

# Counselling at the Workplace in Tanzania

## What can Distance Education do?

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines practice in counselling at workplaces. It draws examples from Tanzania. Authors define counselling as a collaborative approach towards problem solving. It is a step-by-step process of self-actualization guided by a counsellor. The authors are of the view that in most workplaces in Tanzania, for instance, there is a vacuum in counselling activities. Workers have very few professional counsellors to go to for guidance and counselling. This vacuum is usually promptly filled up with managerial actions, trade unionism and personal efforts towards individualisation which is merely advice and not counselling. They further argue that, both trade unionists and managers have objectives sometimes different from those of workers. In other instances, they frustrate the workers instead of helping them to fruitful and well-informed decisions. The paper concludes that the vacuum that exists in counselling at the workplace may be damaging to some work relations, institutional services, and can be a source of job dissatisfaction and low productivity. Thus it must be replaced with professional counselling services. The paper further argues that even where professional counsellors are employed (for example educational institutions like universities), only students are counselled and the workers are not covered as if they have no problems. Counsellors have strictly prescribed duties of dealing with students only. This paper recommends that distance education can be used in various forms to train counsellors for workplaces. Both short and long term programmes meant to groom counsellors capable of professionally guiding and counselling workers can be developed.*

**Keywords:** Counselling at the workplace, distance education, trade unionism, individuation, managerial actions

### INTRODUCTION

Employers are interested in the productivity of their firms and performance of their staff. They are in business to produce. They have deadlines to be met and few staff members with whom to meet them. When employees are unhappy, over anxious or stressed, they are not able to tightly perform their jobs well, and organization productivity and performance will go down. It is in an organization's interest to avoid uneconomical use of their human resources, and the provision of counselling services may be one way of sustaining employee performance, achieving business targets and showing commitment to employees as individuals.

This paper examines the application of counselling in resolving employee motivation and performance problems in organizations. The discussion is divided into six sections. The first section discusses the concept of counselling. The second section examines the application of counselling at work. The Third section dwells on the practicalities of implementation of counselling at work in Tanzania. This is followed by the subsequent sections on counselling implication for management in Tanzania, conclusion and recommendation.

## **COUNSELLING**

There is no agreed single definition of counselling. It has been defined differently by different scholars and psychologists. Counselling is a process of accounting for the growth, development, acquisition and change of people's behaviour. This means that, through developing positive self concept, positive self esteem and positive individuation, people are enabled to recognize and utilize their resources and making career related decisions as well as managing career related problems. It assists counselees to behave in a more motivated manner. The assistance is determined by the counsellor. The motivated manner is determined by the counselees themselves (Delaney and Eisenberg, 1972; Barclay, 1971; Neely, 1982).

De Board (1983); (Burnard 1992; Nathan and Hill 1992), defined counselling as the task of giving a client an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and toward a greater well being. Counselling is therefore a way of relating and responding to another person so that he/she is helped to explore his/her frontiers of the mind, thoughts, feelings and behaviour with the view of acquiring a clear self-understanding.

Parkinson (1995:9) described counselling as a method or process that provides the right atmosphere in which a relationship of trust between two or more people can be developed. As a result of this people are enabled to discover their inner weakness and strength or courage to find their own way through their problems.

### **WHO IS A COUNSELOR?**

A counsellor in UK situation - as explained by Delaney and Eisenberg (1972), is a person who is qualified to offer counselling. A qualified counsellor is a person who has successfully completed graduate studies in counselling, has had the experience of practicing counselling under supervision, is approved and registered by a professionally recognized organization. Experience shows that there are qualified counsellors in employment or occupational counselling, psychological counselling, elementary or secondary school counselling (also commonly known as educational counselling), pastoral counselling, clinical counselling, industrial counselling, social counselling and career counselling.

In Tanzania, counselling is still at its embryonic stage. There is no a professional body responsible for this. For quite sometime, permeation has been the approach used in training counsellors in the country. The Institute of Social Welfare, The University of Dar es salaam and The Open University of Tanzania have been using this approach. Trainees are being trained in counselling as one of the requirements of their academic degree programmes. This is the case with student teachers at the University of Dar es salaam and the Open University of Tanzania and Social Welfare students at the Social Welfare Institute and students in Sociology and Social Work at The Open University of Tanzania. Focused professional training in counselling has therefore just started. Only two universities - Tumaini University College in Iringa and the University of Dodoma, have degree programmes in counselling. Apart from the graduates of these two universities, there are other few counsellors trained abroad, especially in the UK and the US. Other institutions like churches have short course programmes of between one week and four weeks of training counsellors. For example, the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) have been running such programmes since 1986 with the view of training counsellors for secondary schools, non governmental organizations working with youths and church related activities. Of the late, private institutions like Dar es salaam Institute of Hotel Management have started offering diplomas in counselling with an emphasise in HIV/AIDS related counselling. Regardless of the duration of their training, all these are seen and accepted as counsellors. This means that counselling can be learned although some people like Parkinson (1995:25) argue that counsellors have some innate

qualities such as flexibility, warmth acceptance of others, open-mindedness, empathy, self-awareness, genuineness, respect of others, non- dominance and objectivity.

### **WHO NEEDS COUNSELLING?**

Counselling is needed and is appropriate to all individuals faced by problems. Everyone at one point in time and in one situation in life needs counselling<sup>8</sup>. Wherever there are people - for instance at the work places, there will be problems. Such problems may be personal, group, family or organizational. They originate from within individuals or from the settings in which people find themselves. At work places, problems may originate from the interaction between the work environment and the individuals or groups on the one hand, and the management versus employees on the other (Parkinson, 1995:25).

### **IMPORTANCE OF COUNSELLING AT WORK PLACES**

Counselling at work place is geared to maximize employee motivation and performance. As a prerequisite to this, it has to resolve a number of related issues and conditions. These include the following:

#### ***Development of Positive Self-concept among Workers***

Self- concept is the sum total of a being's knowledge and understanding of one's self. Counseling therefore, enables workers to develop a positive understanding of their roles, responsibilities and duties, and the way their work relate to themselves. This is a key factor/ingredient to employee's motivation and job performance in organizations.

#### ***Human growth and development***

Counselling forces the counselee to think for himself/herself, and providing opportunities for his/her growth and change. It enables counselees to think for themselves and therefore making their own decisions that are right for themselves. It helps workers to face the reality and of their own autonomy and enables them to realize that they are free to make choice (De Board, 1983).

#### ***Instilling Positive Self esteem in Workers***

Counselling instills in workers a sense of courage, confidence, daringness and assurance. These motivate workers and in turn improve their performance. Positive self esteem embraces the way workers want to be perceived or understood in the organization.

#### ***Mitigates Individual Differences at Work***

Organizations are made of people characterized by individual differences. Individual differences range from disability, race, interpretations, class, and age to gender. Counselling fosters in workers the spirit of acceptance, tolerance and positive understanding of each other for the common good. These motivate workers as a community and raises performance.

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<sup>8</sup> A person whose job has been made redundant may approach a counsellor with a deep sense of shock, a feeling of shame , a reinforced impression of his /her own inadequacies, a sense of relief or a strongly defiant reaction Nathan and Hill(1992).

David felt a failure in his job as sales representatives. His sales figures were consistently lower than those of his colleagues and at his appraisal he was told that he lacked drive and to continue working he needed a visit to a counsellor Dickson and Roethlisbrger (1966)

### ***Alleviates Differences and Diversities in Culture***

Sometimes organizations find themselves in diametrically opposed cultures. In other cases, neglecting these cultures can lead to clashes. Counselling helps workers to manage cultural differences and diversities with the view of turning them into positive challenges for improved performance. It helps them to develop respect and appreciation, and tolerance of culture differences and diversity for easy integration and inclusion of all workers in various organizational processes.

For example, an organization is in a predominantly non-Islamic society, while employing some Muslims. These Muslim employees would like to fulfil the basic Islamic pillars of five prayers a day. This would mean praying at 1pm and 4:00 pm during working hours. Forbidding them to do so might lead to a religious clash. Allowing them would lead to avoidance of such a clash. To solve the problem the mid day break may be used in the mitigation. The mid day one hour break can be divided into two instead. During both breaks Muslim workers will have time to fulfil their prayers. The religious potential clash will be avoided and non-Muslims will not be affected in any way.

### ***Helps to Minimize the Effects of Psychological Problems on Workers***

Sometimes organizations and jobs inflict psychological problems on workers - like depression, stress, maladjustment just to mention some. This demotivates the workers and in turn affects their performance. Counselling helps workers to overcome the noted problems and thereby motivate them to work and perform their duties more diligently.

### ***Fosters Good Relations at Work***

Good relation at work is a prerequisite for better job performance and motivation of workers. Counselling fosters such relations through helping workers to recognize each other's contribution and to develop the spirit of collaboration and partnership among themselves. The relationships fostered by counselling are two-fold: first is between workers themselves and second is between workers and the management of the organization. When these relationships are good, workers become motivated and performance is improved.

### ***Mitigates Between Legal, Social and Work Environment***

One of the sources of problems at workplace is the mixing-up of legal, social and work environments. When the three are clearly understood by workers, the mix-up is eradicated. Through counselling workers will know the legal, social and work environments in which they operate. As a result, clashes and grudges at work are minimized, thus leading to high motivation and high performance among workers.

## **STAGES OF COUNSELLING**

Counselling at workplace has stages through which it is carried out. These include Exploration, Negotiation, Understanding, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation.

Exploration is the identification and assessment stage of the problem and it involves looking and listening for leads, using leads to get a description of facts and feelings of a situation, summarizing to check out what has been covered and what may need covering.

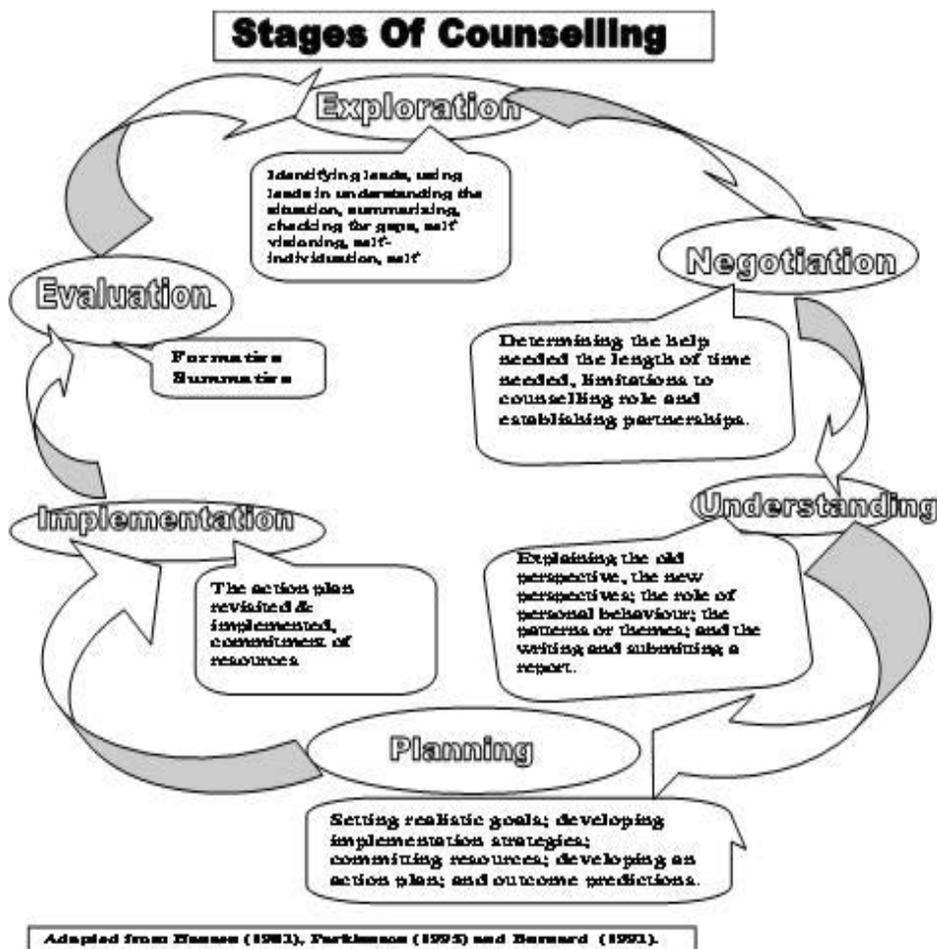
The negotiation stage entails the counsellor discussing and negotiating with the counselee about the problem. It involves getting explanation of the help counselee is seeking, agreeing on the time-line, determining the limitations on the counselling role and agreeing on partnerships.

The understanding stage entails helping the individual to develop positive self-concept and positive understanding of the problem. It involves discussing with the counselee the

preconceived perspectives of the problem and leading him/her into new perspectives. It is also about looking for patterns or themes in the problem and writing a report about the problem.

The Planning stage involves the preparation of actions. It involves setting SMART (Simple, Measurable, Articulate, Realistic, and Time bound) goals, allocating resources, designing an action plan setting what actions to be taken, when, where, by who, how, and choosing strategies for action.

Implementation stage involves putting the plan into action. It is the stage where the counsellor, the counselee and the establishment seek to eliminate the problem or considerably minimize its effects. It entails committing resources, revisiting the action planning to establish durability, improving it where necessary and putting the plan into action.



The evaluation stage is the introspection stage. It involves the square measurement of implementation to establish Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC analysis) with the view of getting the process right and avoiding similar problems in the future. The SWOC analysis is done into two phases. Phase one is during the Formative

evaluation. This is midway evaluation of the implementation. It provides room for adjusting the action plan and the implementation process. The last SWOC analysis is during the summative evaluation. This is the evaluation at the end of implementation. These provide issues for future action and follow up. The above Figure summarises these key stages.

In practice, these stages are not as discrete as they appear in the figure above. They overlap, and the process is itself continuous or iterative in nature.

#### **COUNSELLING AT WORKPLACES IN TANZANIA: THE STATE OF ART**

There are few professionally qualified counsellors at workplaces in Tanzania because, counselling is a new phenomenon and it is at an embryonic stage.. Even in organizations which purport to have counsellors - for example schools, colleges and universities, such are more engaged in administration of the institutions instead of undertaking counselling. In these institutions, counselling of students is entrusted in the hands of people who are not necessarily professional counsellors. Experience shows that there is a vacuum when it comes to counselling services at most workplaces in Tanzania. This vacuum is often filled up with miniature services by individuals not trained in counselling (Kainamula, 2009). In many organizations traditionally, managers and administrators on top of managerial duties also assume the role of counsellors to workers.

Counselling at workplaces is currently erratic and is more of an event rather than a process. Managers and administrators sometimes find it difficult to separate their managerial roles of being disciplinarians and punishers from counselling. In some cases, this threatens the relationship between managers/administrators with workers facing problems. Managers and administrators tend to advise instead of counselling workers. On the other hand, workers do not separate power and authority from their managers and administrators during the so-called counselling sessions. They tend to be reserved during the sessions. They quickly seek to appease their managers and administrators. At the same time, managers and administrators tend to end up giving marching orders like “go and do that and we will see”, or, “play your part and I will play mine”.

Like all organisations worldwide, organisations in Tanzania are concerned with performance. The management of workers’ performance with the view of optimising it, is a concern of all managers and administrators in both public and private sectors in the country. In 2004, the Government introduced a new way of managing workers performance in public service. Government circular number 2 of 2004 introduced The Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS). OPRAS is an open, formal, and systematised system meant to hold both employers and employees in planning, managing, evaluating and realizing the achievement of the organizational goals. It requires employers and employees to discuss ones plans and performance. The employee is usually advised about the achieved level of performance (URT, 2004; Bana & Shitindi, 2009). Some institutions like The Open University of Tanzania are using OPRAS, and advising workers on how to improve or maintain their performance is part of OPRAS. However, experience shows that some workers need something more beyond advice. In some workplaces in Tanzania there is an increased rate of untimely deaths, stroke, heart attacks, and blood pressure cases among workers as they lack counselling services due to shortage of counsellors. Critical performance cases tend to frustrate both employers and employees. The two parties may hold differing opinions as to why performance is quite disappointing. It is at this point that some management experts argue that after appraisal critical cases should be referred to a councillor (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2004). Unfortunately, there are no specialist/professional counsellors at workplaces in Tanzania.

In Tanzania, sometimes, workers in organisations get counselling support from the informal structures. Charismatic, social and task workers are frequently seen as viable counsellors by their fellow workers. These informal structures sometimes surpass the formal ones in counselling. In other instances, they become a source of friction between organizational leadership and workers either as individuals or groups.

In other cases, workers get counselling support from Trade Unions. In Tanzania, every workplace with at least 20 workers must have a branch of a legally constituted trade Union (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1998). These trade unions provide counselling services to workers as part of keeping them united and also as a strategy of exerting pressure on management if need-be. In such cases, trade unionism and radicalization of workers usually overrides counselling. In most cases, workers consult trade union leaders on issues like fringe benefits, remunerations and felt oppressions or repression by the management. In other instances therefore, trade unions can become reactive and confrontational in terms of their approach without necessarily observing the existing national laws and procedures.

Organizational leaders in Tanzania have some legally prescribed organs to advice and counsel them from within the organizations. These include Workers' Council, trade unions and the Integrity committee. In the Workers' Council, counsellors (who are usually workers elected representatives) advise the management on organizational issues of importance such as equipment, establishment, budget (both development and expenditure), and planning, calendar and leaders behaviours. However, individual workers have no opportunity of presenting personal feelings in Workers' Council meetings and thereby not influencing discussions in these meetings.

On the other hand, all public institutions in Tanzania are required to establish Integrity Committees (URT, 2007). As a result of this, by 2009, 132 out of 133 Local Government authorities (LGA) had formed Integrity Committees (Hosea, 2009). Also, one public university, The Open University of Tanzania, has an Integrity Committee. Experience shows that Integrity Committees reconcile differences between workers and the management; and they advice and council workers. However, lack of trust is jeopardising the credibility of these committees. Workers feel that Integrity Committees are powerless and cannot bite. It is important to note that in Tanzania, election and appointment to leadership and managerial positions do not consider knowledge in counselling although counselling workers may be one of their daily duties and activities. The vacuum in counselling at workplaces in Tanzania may have three main implications for management. Counselling at work is not a priority, no specialised services are put in place and no structures are considered. Organizational managements do not relate workers motivation and performance with counselling services for workers. The importance of counselling at workplace is being down played even in Government cycles as it is not directly reflected in government policies save for the Integrity Committees.

Workers problems emanating from jobs and organizational settings are sometimes erroneously perceived and interpreted as stubbornness, disobedience and mischief. Such simplistic interpretations usually can lead to immediate disciplinary actions. These interpretations sometime also lead to a mismatch between a person's capabilities and job demands. This may lead to poor performance through the onset of stress. Such poor performance may have arisen through the job being overly or insufficiently rewarding. For example, boredom can lead to stress, which can lead to loss of motivation and poor performance. In other cases, a person's promotion path is blocked owing to the "dead men's

shoes”, a show-down of available promotional opportunities or a poor relations with significant managers (Parkinson, 1995).

There are no resources allocated for counselling. Counselling is not included in organizational short term and long term plans. It does not feature in organizational human resource development programmes. These may lead to unrealistic deterioration of skills to keep up with the demands of jobs.

#### **WHAT CAN DISTANCE EDUCATION DO?**

Distance education has a potential of resolving counselling problems at work in Tanzania. This is because through distance education people can study and work at the same time. Distance education has an outreach character and power (Bagandanshwa, 2001).

Distance education institutions can design and develop high level programmes in counselling in which counselling at work can be emphasized. If made open to all people, such programmes will make a tremendous contribution towards professional services at workplaces in Tanzania, and particularly for counsellors all over the country.

Permeation can also be used. With this approach in training, management programmes in which the counselling component is included may be of great use. Managers and administrators taking such programmes will not only be competent and well versed not only in management and administration, but also in counselling at work places.

Professional development programmes for managers, administrators, trade union leaders and interested workers in the area of counselling can be another contribution of distance education in counselling at workplaces. Such programmes in the form of seminars, workshops, short courses and longer courses may help in promoting counselling services at workplaces.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Counselling as a term is still debatable as it means different things to different people. Different people define counselling basing on their experiences and background. Although scholars agree that it is a systematic process meant to improve people’s skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours which ultimately enhances organizational corporate performance, they appear to differ as to what it is and what it means.

As far as counselling at workplaces in Tanzania is concerned, there appears to be an apparent vacuum because there are no professional counsellors and professional counselling services are non-existent. Counselling at workplaces, for that matter, is unprofessional and interfered by factors like trade unionism, radicalization of workers, managerial authority which in the final analysis tend to obscure it.

Distance education has a role to play in promoting counselling at work places by providing training opportunities to workers without leaving their jobs. Counselling programmes through the distance mode of delivery can turn round the situation if and when they are properly used.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper has demonstrated that, there are very few professional counsellors in Tanzania. It has been shown that the few counsellors available are located in places where there is concentration of students such as universities. The paper further demonstrated that, there is an urgent need for counsellors at work places which has consequently resulted in workers frustrations, untimely deaths, strokes and related diseases and conflicts and protests. It is there recommended that:

- A professional body for counselling should be developed and charged with a responsibility of setting and safeguarding standards in the profession.
- A policy and legislation on counselling at work places in the country should be put in place. These should stipulate clearly when and how counselling should take place at work places.
- Work places to establish Integrity Committees and that, one or more of the committee members should be trained counsellors so as to improve their counselling potential.
- Short and longterm training programme through distance learning be designed to train counsellors who are urgently needed in work places and institutions. Availability of counsellors will strengthen formal counselling services, counselling services by trade unions and those by managers and administrators.

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