A Phenomenological Examination of the Benefits of Outplacement Career and Counseling Services: The Impact on Recently Downsized Business Professionals and Military Officers

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ABSTRACT

Providing career support for the U.S. service members and business executives who are leaving their positions and need to translate their specialized training into marketable skills in the private sector has been a challenge for both the governmental and civilian personnel groups charged with this role. For those men and women who initially intended a lifetime military career or thought they would work a long time for one company but found their plans altered by downsizing and personnel shift and concerns, the task of tackling the entry/reentry into the civilian workforce can be not only challenging but extremely daunting due to the complexities of the ever changing workplace scene in our country.

As these individuals contemplate exiting their current roles and begin to ponder the future career possibilities that await them, it is believed that the services of human resource and career professionals that work in outplacement counseling field can help bridge this employment gap. Yet, the merits and benefits of this myriad of outplacement services that are available to the departing professionals have not been studies or evaluated for their utility and effectiveness. While an emerging body of anecdotal literature and corporate advertising suggests that outplacement services are highly effective, the purpose of this study was to investigate the merits of these outplacement services that purport to provide quality and useful career related services to those personnel being downsized from their current employment situation.

Keywords: Outplacement Counseling, Job Loss, Counseling, support, services

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This study used a phenomenological approach, which attempted to address the merits of the existing OPCs and shed light on the strengths and weaknesses provided by such services. To reach this goal a series of open-ended interview questions addressing the benefits the outplacement services asked of eleven displaced workers who participated in the study. The intent of this study was to encourage the participants to make their views known, allowing them to tell their outplacement services stories and share and evaluate the quality of their experiences. With the ultimate goal of improving and enhancing outplacement services, it was crucial that these participants be able share their views and perceptions.

A phenomenological approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews, to collect information on the phenomena of newly terminated employees and the impact that outplacement services had on supporting transition. Data was analyzed using ATLAS ti © to examine trends. Due to the dearth in the area of data of exploring outplacement counseling services this does provide a limited scope of inference. Indeed, the concept of using outplacement services, as a way to retool and support newly terminated employees is an ongoing area of interest, specifically as it relates to integrating the modeling
of best practice and counseling support. (Anderson and Vandehey, 2012) Specifically the researchers analyzed the effectiveness of outplacement services as a supportive strategy for transition and retooling of newly terminated employees.

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

Selection of Participants

One-on-one interviews were conducted in person to gain the interviewee’s in-depth perspective utilizing the six open-ended questions. Such a practice was designed to allow the participants to share their personal perspectives, point of view, and their involvement with the outplacement firms that were provided to them by their former employer.

The interview questions focused on attempting to align with some of the challenges with newly terminated employees while also attempting to assess outplacement services effectiveness. Furthermore, by having open-ended interviews appeal to support the newly terminated relational style. This, in turn, gleans not only rich data but also emotional frustrations and reactions to the questioning upon reflection. This questioning provided an opportunity to learn a type of ‘conscious’ awareness and the anecdotal feedback from the participants was that they were appreciative that someone had thought of their uniqueness as a newly terminated employee and the emotional impact.

Coding

Following transcription, responses were process for analysis through ATLAS. ti. the researcher decided to use ATLAS ti. Qualitative software due to the ease of the program for qualitative analysis. The transcribed responses were uploaded and initially coded by participant subjects and by questions from the interview guide.

MAJOR THEMES

Atlas Ti coding was used by the researchers and the following feedback represents the area of support and the answers provided by the participants through analysis. Services and support are identified as the overarching impact of responses participants’ perspective throughout the survey. The following responses were provided: Participant 6 described that they “didn’t get much support in the area of goal setting” and Participant 5 stated that the “telephone and email support were of merit as they made me think.” Participant 5 and 7 “wanted additional help” while Participant 3 “wanted relocation assistance”. Participant 8 said “they were more sales oriented than helpful’ in addition Participant 4 asked ‘What if any additional support would have been helpful or could have been available’. The most highly occurring word from the data was support and services.

CONCLUSION

As with our previous research on military personnel, there appears in the counseling sessions throughout this study to be a need for incorporating more counseling services in the area of personal counseling to help clients deal with the transition and the challenges they are experiencing as they entered their new work environments. There is a decided need for these programs to provide more support and services through more personalized counseling sessions, which is believed to better meet the needs of
both business professionals and military officers. The recurring statements suggest that the need for more personalized services and should be used in Outplacement companies to improve services. Furthermore, a suggestion that an analysis of the outplacement professionals, training and qualifications would be helpful, as there is a strong need in more counseling skills in support of these professionals as they transition to their new work settings.

REFERENCES


