

Does Your EAP Deliver Real Value?

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The *right* EAP has immense value to offer your entire organization. Unfortunately, over the course of time, this value has been diluted by the migration of EAPs to an employee benefit. We lost a lot when the mission of EAP shifted from managing people risks to reducing behavioral health costs.

Here are some of the things we lost:

- The ability to manage workforce **crisis and trauma**
- The opportunity to manage **performance**
- The tools to manage **risk**
- The means to mitigate **workforce stress**
- A resource to promote **diversity**

An EAP can and does do all of these things when it is a strategic management tool – but not when it is an employee benefit grafted onto the front end of a behavioral health plan. An EAP can help you manage your people risks, *if* it provides these services as discussed below.

The ability to manage crisis

True crisis management is proactive not reactive. An EAP should assess your organization's ability to manage crises and, based on this assessment, help you prepare for the inevitable critical incidents that affect your workforce. The EAP should ensure that you have a constructive crisis response plan in place and train your managers and HR staff to use the EAP to manage crisis situations.

In the event of a crisis, an EAP should work with you to manage the immediate impact and, as importantly, advise you on how to recover as quickly and effectively as possible. Interventions, both immediate and long-term, must be tailored to the specific incident rather than a standardized, off-the-shelf response. The best EAPs also anticipate and prepare you to handle delayed reactions and the anniversaries of major events.

The opportunity to manage performance

EAPs should provide essential performance management support services geared toward your entire workforce, not just the clear-cut problem cases. These services should include not only training to improve your managers' performance management skills but also consulting on a full range of workforce issues to help them apply those skills. By coaching your line managers through specific situations, an EAP can help avert severe performance issues and improve your performance management results across the board.

EAPs should also provide individual employees with guidance and advice on improving their performance, skills, and relationships with supervisors and co-workers.

The tools to manage risk

Your EAP can help your organization manage the risk associated with impaired employees, workplace violence, and litigation related to harassment, discrimination, and performance management practices. Your EAP should be available at all times to provide assessment, advice, counsel, and appropriate intervention in all of these areas

Your EAP's ability to assist you with workplace dynamics, performance practices, and diversity issues can help prevent the types of behavior that contribute to risk. Your EAP can work with your HR staff and managers to help them recognize potential issues and how to handle these incidents properly.

The means to mitigate stress

Of course EAPs are available to help employees deal with personal stress, but a strategic EAP also helps reduce the general level of stress in the workplace. An EAP should coach your managers through handling interpersonal conflict and other workforce issues in ways that alleviate rather than exacerbate workforce stress levels. Manager coaching is an invaluable EAP service that many EAPs don't provide and most organizations don't use enough.

Your EAP should also consult with your HR department on stress reduction initiatives, including training seminars on stress management. This kind of global response to workforce stress can enhance the overall health of your organization, enabling employees to focus on the work at hand.

A resource to promote diversity

EAPs have a great deal to offer with respect to diversity issues. Working individually, or in group settings, an EAP can help your employees and managers better understand cultural differences and increase their sensitivity and self-awareness. Your EAP should support employees in managing their interpersonal relationships, improving the tenor of the workplace for everyone.

The best EAPs can educate Human Resources and leadership on how organizational culture affects groups and individuals, including identifying areas for improvement.

A true EAP can help your organization perform

The EAP's value lies in helping you to proactively manage these issues. Proactive management helps your people perform better. When your people perform better, your organization performs better.

And, after all, isn't that the EAP's reason for being?