

The Workplace, Individual Psychology and EAP

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Overview: In 1898, Adler wrote a small book entitled Health Book for the Tailoring Trade. One hope that Adler had for this publication was that it might improve the workplace for a particular occupation. Adler's interest in the task of work continued throughout his career. All human beings must somehow address the Life Task of occupation.

Jesse Bernstein and Frank Horton (1992) and David Worster (2010) are Employee Assistance Professionals who trace the development of today's Employee Assistance Programs back to the 1880's. Social work movements advocated for improvements in the workplace during the Industrial Revolution. In the 1930's and 1940's, coinciding with the genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous, large companies initiated Industrial Alcoholism Programs. A third stream in efforts to address behavioral health and the workplace was the Community Mental Health Act of the 1960's.

Unions developed Member Assistance Programs in the 1960's to help union members with alcoholism and personal problems. Federal funding was made available for Occupational Consultants in the 1970's. In 1972, ALMACA, the forerunner of today's Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) was founded. In the 1980's, employee assistance programs expanded beyond the focus on substance abuse and came to offer a variety of behavioral health resources, particularly referrals for mental health issues impacting productivity in the workplace. In 1988, ALMACA became EAPA.

Today, employee assistance programs provide a variety of resources for substance abuse, mental health concerns and life management. EAP's have become international in scope, reaching into Canada, Europe, China and other countries.

An Adlerian Interface

With an overt recognition that the Life Task of Occupation is a task that all human beings must address in some way, Individual Psychology offers a rich context for understanding human behavior in the workplace. Tenets such as **social embedded-ness**, **democracy** in relationships, **purposeful behavior**, the use of **encouragement** and the notion of human beings as **responsible** can help the Employee Assistance Professional in consulting with workplace management, with workplace systems and individual employees and their families. The ethic of **social interest** serves as a valuable guide not only for discouraged employees, but also businesses struggling to find an ethical compass other than consumerism and profit.

“Employee assistance program core technology” represents the essential components of the employee assistance profession. These components combine to create a unique approach to addressing work-organization productivity issues and the personal concerns of a discouraged employee who is not doing their job well. Individual Psychology provides a useful set of “glasses” through which to view these EAP core technologies.

EAP Core Technology

- 1.) Consultation with, training of, assistance to workplace leadership trying to (a) manage troubled employees (b) enhance the work environment (c) improve employee job performance. (How does workplace leadership understand motivation, effective relating, or the use of encouragement?)
- 2.) Promotion of Employee Assistance services to employees, family members and the work organization. (An interface with larger systems and recognition of the importance of social embedded-ness.)
- 3.) Problem identification / assessment services for employees with personal concerns that affect job performance. (The effectiveness and efficiency of Adlerian Lifestyle analysis.)
- 4.) Use of constructive confrontation, motivation and short-term intervention with clients to address problems that affect job performance. (Challenging mistaken beliefs, use of Adlerian techniques to optimize change.)
- 5.) Referral of employee clients for diagnosis, treatment and assistance, as well as case monitoring and follow up services. (How Adlerian theory informs assessment and intervention.)
- 6.) Linkages from the workplace to treatment and other resources. (Using “more heads than mine” to work on a problem.)
- 7.) Consultation to the work organization to encourage availability of resources for behavioral health problems (substance use disorders, mental illness, emotional disorders, etc.) (How the Adlerian understanding of human behavior impacts consultation.)
- 8.) Evaluation the effects of EAP services on work organizations and job performance. (Is what we are doing working? How does my theory inform my response?)

For more information on employee assistance programs and the Employee Assistance Professionals Association, go to www.eapassn.org.