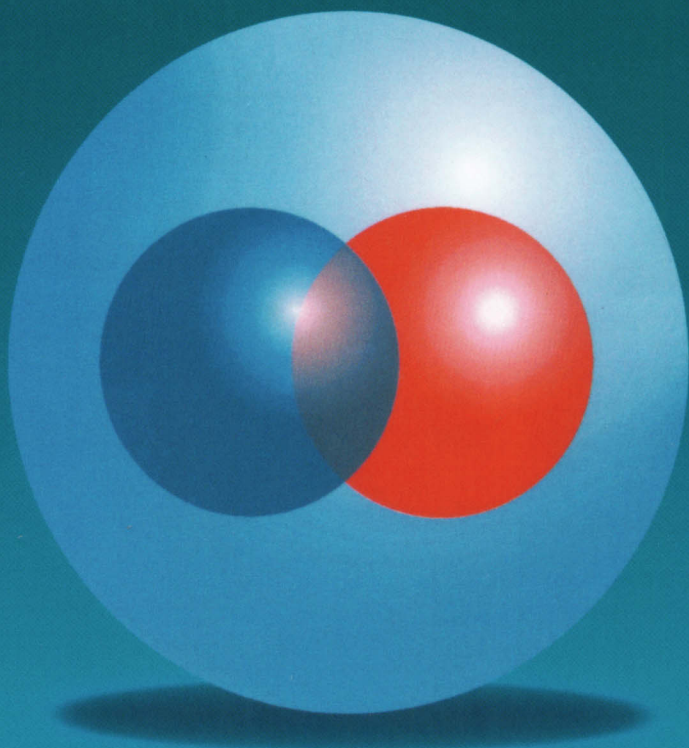# WORKPLACE COUNSELLING

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Workplace Counselling

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A Systematic Approach to Employee Care

Michael Carroll

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Preface

This book takes one context – the workplace – and considers counselling provision there. Its focus is the interface between counsellor, client and organization. The three work together or are in conflict. While the book focuses primarily on workplace counselling, much of it is applicable to counselling in other organizational settings; for example, medical and educational. When an organization pays counsellors to see clients on its behalf, whether those clients are employees, customers or members of the public, then particular sets of relationships are set up that are the theme of this book.

Considering organizational aspects as part of individual counselling provision has been new learning for me. I was taught that counselling involved two people who met privately to enable one of them to deal more effectively with his/her life. Great emphasis was laid on the fact that the involvement of any others in the counselling relationship was intrusive. Counselling, by and large, was concerned with the internal world of the client, with the external world and its problems left to social workers, welfare officers and information-giving services. Rarely, if ever, would counsellors intervene in the external life of clients.

From my counselling work I became painfully aware that many individuals were not responsible for what had happened to them. As part of the wider community, they were often pawns in political games which left them powerless, defenceless, depressed and confused. Nor could they be made responsible for their reactions, despite Victor Frankl's assertion that we all have the right to choose our reaction to what happens or 'is done' to us (1959). While it is important to support and work with individuals crushed by others and by systems, it also seems worthwhile to see if systems can be changed. I was beginning, in Egan amd Cowan's terms (1979), to move from 'downstream helping', where individuals are pulled from rivers and resuscitated, to 'upstream healing', which looks at the systems and organizations that push them into the river. Sick companies produce sick employees, as dysfunctional families produce dysfunctional family members, as sick societies produce sick citizens. Not all subscribe to systemic approaches to life and relationships. Our Western culture upholds, by and large, an individualistic

approach where our ideal is the strong and self-sufficient person who survives alone and is able to meet life's problems without help from others. No wonder counselling has had problems adapting to other, non-Western cultures, especially those with a strong sense of family and extended family identity.

My interest in counselling in organizational settings, and in particular counselling in the workplace, began about 10 years ago. At that time, I was asked to train and supervise the work of the Welfare Branch of the Metropolitan Police. This taught me that the organization has a vast effect on the way counselling takes place and helped me see that the individual side of counselling is only one side. In 1991 I organized and ran a two-year Diploma in Counselling at Work course for TDA (Training Development Associates). This was a pioneering programme, and my attempts to find material in this area were thwarted; there were few pathways. I had to think through what was needed and make the best of what was available, both from my own experience and that of others. Throughout this time I was supervising counsellors who were constantly dealing with particular organizations: educational establishments, GP practices, private organizations, public services, religious establishments. Furthermore, for the past seven years my wife, Cathy, has been the in-house counsellor for Shell International. She was involved in researching in-house counsellors' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities (Carroll, 1994). She translated theory into practice and never allowed my lofty thoughts and ideals to get too far from reality.

From all this experience I am convinced that working as a counsellor in an organization brings its own issues. Questions are raised that are not considered in other counselling contexts. Who to involve, when to involve them, who to speak to, who not to speak to, when do responsibilities to the organization come first, which roles to engage in, and which roles are compatible with other roles? Managing counselling provision and negotiating with organizations are not skills that come naturally to counsellors, nor are they built into counselling training. It is to be hoped that they soon will be.

Readers will not find all chapters of equal importance to them and their work. They may want to pick and choose what is applicable to their particular situation. Chapter 1 provides an overview of what employee counselling means, its many faces, and looks briefly at the history of workplace counselling, in particular at this history in Britain. Chapter 2 offers a review of counselling models used in workplace counselling. Chapter 3 is my attempt to summarize the critical points, debates and trends happening in workplace counselling. Understanding some of the questions may

help to work towards possible solutions. Chapter 4 is a central chapter in this book. It summarizes how organizations can impact upon and influence employee counselling. This chapter contains my reasons for writing this book: to try to understand how various organizational cultures create their own dynamics (some conscious and some unconscious) which impact on individuals in many ways. Chapter 5 returns to counselling provision and sets up a model of introducing counselling into the workplace. Chapter 6 outlines a model for practitioners working with individual employees. It is a systematic model over five chronological phases and will allow counsellors to monitor their own work. The final four chapters pick up themes within employee counselling: Chapter 7 is centred on the theme of evaluation and concentrates on methods of evaluating both individual counselling and counselling systems; Chapter 8 focuses on the important dimension of ethics and professionalism in employee counselling; Chapter 9 proposes a possible training curriculum for counsellors who work or will work with employees; and Chapter 10 helps counsellors in the workplace understand and use supervision effectively. I argue here that supervisors need to be aware of the contextual dimensions of counselling when working with supervisees from organizational settings.

Throughout the book I present models and frameworks that deal with the ideal. Reality falls far short of this and, like 'stars we never reach but which still guide us', these models can be used to help us reflect on our work and adapt it rather than become sticks with which to beat ourselves. We need to accept where we are if we are to move to where we want to be.

This is an exciting time for counselling. From the past it has inherited the three main forces of psychodynamic, humanistic and cognitive-behavioural approaches, and from the present comes the fourth force in counselling: cross-cultural or multicultural counselling. Perhaps the fifth force in counselling will be a new awareness of context in counselling and the impact of the environment on counselling provision. When that happens workplace counselling will be seen as an important area of counselling provision.