

# **Entrepreneurial Training and Curriculum Development for Workplace Counselling as an Emerging Profession in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

*Across the world, a bleak future is painted for the counselling profession in the age of technology advancement; more so for workplace counselling, which appears to be an emerging profession in Nigeria. Changes are taking place in industries and organizations. Prospective workers are expected to develop skills that will increase their desirability and success in the workplace. Workers can only be relevant and successful in the workplace if they demonstrate diverse skills that are needed in the emerging workplace. This article examines entrepreneurial training and curriculum development for workplace counselling, a profession that seems to be in its elementary stage in Nigeria. The necessary skills required for workplace counselling, entrepreneurial training and qualifications needed for workplace counselling are outlined. The paper further presents a list of organizations that can benefit from workplace counselling after highlighting what employers might expect from workplace counsellors. Suggestions were made on the need for the development of a robust curriculum for workplace counsellors for them to make an impact in the workplace.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial training, Curriculum development, Workplace counselling, Elementary stage, Emerging profession.*

## **Introduction**

Youths, especially students preparing for future roles in the world of work, are faced with the enormous task of learning many skills that will prepare them for their future roles. The majority of organizations across the world have special training programmes to equip new entrants with skills required for the roles they are about to face. These training programmes are usually for existing roles in these organizations. The same cannot be said for emerging professions. Firms provide firm-specific training to their employees and may be reluctant to recruit young people unless they are ready for the job (OECD, 2011). As a result of changes taking place in the workplace the challenge is to prepare students to enter and be competitive in a world-class workforce (Feller, 1996). Tertiary institutions worldwide are expected to design and implement curricula that encourage

innovative teaching in order for students to develop critical thinking skills and increase their employability prospects. Entrepreneurial training is important in tertiary institutions in Nigeria because it instils and stimulates the urge for excellence in an individual so that such an individual can generate and put to use, the necessary skills that are relevant for social prosperity and thereby ensure decent means of living for every individual (Parthasarathy, 2005).

Workplace counselling appears to be an emerging profession in Nigeria. In the developed world, workplace counselling is a specialist division that focuses on introducing the best practices at work, to promote an emotionally healthy workplace for all (Cranton, 2016). Authors and researchers in Nigeria have advocated for the organization and administration of Guidance and Counselling services in non-school settings, special settings and the workplace (Olusakin and Ubangha, 1996; Olayinka and Omoegun, 2001; Denga, 1985, 1991 & 1996; Edet, 2016, Oyewunmi, et al, 2015 and Aluede, 2008). The emergence of workplace counselling in Nigeria remains relatively new and untapped (Oramah, 2013). This paper highlights the entrepreneurial training and curriculum development of Workplace counselling as an emerging profession in Nigeria. Other issues discussed include; skills workplace counsellors should possess, qualifications of workplace counsellors, organizations that can benefit from workplace counselling and expectations of employees from counselling services.

### **Workplace Counselling as an Emerging Profession**

According to Snyder (2012), by 2020, everyone will be chatting with their computers as a result of technology advancement. This bleak future is painted for the counselling profession in the present age of technological advancement. The implication of this for counsellors is that new computers have software that will enable the machines to answer their owners' questions, including questions that people often go to see a counsellor to discuss. A live counsellor is the first stop for someone with mental health, career, relationship or other issues, in order for the person to ask the personal avatar "counsellor" on his or her computer for feedback and advice. If the artificial counsellor assesses that the person has a problem beyond the scope of assistance the computer can offer, it will recommend that the person goes to a real-life counsellor. The artificial counsellor becomes the first line of defence (Snyder, 2012). This is not an encouraging prediction for the counselling profession in this age of advancing technology, which might threaten to make the counselling profession obsolete (Shallcross, 2012). It is not all doom predictions for the future of professional counselling. While "artificial counsellors" will become crucial to the profession, there will not be enough

human counsellors to meet the growing demand as the world becomes more complex and everyday life is filled with increasingly challenging problems and decisions (Snyder, 2012). Counselling as a profession will still be and continue to be relevant and important to people.

A number of leaders in the counselling profession shared their thoughts on the next decade of counselling (Shallcross, 2012). The counselling profession will be aware of a number of important global trends (Lee, 2012). Technology is changing our world at an astonishing pace, transforming our planet into a global village (Herlihy, 2012). There will be increased use of technology, cyber counselling and virtual reality (Locke, (2012). Professional counsellors had better get ready for the transition into a world of technology (Butler, 2012). Actual change in the counselling profession will come in the shaped of collective thinking (Kraus, 2012). Counselling is something that will change the brain because of incorporation of neuroscience into our counselling practice and research (Ivey, 2012). Counselling profession over the next decade will respond to major demands such as accountability, understanding of complex connections between mental health and a variety of factors such as neuroscience and identity (Barrio Minton, 2012).

The future of the counselling profession has the potential to be bright. Multiculturalism and social injustice should become an integral part of everything that professional counsellors do (Ratts, 2012). The emergence of Relational-cultural theory (RCT) as one of the theories of counselling in the next decade will be relevant (Duffey, 2012). Professional counsellors will educate others as to who they are and how they contribute to the realization of a healthy society by fostering wellness and human dignity (Sweeney, 2012). Professional counsellors should be prepared to address these four additional issues in counselling: Life balance, Patience, Health related decision making and Aging (Reiner, 2012). It should center on the counselling needs of older adults (Mynatt, 2012) and draw attention to the three major trends that are emerging in the discipline of counselling; more nuanced understanding of counselling: the internalization of traumatic stress and the role it plays in psychological distress, and counselling children (Olatunji, 2012).

Counselling as a profession is just coming into its own terms of parity and respect among peer professions, legislators and the public (Erford, 2012). As a leading helping profession, counselling will lay emphasis on wellness, creativity and career development theory and practice (Gladding, 2012). These are all hot topics

in the society today. Counselling as a profession will be significantly impacted by the emerging relationship counsellors have with the health care reimbursement system (Duba, 2012) because it has a great potential, greater than many of the other mental health professions (Pope, 2012). Counsellors will need to develop a tool kit loaded with emerging counselling theories; strategies and skills to be employed depending on the clients' need (Mascari, 2012). Counsellors will expand their skill set to keep abreast of the emerging science on the brain and how brain disorders affect behaviour, mood, academic performance and interpersonal relationships (Stokes, 2012).

Leaders in the counselling professional have outlined the various areas that might develop in the counselling profession in the next decade. There is no mention of 'workplace counselling' as one of the areas to be developed in the next decade because workplace counselling has been in practice in other parts of the world for decades. In Britain, external employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) provide counselling services for approximately 2.26 million employees; or 10 percent (10%) of the working population in 1137 organizations. The value of this business is 22.53 million pound sterling (EAPA UK, 2001). It is possible that this figure has increased between 2001 till date. In North America the number of organizations using EAPs and counselling services account for a much higher proportion of the national workforce (Coles, 2003). Workplace counselling is practiced in one form or the other in different parts of the world. Countries like England, Wales, Scotland, Taiwan, China, Ireland, Greece, Tokyo, Trinidad and Tobago, Western Canada, South Africa and even Nigeria have one form of workplace counselling in organizations.

It is not out of place to say that the history of counselling runs side by side the history of work (Coles, 2003). It is possible that counselling in the workplace has been in existence for as long as there have been relationships with colleagues at work; or where one person serves another person in a non-familial context, that is, without a family bond (Coles, 2003). This observation is apt to the Nigerian workforce. In any organizational setting where there are two or more people (who are not necessarily related), there is bound to be some form of communication or the other. Individuals have at one time or the other confided in colleagues at work or discussed personal, emotional, or social problems in order for them to have a form of psychological relief from these problems. Employers of labour on the other hand (both in public, private or even on a very small scale) have at some point helped their employees to solve financial or health problems. In big organizations the human resource departments take care of the problems of

employees by putting programmes in place to ease the burden of work. Where organizations are too small or informal to have human resource departments, employees sometimes get benefits from their employers (either financial or otherwise) to ease the daily drudgery of work. Unknowingly, workplace counselling in Nigeria may be in its rudimentary stage.

A survey of some organizations in Lagos State, the largest commercial hub in Nigeria, showed that a very insignificant number of multinational organizations (two out of fifteen) and one out of ten big private health care providers; have very small workplace counselling outfits in their offices/hospitals. Governmental institutions /parastatals, legal, maritime, financial and so many other institutions have no form of workplace counselling or another. It is possible that these institutions/organizations are not aware of the skills and competencies of workplace counsellors and see no reason to employ them or ask for their services. An awareness of the skills, competencies and roles of workplace counsellors in organizational setting, might lead to a change of perception of workplace counselling in the Nigerian workforce.

### **Skills Required for Workplace Counselling**

A workplace counsellor requires certain skills and competencies for effective performance in the workplace. There are also roles that the workplace counsellor should play in organizations. A good understanding of organizational setting and staff organogram by the counsellor, will help him/her carry out his/her duties without role conflict or conflict of interest. There appears to be a lacuna between the counselling profession and workplace counselling. This gap can be addressed since workplace counselling cannot be separated from the counselling profession, because it is an extension of counselling or a sub-profession of counselling (Strumpfer, 2007). It is important to note that the counselling profession has different fields of application (Rothman and Cilliers, 2007).

There might be confusion regarding the nature and scope of workplace counselling. Professional counsellors need to clarify the role and contributions of the field of workplace counselling (Barnard and Fourie, 2007). It is necessary to classify the practice of workplace counselling and resolve issues such as education, training and licensure, which define this profession (Barkhuizen, Jorgensen and Brink, 2015). It is important to establish a legitimate identity for professional counselling to protect the general public from those who would allege the title of counsellors without proper training (Johnson and Kaslow, 2014). The application and usefulness of psychological principles have been

acknowledged in business since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Johnson and Kaslow, 2014). In the past researchers noted that workplace counsellors are necessary and needed in the business industry (Cristiani and Cristiani, 1979). Organizations that enjoy the services of workplace counsellors are likely to have employees who will experience a change in their perception of emotional difficulties and personal problems. This can in turn change the attitude of employees with regards to the challenges faced in the workplace.

In a research carried out by Barkhuizen, et al (2015), on “Training the industrial and organizational psychologist as a counsellor: Are we doing enough?” certain skills were outlined as necessary and important for counselling in the workplace. The utilization of the following counselling skills and competencies are required for effective workplace counselling: Facilitation skills; to assist an employee to reach a point where self-insight is obtained by utilizing a non-directive approach. Establishing and maintaining rapport; to make the counsellee comfortable about disclosing confidential information. The counselling environment should be safe and exclusive to prevent distractions during the counselling process. Effective communication skill involves the ability of the counsellor to listen actively to what clients are saying. Counsellors should avoid ineffective communication, giving advice to clients and interrupting clients during counselling. Non- verbal communication skill: making eye contact with clients and paying attention to the body language of clients. Probing skill: to obtain more information from clients. Others are; Questioning skill; a necessary skill in the counselling process in order to follow a suitable line of questioning (to keep the conversation flowing). Knowledge processing skill: to maintain the flow of the counselling process and keep it on track. This helps with trauma counselling. Referral: for counsellors to know their scope/boundaries, to refer clients to other professionals that are better equipped to provide services that are beyond the scope of counselling. Interpersonal skills; to enable counsellors connect with and build professional relationship with clients. Empathy; to have a good understanding of clients’ feelings, experience and problems. Neutrality; for the counsellor to have a good understanding of the problems of client and still maintain a professional distance. Objectivity: Counsellors should not pass judgement or draw conclusion about the client or situation. Counsellors’ personal values and opinions should not be imposed on the client (Barkhuizen, et al, 2015)

Denga, (1985) points out some specific functions of the guidance counsellor in the bank. Counsellors in other organizations or industries can perform these functions to help their clients. These functions include: The counsellor as a developer of

training programme for the organization. The counsellor as a group facilitator in the organization. The counsellor as an industrial consultant to employees in the organization, in matters of vocational, educational and psychological issues. The counsellor as an instructor, either on full time or part time basis to teach some of the training programmes which he planned. The counsellor as an effective listener and a therapist in the organization, in a non-formal outreach basis. Discussions of diverse topics can be carried out by employees and the counsellor in any convenient place (Denga, 1985). In order to utilize these counselling skills and competencies, and to play the roles and functions outlined above, and also for effective workplace counselling, counsellors are expected to undergo basic training and acquire the necessary qualification needed for workplace counselling.

### **Entrepreneurial Training and Qualifications Needed for Workplace Counselling**

Counsellors who wish to work as workplace counsellors are faced with the huge responsibilities of acquiring the necessary entrepreneurial training and qualifications needed to operate effectively in the workplace. In Nigeria, prospective counsellors at the undergraduate level, are exposed to general, educational programmes. These include, biological and physical sciences, mathematics and the humanities, with some degree of specialization at the post-graduate level in the behavioural sciences such as guidance and counselling, psychology, sociology and supervised practicum. Students are exposed to many introductory courses in measurement and evaluation, statistics, developmental psychology, personality and developmental theories, research methodology, psychological individual and group guidance (Olayinka, 1993). Counsellors who are exposed to the courses outlined above are expected to have acquired the appropriate skills, abilities and competencies that will enable them have positive impact, and contribute meaningfully to uplift and develop their immediate environment and the society at large (Olayinka and Omoegun, 2004).

The qualification for counsellors interested in workplace counselling should include skills and necessary certificates required for workplace counselling (ILO, 2011). The Nigerian National Policy on Education (1977, 1981 and 2013), is clear on the importance of guidance and counselling in the school system. It is believed that:

many young people are ignorant about career prospects and there is a prevalence of personality maladjustment among school children; as a result of this, post primary institutions were directed to appoint career officers and counsellors to take care of the needs of school children. The scarcity of personnel in this category led the government to make

provisions for the training of teachers who are interested in guidance and counselling. The government also directed that guidance and counselling should feature in teacher education programmes (NPE, in Olayinka and Omoegun, 2004).

Every school in the country was also directed to have a counsellor. The above has led to the appointment of bachelor's degree holders as counsellors in the majority of post-primary institutions where such services are provided. Some state governments in Nigeria provide professionally trained guidance counsellors with a minimum of bachelor's degree in guidance and counselling in each of their numerous post-primary schools. Some states are however yet to implement this (Omoegun, 2007).

In the developed countries of the world there is continuous training and retraining in the workforce (workplace counselling included) to respond to employment challenges that arise from time to time. The International Labour Organization (2011) described a major challenge in all G20 (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and the European Union) countries of the world as; response to education and training systems, changes in skill requirements and improvement in training and skill development. It is therefore the recommendation of ILO, that to develop a suitable skilled workforce, there should be a variety of good quality education that are readily available. These will serve as background/foundation for future training. There should also be skill acquisition that is necessary and relevant to the needs of the particular job (ILO, 2011). It will then be right to say that entrepreneurial training and qualifications needed for workplace counselling in developed countries of the world are in accordance with the dictates of employment challenges arising from current and future workforce (ILO, 2011).

### **Expectations of Employees from Workplace Counselling**

In every organization, employees play major roles and are vital tools to the success or failure of the organization. In organizations where workplace counselling is available (it is still an emerging profession in Nigeria) employees would expect increased motivation through counselling (Onukwufor & Ugwu, 2013). Other expectations of employees from workplace counselling may include but not limited to addressing the following problems; Help reduce pressure on workers which can lead to possible negative consequences on productivity (Oramah, 2013). Work motivation, job satisfaction and organizational

commitment (Tella, Ayeni & Popoola, 2007). Career development and employee commitment (Agba, Nkpoien & Ushie, 2010). Employment and salary, counselling process and outcomes, characteristics of a counsellor/psychotherapist, employee/client characteristics, counselling relationship, cultural variables, counselling ethics and measurement of counselling outcome (Counselling Psychology, 2008). Guidance, counselling, social work, behaviour modification, gender sensitivity, guidance and counselling programme development, adolescent reproductive health and workshop administration and conduct guidelines (Guez and Allen, 1997). Mental health; a realistic and legitimate concern of the workforce (Oyewunmi, Oyewunmi, Iyiola and Ojo, 2015). Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on employees' performance (Akanbi, 2011). Employee engagement and retention, employee recognition, performance management, supervision, discipline, termination and exist interviews (HR Toolkit, 2005). Motivating factors; employees' retention, and job satisfaction (Osibanjo, Salau and Falola, 2014). Help resolve workplace conflicts, family matters, and financial challenges (EAP, 2016)

### **Organizations that Can Benefit from Workplace Counselling**

The myriad of expectations of employees from workplace counselling is a pointer to the importance and relevance of workplace counselling in organizational settings. The workforce in the private and public sector can benefit immensely from workplace counselling because it covers all aspects of human life, academic/educational issues, career/vocational issues and personal social problems (emotional, behavioural, familial and so on). Workplace counselling will be of immense benefit to employees and management of all organizations because as a confidential programme geared towards rendering help to individuals, it will help employees, including management to work through various life challenges that may adversely affect job performance, health and personal wellbeing to optimize an organization's success (Work Life Employee Assistance Programme, 2016).

In view of the above "professional workplace counselling" will be very relevant in the following sector: Government (Local, State and Federal). Government agencies and parastatals, Religious institutions; Legal institutions; Maritime institutions; Oil and Gas Sector; Health care delivery sector (Hospitals, Pharmaceutical companies, Laboratories); Financial institutions (Banks, Insurance companies, Security and exchange commission); Telecommunications; Agricultural sector; Media (Print and electronic); Sports; Any other business sector (Big businesses, small and medium scale enterprises).

### **Curriculum Development**

It is necessary to classify the practice and resolve the issues (Barkhuizen, et al 2015), surrounding workplace counselling as an emerging profession in Nigeria. Before the issue of curriculum development comes up, modalities should be put in place for training and licensure (Barkhuizen, et al 2015) of workplace counsellors to define the profession. Curriculum developers working in collaboration with various institutions of learning where workplace counselling is offered as a specialized area of counselling can provide activities which will form part of the curriculum, to help prospective workplace counsellors to master these skills and competencies required for workplace counselling (Hughey and Hughey, 1999). The International Labour Organization (2011) described a major challenge in all G20 countries of the world as; responsiveness of education and training system to changes in skill requirements and improvement in training and skill development. Counsellors who are interested in workplace counselling should be equipped with skills and necessary qualifications required for workplace counselling (ILO, 2011).

The following suggestions are made for workplace counselling to gain relevance and acceptance in organizations and the workforce in Nigeria. A viable workplace curriculum development that will address the felt needs of both employers and employees is recommended. Curriculum development for workplace counselling which is subject to change or amendment as technologies evolve may be in line with the proposed curriculum for “Training of Counsellors for the twenty-first century” (IAEVG, 2016) and may include but not limited to an in-depth study of the following: (1) Organizational setting including the organogram and terms and conditions for promotion; This is important for proper counselling of employees in various levels of the organization, to prevent or avoid complaints and dissatisfaction during promotion exercise. (2) Techniques of counselling; with special focus on workplace counselling techniques. (3) Provision of vocational and academic counselling and labour market information; for employees who require additional qualification or career mobility. (4) Workplace counselling techniques; to assess and measure employees’ skills, abilities, aptitudes, interest, values and personalities. (4) Workplace needs techniques; to assess the felt needs of employees. (5) Current trends in technology for example, computer and internet systems; to keep employees and workplace counsellors abreast of new technologies in counselling and the world of work. (6) Arrangements of programmes in vocation/career development for employees; for employees who are in the establishment stage of their lives and may want to explore opportunities in other organizations. This also helps to expose employees to techniques/skills in

searching for job, making smooth transition from one organization to another, creating a link between employees, organizations and the communities where they work. (7) Networking skills; to help employees make contact and exchange ideas with people in their community. For example, other workers in organizations within the community and people living in the community for the purpose of corporate social responsibility. This helps to expose employees to skills and techniques in public relations to promote career development activities and services.

### **Conclusion**

Workplace counselling is an emerging profession in Nigeria. The majority of organizations in Nigeria, both national and international do not have workplace counsellors. The number of organizations where there is a semblance of workplace counselling in Nigeria is insignificant compared to those organizations where there is no workplace counselling. It is also doubtful if workplace counselling is practiced in the way it should in these organizations.

### **Recommendations**

A more robust curriculum for workplace counselling is recommended to cover all areas in the developing and emerging workforce. Innovations should be embraced without delay in order for counsellors and in particular workplace counsellors to be abreast of happenings around the world.

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