2013

What is a Workplace Assessment?



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What is a Workplace Assessment?

By Brenda Kelleher-Flight Ph.D.

Introduction

Have you ever been advised that your supervisor has requested or your Human Resources Department is going to complete a workplace assessment? If so, what are they and what does it mean for you.

This article explains what is meant by a workplace assessment, ???

What is a Workplace Assessment

A workplace assessment is conducted when someone determines that it is important to become aware of the exact nature of the issues which are being expressed. When this is ascertained then it is possible to accept the notion that these issues are creating problems and to design a plan of action to resolve them.

Workplace assessments are participatory assessments of a workplace as a whole or one particular section of it. They may be conducted to examine the safety and health conditions in the workplace or causes of unresolved conflict. The discoveries about the strengths, needs, opportunities and threats in the workplace give managers and human resource personnel a clear idea of what is needed to improve harmony, meet objectives, and ensure a culture which demonstrates the delineated values.

Each entity may have its own method for conducting a workplace assessment. Ultimately though, the goal is to improve circumstances in the organization that are interfering with professional conduct or work completion.

The key with a workplace assessment versus other types of assessment is that it focuses on circumstances and the impacts of those circumstances on employees.

Benefits of a Workplace Assessment

The essential thing to remember is that there are many organizational and the individual benefits which arise after the completion of a workplace assessment. You may be asking, "What are those benefits?"

Benefits for the organization

The benefits for the organization include:

- a healthier and happier workforce
- elimination of reasons which are causing conflict in the workplace
- fulfillment of legal requirements and reduction in the number of lawsuits
- improvement in employee morale
- increased understanding of each other's mind styles and what works and does not work for each person
- increased understanding of policies and rules
- protection for the workforce from both immediate and potential dangers
- reduction in absenteeism rates
- reduction in employee turnover; and/or a
- reduction in the number of formal complaints made by employees.

Benefits for Employees

During the workplace assessment, the assessor gains an understanding of your perceptions of the work environment. As a result, the benefits for individuals are:

- better working conditions which result when co-workers are present and productive and others do not have to compensation for their inability to fulfill their roles
- comfort that this process is less confrontational than other methods which could be used, such as town halls or face-to-face mediation

- confidence that action will be taken to improve working conditions or solve conflict
- improvement in morale when management tangibly demonstrates its commitment meaningful discussions and action to resolve difficult issues
- knowledge that issues which could result in work-related illness and conflict
 are resolved
- knowledge that timely, relevant information is gathered that provides insight into current workplace dynamics enable realistic opportune decisions to be made; and
- opportunity to voice concerns and know they are heard.

How are Workplace Assessments Conducted?

Risks exist in all working environments. Risks, whether they are serious and life threatening or not, must be identified in order for the the organization to provide solutions designed to protect the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

Industrial environments usually possess obvious risks to employee safety. However, office environments also possess risks and stressors. Therefore, precautions and preventative measures are implemented in these industries as well. In office environments, employees may suffer from migraines, back pain, strain injuries, psychological problems, and stress due to conflict. Discerning where even the smallest risks are is the fundamental purpose of a workplace assessment.

Workplace assessments are customarily conducted by consultants who specialize in human resources, organizational development, or conflict resolution. They would follow a common process which involves:

- 1. Engaging in a discussion with the client to determine the issue which prompted the need for a workplace assessment.
- 2. Identifying the best method to utilize to assessing the facts or stories surrounding the issue, such as individual interviews or focus groups, or town hall meetings.

- 3. Utilizing direct or open-ended questions to find specific facts or elicit stories and perceptions.
- 4. Delivering a report that includes analysis and suggestions/recommendations. The structure of this assessment report can vary depending on the needs of the organization, the number of employees being assessed, and the nature of the issues being assessed. It is in this step that determination of which problems need to be addressed first and who could address them occurs. Recommendations often include the need for workplace mediation, executive coaching, or workshops on specific topics.
- 5. Providing direct services to resolve situations where the organization is unable to offer those services at this time or where the organization lacks the required expertise.

How to Ensure a Good Workplace Assessment

Workplace assessments provide organizations with a clear idea of what is needed when issues have not been resolved. Therefore, it is essential for the entity to take four steps to ensure they have a good workplace assessment.

First, it is important to provide all necessary support to ensure the consultant can identify the source the problems as well as what can be done to resolve them. Resolutions rarely work if the focus is placed on the symptom, there is fear associated with naming the issue, or the root cause is ignored or remains unidentified.

Second, it is imperative to outline for the consultant policies, procedures, or formal and informal practices which are common in the organization.

Third, management needs to make it easy for employees who are experiencing issues to contribute their own stories and knowledge about the situation and offer their resolutions.

Fourth, is to ensure the assessment is in writing providing a reference when making alterations or changes to physical conditions, policies or practices.

Fifth, after the assessment has been completed and issues have been prioritized and resolution implemented to conduct a follow-up evaluation to determine whether the selected solutions improved working conditions or resolved the conflict.

Where possible and prudent, the assessment results would be made available or explained to the affected employees. Everyone in the organization has a vital role in ensuring a workplace assessment is accurate, completed in a timely manner and follow through on suggestions occurs.

Final Comment

A workplace assessment is a valuable participator process utilized to assess working conditions or employee relations. When completed correctly, issues that threaten the physical and mental well-being of employees are identified and an action plan is being implemented.