employment needs and to define realistic employment goals. As such counsellors are the key players in the provision of assistance in any public employment service. Clients are also supposed to be assisted by way of gaining skills and training needed to enter and stay on the job. This may be in the areas of technical skills, interpersonal skills, or effectiveness skills.

Counselling should be an integral part of the services of any work place and a key element in achieving the improved employability of a client. It will assist individuals who are experiencing serious labour problems to overcome existing or anticipated labour problems leading to integration into appropriate conducive work environment. Client self-sufficiency and long-term increased employability, which are the desired outcomes of counselling in the work place are important goals.

Considering therefore the fact, that counselling is mainly concerned with the ways of assisting an individual client (counselee) to understand himself, the world around him and so be able to utilize his potentialities to the fullest and live a normal and well adjusted life; tin's paper intends to focus on what counselling can do as a way of interaction to the numerous problems faced by the Nigerian worker.

As a helping relationship, counselling is designed virtually for all persons. The nature and intensity of the assistance however varies from person to person and from one group to another, depending, however, on the peculiar needs of such individuals or groups.

One of such groups with peculiar needs for counselling, but whose needs have not yet received much attention from appropriate authorities are workers. For productivity to be enhanced, thereby justifying the high wage bills incurred by various employing agencies, problems that may confront workers that will limit the scope of their functioning such as educational vocational, personal-social, pre-retirement, and retirement counselling needs would have to be identified and tackled. Therefore, this paper intends to look at the aforementioned needs of the Nigerian worker for efficient service delivery.

Rationale *for* Counselling Outside the School Setting

Counselling has been viewed by Downing (1968), Makinde (1983), Bulus and Lar (1986), as the heart of the guidance programme, ft implied, therefore, that counselling is concerned with the feelings, attitudes and emotional disposition of an individual about himself and the situation facing him. As a helping service, counselling is designed to provide an interacting relationship where the counselor is attempting to help an individual to better himself in his present and the future decisions or problems, f fence, the need for counselling in the work place setting, so as to debunk the assumption that the services are only limited in scope and in particular confined to school the setting. It is because of this narrow view of counselling services that it becomes necessary to examine this practice in other setting outside the school. It is a fact that individuals in settings outside the school also have problems that need the intervention of counselors.

It is in this regard that Oyeleke (1991), observed that counselling has the potential of assisting individuals throughout their life span and in virtually all environments. There is always the need to provide people with the opportunities to relate

their aspirations the realities of their environment when it comes to choices and decisions.

Salawu (1995) pointed that, work has been regarded as a central force in defining individual life styles. So, a broad understanding of work and its potential meaning to different people is crucial to the effective practice of career counselling. The rationale for counseling in the work place, therefore implies that work is fundamental to how one feels about oneself and adjustment to work is affected by worker's habit, values, attitudes and feelings comprising what is known as "effective work competences".

Osipow (1982) identified certain problems (hat could require the attention of a professional counselor in the work place setting as follows:

(i)   Helping employees and managers identify hazard in work,

(ii)   Training people to identify their work style (especially those that might be deleterious to them, and tracing them,

(iii)   The effects of repetitive work on people;

(iv)   The effects of transfer to new locations especially if forced;

(v)   Special stresses and strains in the two-career couple family;

(vi)   Preparation for retirement'

(vii)   Dealing with the problems of the jobless;

(viii) Health care issues;

(ix)   Self help and self-care, and

(x)   Family counselling

Apart from the foregoing problems identified by Osipow, Okpede (1998) saw the counselling needs of workers to include Educational counselling, Vocational Counselling, Personal-Social Counselling and Retirement Counselling. All these would be discussed briefly here.

Educational Needs of the Worker

Okpede (1998) asserted that at a glance, one may wonder or ponder as to why a worker could still be associated with the educational needs when they are expected to have been people whose academic undertakings must have been crystallized before the commencement of working life. It is to be noted, however, that the quest for further acquisition of knowledge is inexhaustible.

Thus, it might not be surprising to find out that even after having reached the zenith and apogee of one's educational pursuit by obtaining a first degree, some workers still Inter develop further desires for some oilier forms of academic pursuits as amplified subsequently.

Another dimension to the issue of educational needs as manifested by workers is *the* fact that most middle level as well as lower level workers were not able to maximize their schooling opportunities before their employment Okpede (1992) found that, for most workers, they could not pursue their educational undertaking to the University level as a result of family pressures and other problems. For others, poor parental background making it impossible for them to sponsor themselves beyond some level, and other still had to discontinue as a result of their inability to obtain qualifying requirements for higher education. Counselling if properly organized and managed within the work place can help adequately in tackling the above needs of workers by guiding (hem into right courses, right schools and appropriate time to attend to school.

Vocational Needs of Workers

Tambuwal (2001) asserted that a vocation are activities, trade or occupation and others constituting a life style expressed in lime, energy and ability. Vocation is a calling, it is an occupation with a sense of commitment and person-centred. Workers are having a vocation which implied needs to a lifestyle which calls for counselling intervention so that the life a worker leads is commensurate to what can be obtained within his limitations. Vocational psycholologist such as see "work"' as one of the basic requirements of human existence, because it determines the social status, values, attitudes and styles of living of an individual, Hansen (1974), opined that work provides ways for people to fulfill a variety of psychological needs. It may be an outlet for an expressive drive that each of us has. It may also provide for a person to win approval from others, to be appreciated by others. Work may promote the development of relationship, an important part of most people lives. Feeling like, appreciated and need are part of people's work experience.

Tambuwal (2001) citing Morse and Welse (1974) postulated that a very important aspect of most people's working lives and one readily available to themselves is the fact that working gives them a feeling of being tied into the large system of society of having something to do, of having a purpose in life. In an investigation by

McCandless (1970), men were asked, "if by some chance you inherited enough money to live comfortable without working do you think you would work or not?". The great majority 80% percent, answered that, they would "fee lost" if they did not work, "go crazy with idleness" and "not know what to do" with their lime, such responses indicated to the investigator that many people work to ward-off the twin threats of loneliness and isolation.

From the foregoing it can be seen that some workers in the work place are not just there for the financial gain but also to be part of a community that is, to belong and word off isolation and redundancy. Therefore counselling can best suit the worker to assist him in his vocational needs. Okpade (1998), stated that since workers differ in the nature, course and degree of the type of vocational problems that confront, it is required that counselors who work with them must be prepared to approach them individually and in groups as may be dictated by the circumstances of the time. Therefore identifiable workers would require vocational counselling in the following areas as listed by Okpede (1998):-

(a)   Helping them to fully understand and accept who are they in terms of their ability, aptitude, interest and personality.   This is achieved through the appraisal service.

(b)   Broadening their knowledge about the world of work so that they may fully appreciate the wide ranges of options open to them for choice making.

(c)   Helping in matching individuals to appropriate and relevant vocational areas.

(d)   Helping workers cope with stress and frustrations at work.   It is this service that would be found relevant and useful by senior civil servants whose career decision have already reached what Ginzberg refers to as "the irreversible stage".

(e)   Acting as the ombudsman between superior and subordinate officers, since some of the problems of workers stems from poor relationship between superior officer and their subordinates.

(f)   Serving as referral points when the need arise.

Since some of the workers vocational problems might be beyond the counselor's ability to handle, it might be appropriate for him (i.e. the counselor) to identify such workers with peculiar problems and refer them to appropriate sectional heads with whom solutions to their problems might be found.

Workers' Personal-Social Counselling Needs:

Denga (1985), put forward a number of personal social problems of individuals which cut across academic performance and also provide a basis for failure in occupational pursuits. Typical examples of such problems include inter personal relationship problems, family problems, marital disharmony, broken homes, sexual difficulties, emotional disturbances, phobic fever, self concept problems, drug abuse, juvenile and adult delinquency and other forms of maladaptive behaviour.

Apart from the above mentioned Okpede (1998) citing Morris and Associates asserted that the counselor should also from time to time provide workers with personal-social information as follows:

> valid and useful data about the opportunities and influences of the man physical environment which bear on personal and interpersonal relationship. It is that information about human beings which will help a student to understand himself better and to improve his relationships with others included but not constituting whole, are such broad areas of information as "understanding self and "getting along with others as well as such specific areas as boy-girl relations, manners and etiquette, leisure time activities, personal appearance, social skills, home and family relationships, financial planning and healthy living. (Okpede 1998:24-25).

The identified personal-social areas, if properly harnessed and coordinated would lead to a friendly and productive working environment.

Workers' Pre-retirement and Retirement Counselling Needs:

Akinade (1993) defines retirement as a "final stage of life when one leaves an occupation which one had been involved in for a considerable length of ones working life". Retirement is an inevitable stage of ageing where the individual gradually disengages from the main stream of active work, social life and is eventually replaced by a younger person. It is a stage in an individual's life which is very sensitive and complex. An employee about to retire must have put in about 30 years working or he is 45 years of age in Nigeria. That is he is approaching the end of his working career. But that does means that life has ended. Rather he is about to enter into another chapter of his

life span. It is this phase of life (retirement period) which is as same as death that people generally find difficult to plan towards. Instead of retiring to a meaningful and fulfilled life they rather face social and financial problems and probably untimely death, simply because they failed to plan well during their active working life. Counselors in work place setting need to address such and related issues.

The hope of every worker is that one day he would successfully retire and receive his benefits. Such workers may need to adequately prepare for disengaging from active service because their working life has become almost part of their lives. There is need, therefore, for counselling in the work place to prepare the minds of prospective retirees on what to expect on retirement and how to manage their retirement benefits. The task of counselling in the work place is therefore to provide adequate counselling procedure by the counselor in all facets of life that will assist an individual make positive decision on retirement. The fact that retirement is an inevitable phenomenon for workers at a certain stage in life demands proper planning and necessitates pre-retirement counselling.

Ndaman (2005), identified the following as the informations to be given to workers either retiring or already retired.

1)   Investment information;
2)   Skill acquisition
3)   Accommodation
4)   Health care
5)   Social information

Planning ahead of retirement is a pre-requisite for creating a satisfying retirement. Relying on pension and gratuity can be frustrating, because the process take such a long time before benefits are released. Ones children also can not be relied upon as a social security because they can also disappoint one by way of complains and mischief. Therefore workers retiring really need the assistance of a counsellor so as to have a safe landing.

Apart from the aforementioned areas of counselling needs in the work place, Denga (2001), opined that there are issues of psychological malaise which germinates in work places. Typical among the psychological problems often experienced by industrial employees are depression, anxiety, low self-concept because the society regards the blue-

collar workers as dirty and not well educated. Psycho-physiological problems such as hypertension, heart diseases, stomach ulcers incurred mostly through long hours of normal and overtime schedules without proper feeding. Family problems due to protected absence from home in order to meet commitments at industries is another problem.

The major sources of these psychological problems include job stress, over demanding company's goal and impact on workers, inter-personal/ intergroup conflicts, irregular reward systems, a lack of appropriate tools for some workers and organizational insensitivity to personal and family problems of workers (Denga, 1980 & 1984). The industrial workers' problems manifest themselves not only in the psychological devastation but also in worker apathy, absenteeism, and wanton waste of industrial material as a way of revenging on the management, excessive smoking and drinking and industrial accidents since some workers might operate the machinery absent-mindedly.

Counselors in industries can utilize the following procedures:-

(i)   listen to workers and analyze their problems'

(ii)   teach workers how to cope with stress;

(iii)   help workers to explore skills which they could transfer to other

jobs should they face retrenchment from the organization

(iv)   Organize programme that can develop workers' skills in muscle relaxation and help them to stop smoking, drinking and other forms of maladaptive behaviour.

(v) Mount personal-social counselling workshop where family problems and other psychological problems can be discussed with a view to resolving behaviours.

(vi)   Consult   with   the   arrangement   sector   to   discuss   healthy management skills   and   other   modalities   aimed   at   humanizing   the   relationship   between   the management and employees,

(vii). Make referrals to medical Doctors, religious leaders and other competent sources as soon as problems outside the competence of the counselling are diagnosed.

Conclusion

Counselling has been identified to have a significant position in the work place setting if harmony is required within the workers and the managers. Individuals who understand themselves and their world will become more effective, more productive

and happier human beings. Individuals can achieve greater awareness not only of who they are but who they can become through counselling services.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions so far on what role can counselling play in the work place setting for improved service delivery, this paper recommends as follows:-

(1) The Human Resources Development Department of each work place setting should have a qualified counselor attached to it.

2) Appraisal materials be made available in all work place settings for workers to know their capabilities and weaknesses.

3) Since counselling is recognized as a profession, then the enable laws should be put in place for its actual practice in the Nigerian setting.

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