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2009

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Publication details

Pre-print of Gribble, LC& Miller, P 2009, 'Employees in outplacement services, do they really get the help they need?', *Australian Journal of Career Development*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 18-28.
Published version available from: http://www.acer.edu.au/ajcd/
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Employees in outplacement services, do they really get the help that is needed?

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ABSTRACT

Outplacement is often provided by organisations to people when they are retrenched but little is understood about the processes of outplacement, or how retrenchee's experience it. Further, those who are retrenched are often not researched as they no longer belong to the organisation that pays for the outplacement and the outplacement agencies' focus is to assist them to find new employment. This paper investigates retrenchee's experiences with outplacement and finds that their experiences are not always positive and the focus of the experience is on finding new work. While they are offered services other than job seeking skills, these services may not provide what they seek. It concludes by recommending that services be tailored to focus on individual needs based on personal assessment conducted between the retrenchee and outplacement provider.

The number of reported retrenchments has significantly increased over the past months since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) emerged in September 2008 (Human Resource Leader, 2009). While it is unclear if those being retrenched are offered career transition or outplacement assistance, public opinion seems to favour that the former employer or current government are doing something to assist these people once they lose their jobs (Human Resource Leader, 2009). However, it should be noted that while offering such assistance may make the employer appear to be more caring, it is unclear if it actually helps the retrenched person do any better in coping with the effects of retrenchment. The term retrenchee is used throughout this paper to describe the retrenched person. Much of the published information surrounding outplacement is available in professional magazines and upon careful examination, is largely reported by human resource professionals or the outplacement providers themselves (Owens, 2008). What scant academic literature is available suggests that outplacement is focused on getting the retrenchee a new job. Further, the research suggests that the outplacement provider should 'broker the deal'. That is, being an advisor to the organisation prior to retrenchments and an advisor to the retrenchee post the experience (Arslan, 2005).

This paper investigates retrenchee's experiences with outplacement services for those who are facing a forced career transition. On face value, the services offered by career transition firms are often differentiated, just as those by recruitment firms, in terms of caring and levels of service for the fee exchanged. However, in reality, these firms often become a means of the former employer ameliorating their guilt and appearing to look like good corporate citizens (Feldman & Leana, 1994).

It is important to understand whether outplacement assistance does change the effects of retrenchment on the retrenchee. The effect of retrenchment on retrenchees has been well documented and can include stigma, loss of identity and self esteem, grief, destruction of existing habits and loss of social and support networks (King, 1996; Parker, Chmiel,& Wall, 1997; Ryan & Macky, 1998). Self esteem is said to be lost due to a loss of social support systems that can occur when a person is retrenched (Feldman & Leana, 1994). By acting in a social context, humans are able to constitute what defines themselves through their actions; therefore, the loss of social interaction through retrenchment is a critical issue influencing self esteem (Ransome, 1995). Retrenchees may also experience anger (Shaw & Barrett-Power, 1997) financial distress (Doherty & Tyson, 1993) or feel that the experience was positive (Bennett et al., 1995). Additionally, the literature documents the experiences of the retrenched person outlining a plethora of grief reactions to job loss and the subsequent approach to looking for new work (Claunchy, 1998). The literature remains unclear however, on whether the outplacement service offerings are what is expected or required or make a difference to those who have been retrenched.

Outplacement services

Outplacement services emerged in the 1970s as a response to the growing number of retrenched executives who had long tenure with organisations, often of more than twenty years in the retrenching organisations. Outplacement is also called career transition and is known as a process to assist retrenched workers to find a new job (Feldman & Leana, 1994; Ormonde, 1997). Outplacement providers are usually retained by the retrenching firm to provide retrenchees with assistance after they have physically left the organisation (Doherty & Tyson, 1993; Kozlowski, Chao, Smith, &

Hedlund, 1993; Arslan, 2005). An outplacement provider may also be brought physically into the retrenching organisation as people are informed of their retrenchment so that they may talk with and counsel the retrenchees and assist the organisation with implementation (Williams, 1986). This model is also being touted as a best practice model where the outplacement provider works in the organisation and with the employees before, during and after the event (Arslan, 2005)

Outplacement services can include:

- provision of a pseudo office with administrative staff to assist with faxing and posting of job applications, access to phones, faxes, photocopiers, computers and printers at no charge to the retrenchee;
- provision of training in job searching activities such as preparing resumes, attending interviews and using networking as a means of gaining employment opportunities;
- provision of career counselling and assessment to enable retrenchees to broaden their career choices;
- provision of psychological assessment; and
- provision of access to financial counselling.

(Doherty & Tyson, 1993; Morgan & Banks, 2000)

While outplacement may provide any or all of the above components, skills assessment, development of job search skills, assistance with networking and the provision of support services are considered to be the critical and major components in an outplacement program (Feldman & Leana, 1994). However, programs offered by outplacement providers may be as short as a day or be open ended until the retrenchee finds new employment (Morgan & Banks, 2000). For those who are provided open ended outplacement the assistance may go beyond reemployment and provide assistance to help them settle into their new job (Morgan & Banks, 2000). The length of program is determined by the former employing organisation and based

upon recommendations by outplacement providers who are guided by the position the retrenchee held.

Benefits of outplacement

Outplacement provisions vary between providers; however, providing outplacement services is one suggested means to ameliorate the effects of retrenchment. People need to rebuild their lives after retrenchment and organisations providing outplacement resources are seen as being better in the retrenchment process (Feldman & Leana, 1994). Firms with effective retrenchment strategies take responsibility for assisting their retrenchees into new positions (Morgan, 2000). Outplacement providers often provide this assistance. However, while there is considerable anecdotal evidence and prescriptions in the literature on the beneficial effects of outplacement, there appears to be little in the way of solid research to confirm outplacement's value to the retrenchee (Doherty & Tyson, 1993). This is particularly important when one considers the impact of retrenchment that reaches far beyond the loss of income and a job.

Outplacement is designed to minimise the length of unemployment (King, 1996). Many retrenchees who have been retrenched in previous periods of recession and placed in an outplacement program, have gained employment within 12 weeks (Bland, 1999). Alternative outcomes such as retiring, volunteering, starting one's own business are also considered to be successful outcomes and signal the end of the outplacement service (Arslan, 2005).

In addition to assisting retrenchees find work, outplacement can ease the pain of the retrenchment experience (Moss Kanter et al., 1992). It is seen as a means of humanising a very unpleasant aspect of organisational life. In the 1970s when retrenchment services were first implemented in the UK and USA, the typical white collar retrenchee was male, 40+, with ten years tenure in an organisation and as a result they often lacked the ability to market themselves to gain a new job (Doherty & Tyson, 1993). Outplacement services were aimed at assisting these retrenchees back into new jobs by giving them the skills to help them help themselves gain reemployment.

Has the retrenchee profile changed?

However, forty years later, the profile of the retrenchee may have changed. If the length of tenure or profile of retrenchee has changed then the services offered by outplacement services may no longer be appropriate. As retrenchment as a means of downsizing employees in organisations has now been occurring for over 40 years, retrenchees may have already been outplaced on a previous occasion or may have only recently changed jobs and may therefore, have good job searching skills. The profile of retrenchees needs to be investigated along with the length of tenure prior to retrenchment to ascertain what level of assistance the retrenchee may require for job search.

Psychological consequences of job loss

Outplacement may provide additional services to address the psychological consequences of retrenchment (Sims & Sims, 1994). However, Johnson (1995) claims that the provision of psychological counseling of this nature is often absent from the

outplacement provider's contractual obligations. This is confirmed by the literature from Morgan & Banks (2000) where only two of their programs offer psychological appraisal. This appraisal is unspecified and does not suggest that it will address the specific issues of job loss. De Witte, Vandoorne, Verlinden, & De Cuyper, (2005) research focused on Belgium clearly states the need for traject-counselling or route counselling where a path is determined to be followed again with the outcome of reemployment.

Addressing the psychological consequences of job loss should be considered a pivotal part of outplacement. There is a large amount of literature that indicates the negative psychological effects of retrenchment such as loss of self esteem, grief, loss of social structure and support networks (Applebaum, 1991; Doherty & Tyson, 1993; Kozlowski et al, 1993; Arslan, 2005). However, it would appear that the absence of work is only one component of the total retrenchment experience. While there is a gap to be filled in relation to the absence of paid work, there are also a number of underlying issues that would appear to be of concern for the retrenchee. Regaining employment, while assisting in the rebuilding of social structure and may even address some of the concerns in relation to self esteem and identity, it may fail to address the other psychological effects such as self efficacy or esteem in relation to the organisational brand. It is the act of retrenchment rather than just the job loss which affects the retrenchee. Issues such as loss of trust or if the new job is at a lower position or pay than the previous position may also need to be addressed at a psychological level.

Focus on re-gaining employment

The focus of outplacement on regaining employment is handled in a variety of ways. Training is provided on how to write a resume, search for a job and how to access both informal and formal networks. This training can be provided in a group setting or on an individual basis. Workshops create an environment for people to feel less isolated (Bragg, 1996). Training in a group environment increases social support, maintains self esteem and reduces depression (Feldman & Leana, 1994). However, Morgan & Banks (2000) use workshop environments for their programs of less than 8 weeks duration. Retrenchees on all other programs may use the workshops or gain individual assistance. Clearly, the evidence indicates that workshops have additional benefits that will assist the retrenchee to cope with the total retrenchment experience. Workshops inadvertently address the loss of social and support networks as a result of job loss. While recent outplacement models may include the use of technology driven programs and groups and individual assistance it remains a program selected by the former employer to assist the retrenchee (Arslan, 2005).

The Australian Government has started to offer retraining assistance through their job network providers. However, this type of assistance is only available to those who are long term unemployed or considered to be at risk of long term unemployment (Department of the Prime Minister, 2009). While any retrenchee may undertake retraining as a means of changing their employment options or commencing a new career, this is usually the decision of the retrenchee to gain new skills. In order to gain access to this type of retraining, the person must be registered unemployed and entitled to social security benefits. However, executives or others who receive pay out packages are not eligible for assistance from Centrelink because it is means tested and

all payout provisions must be exhausted first including any accrued leave entitlements. Retraining is then at the retrenchee's expense.

An issue with career counselling is that during times of crisis, people are known to move to a lower level of motivational need. In Maslow's (1970) terms it is difficult to be self actualising without having the basic and safety needs fulfilled. Given this, trying to get retrenchees to assess career goals and aspirations during a time when they are facing uncertainty of income and the future may produce less than the desired outcome. However, the humanistic approach suggests that people are at all times capable of being self actualising and therefore, must be provided with the opportunity to do so.

Financial counselling

Financial counselling is also available in some instances (Morgan & Banks, 2000). This appears to be a standard in outplacement services in Australia. However recent changes in the industrial relations system under both Work Choices (2005) and the proposed new Fair Work Bill (2008) and the subsequent Fair Work Australia Act (2009) due to commence July 1, 2009 no longer require all retrenched employees to be paid any retrenchment packages unless specified in their particular award. In addition, retrenchees may also have access to superannuation payouts if they had contributions prior to 1990. Given this, retrenchees are often faced with making decisions about how to handle large, finite sums of money to the most advantageous outcome. Assistance from an external party unknown to the retrenchee may be a less satisfactory choice than enabling the retrenchee to seek financial advice from a planner or accountant of their choice.

In summary, outplacement providers, it seems are required to do a number of things for a retrenchee. The outplacement provider is a combination of things "…psychologist, confidant, aide and friend" (Doherty & Tyson, 1993, p. 104). However, an outplacement provider cannot promise a job to clients, as most outplacement providers have "too few counsellors with less than adequate specialized knowledge of specific business sectors" (Doherty & Tyson, 1993, p. 113). This highlights a particular concern with outplacement. The retrenchee may require a variety of assistance that should and can be filled by a number of people. However, as the outplacement provider is required to do so many various tasks, there is a danger that none or few of them will be done well. This concern is confirmed by the differing levels of quality in the outplacement retrenchees receive (Johnson, 1995). Outplacement providers need to follow Peters & Waterman's (1982) advice and decide who they are and what they provide and 'stick to their knitting' rather than trying to be all things to all people.

Outplacement providers suggest the key to success is to get over the emotions of losing your job as quickly as possible and get another job (Kershaw, 1998). However, this attitude by outplacement providers fails to recognise the time factor in grief. Both Worden (1997) and Kubler Ross (1969) note that any grieving process is a non linear process which takes time to work through. It is important that retrenches' grief also be recognised in the context of outplacement. It appears that outplacement's prime focus on job placement may leave the grief process of retrenchment unexamined or not fully resolved.

The outplacement literature situates outplacement service focus on job searching, although it has also suggested that outplacement should provide general assistance to retrenchees and has indicated awareness that retrenchees may not be ready to search for new employment immediately following their retrenchment. Arising from the gaps in the literature, the following research expectations are raised to guide this research:

a) Expectation 1 – It is expected that, going to an outplacement service is a positive experience for retrenchees.
b) Expectation 2 - It is expected that, retrenchees will find that the outplacement service focuses mainly on finding them new employment.
c) Expectation 3 – It is expected that the outplacement service will also offer general job loss assistance to assist the retrenchees' readiness to find new employment.

METHOD

An exploratory cross sectional research design was utilised. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with retrenchee's focusing on each person's experience of outplacement. The aim was to give the retrenchee a voice and recognition of their individual experience.

The sample was a non probability sample collected by snowball method as privacy constraints limited access to potential respondents. Identified outplacement agencies and Centrelink around Australia agreed to place information flyers on notice boards as an invitation to participate in the research. Men and women from white collar jobs regardless of age or experience were interviewed in Sydney. Confidentiality provisions were developed for the research procedures. Twenty five in depth semi

structured interviews were undertaken. A number of open ended questions were asked such as length of service with the organisation and if they had been retrenched before. Specifically, participants were asked "Where you offered outplacement, training, package, any other assistance? On conclusion of the interviews demographic information was gathered so as to look for a representation of current workforce demographics and to ensure no one particular group was over or under represented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The semi structured interviews accessed data from both men and women in white collar jobs who had experienced outplacement services. There are no other characteristics that bind the group. These retrenchees had chosen to be involved in the research to discuss their experiences of retrenchment in general and outplacement in particular. The interviews were thematically analysed with recurrent themes being the experience of outplacement, the inclusions of outplacement and other services provided within outplacement. Each of the expectations raised from the literature review is now addressed in terms of data collected and outcomes for knowledge and practitioners in the outplacement sector. The interviewee's words are used to show both the experience and the perceptions from a qualitative perspective.

E1 – It is expected that, going to an outplacement service is a positive experience for retrenchees.

The results indicate some diversity in the retrenchee's experience of outplacement. Those who received outplacement assistance reported different opinions of it. The experience was either very good or very poor. No one interviewed felt neutral about their outplacement experience. This outcome needs to be considered in terms of why

the disparity occurs. Comments such as “Initially I thought it was a good idea but the first week was good but after that no good … this guy promised to look after me but I never spoke to this guy again after one phone call … zip I heard nothing I thought this is a bloody farce” (F5). Others state “Outplacement has been much better than I expected … it has taught me about how a professional person gets a job and because I have been out of the job search network it has helped me know what is current” (F1).

However, this needs to be tempered against comments such as “Outplacement became a way for the organisation to say they were doing something for their people but it really wasn’t worthwhile for me” (M11) and “I was told I would get outplacement but I didn’t know what it was … about two days later I got a call and I thought I don’t want my old organisation choosing me a head-hunter but later I found out what they do … it was a waste of time sitting in a room with other people who had been retrenched. It was a bit too technical … I went to a couple of seminars but I know how to network and sell myself, so I thought I am better off to go to the gym” (M3).

These comments also highlight the differences in expectation of each of the retrenchees. In order for the experience to be a positive one, it must consider what the retrenchee needs rather than being a ‘standard program’ on offer. However, it is clear that those who were dissatisfied with the process wanted either one-on-one counselling or less focus on job search activities and more focus on helping them through the experience of losing their job. Comments such as “I started off feeling very positive but looking back I am disappointed with the lack of one-on-one attention I got …I am confused about what they could have done for me” clearly indicate how the expectations differ. As a result the E1 is not met.

This finding must be considered in regard to the literature which offers isolation (O'Neill & Lenn, 1995) as one of the key effects of being retrenched so it would at first glance appear that a group setting is useful. However, it was clear that those who wanted more individualised assistance or perhaps were not suffering isolation found the groups to be less helpful. This is a concern given that retrenchees have just experienced a negative experience in losing their job. To then be forced into another negative experience could be detrimental. Understanding that outplacement was either a positive or negative experience for people and the comments included about job seeking skills as part of that process, expectation two is now explored.

E2 - It is expected that retrenchees will find that the outplacement service focuses mainly on finding them new employment.

As job loss is the primary lever for attending outplacement and that outplacement providers are paid to ease the notion of job loss, it was expected that outplacement focused mainly on finding a job. This expectation was examined to understand the focus of the outplacement providers. Were they mainly focusing on getting the person into new employment or alternative employment or were they dealing more broadly with the overall experience as suggested by De Witte et al (2005)? People leave the outplacement situation once they have commenced new employment or decided to operate their own businesses or move into a suitable employment alternative. Outplacement assistance offers a new job as the answer to retrenchment. Participants in some instances feel that the role of outplacement is to assist them into new work but also has other benefits as seen here: "I requested outplacement and it was good to have the initial discussions and talk through the feelings and unexpected shock but we

only got together three times because I picked up another role quickly" (F2). Again the focus on looking for work is discussed: "The organisation didn't organise it but a friend suggested it so I negotiated it as part of my package …but they were not involved until I left … now they are helping me to apply for jobs" (F8). However, some of the assistance in looking for work was not as positive. "The outplacement could have been better … I gave my resume to her on disk and she turned her back on me and started working on my resume … I thought that she should talk with me about her ideas but not change my resume … don't manipulate my stuff. The group sessions were quite good it gave me the chance to see others going through the same thing" (M12).

The focus of job seeking is also something the participants spoke of in their expectation of their outplacement experience. "I only used the outplacement people to save my phone bill, there was one good guy but the rest of them were idiots … I had to ask them to do a mock interview but she was hopeless and I did not get any decent feedback. They are not quite a waste of money but not far removed from it" (M14). The findings indicate that outplacement does focus on getting a new job.
As a result this expectation is met. This was expected, as the current success criteria for outplacement is based on retrenchees gaining new jobs (Applebaum, 1991; Doherty & Tyson, 1993; Kozlowski et al., 1993; Arslan, 2005; De Witte et al, 2005).

Nonetheless, to focus only or mainly on job seeking skills, may fail to recognize the deeper issues that surround job loss. This is not to dismiss the need for these people to find suitable employment. Nor is it to suggest that they have the necessary job seeking skills, however, it is important to understand if outplacement providers offer more than the technical aspects of job seeking. While expectation two investigates job

seeking skills, it is also important that the other issues of job loss are explored for overall wellbeing. Expectation three is now explored.

E3 – It is expected that the outplacement service will also offer general job loss assistance to assist the retrenchees' readiness to find new employment.

DeWitte et al (2005) discuss provision of financial advice and counselling. While psychological assessment has been suggested by Doherty & Tyson (1993) and Morgan & Banks (2000) to also be included in the service, comments from participants included suggest that is not always welcome. "I had just received a body blow and now I was expected to pour my guts out to someone I didn't know" (F7). Yet others, were looking for more support. Even those who managed to achieve some relationship with their outplacement provider still questioned its worth. "I got some assistance, a counsellor/mentor to talk about my future and I have been to visit this guy 6 or 7 times because we have similar interests … but I would not have paid for it, I only used it because it was provided for me" (M16).

It does seem that outplacement normalises the experience for people "I got outplacement and it was extremely valuable …it was only after I spoke to them that I felt better about my package" (M4). This is supported by De Witte et al (2005) where outplacement should provide more broad assistance such as understanding the legal requirements of redundancy. However, in Australia this would be concerning as employment law is a specialized area and advice of this nature could not be provided by a generalist outplacement provider. It should also be considered in light of the second expectation in terms of focusing on new employment. Outplacement's success should not be measured by reemployment alone. Considerations of how the retrenchee

experienced the service and their general well being as they enter new employment and during the time of outplacement must also be considered. As a result of the participants information expectation three is met.

Further research

Further research needs to be conducted to ascertain if quick employment is satisfactory for the retrenchees, and whether length of tenure in the new job is impacted by the speed at which a retrenchee becomes re-employed. It would also be of interest to discover the length of time retrenchees prefer to have before commencing outplacement programs. The conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is outplacement is far more focused on assisting the retrenchees than would be expected from the literature reviewed. However, these findings should be viewed cautiously as outplacement providers appear to be offering a service based on the provider's perceived needs of the retrenchee without considering the retrenchee's level of readiness to find a new job.

CONCUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The data collected for this research expectation showed that outplacement assistance appears to be offered without any situational adaptation. In other words, a one size fits all package tends to be used. It also suggests that there is a need for a strong relationship between the counsellor and the retrenchee. If the retrenchee creates this relationship or connection, then outplacement assistance appears to have a better result than if the retrenchee feels they are just one of a group or a number in a process. Clearly, if there are promises broken it becomes yet another disappointment on top of the job loss. This also indicates that outplacement professionals need to be aware of the relationships formed and maintained during the process.

Given these findings, outplacement needs to adjust how it assists retrenchees, as it could offer assistance to further ameliorate the defined effects of retrenchment such as grief and loss of self efficacy. There is a concern that those who experience outplacement are continually exposed to the patterns and norms of their previous organisation if mass retrenchments are enacted and result in whole departments or organisations utilizing the same outplacement provider. This may maintain their former organisational identity. Where an organisation retrenches a number of people at one time and uses the same outplacement firm, the retrenchee may feel as though the 'organisation' has just moved offices. The retrenchees can still be referred to by their previous organisational name and interact on a daily basis with their colleagues and friends as if nothing has changed. In reality, these retrenchees become kindred spirits, previously working together, then retrenched together and now job searching together. Outplacement providers should be aware of this phenomenon and assist these retrenchees to shift their corporate identity.

This attachment, however, may not be useful for the retrenchee. Given that the models of counselling suggest a need for an ending in order to move or transition forward (Bridges, 1995) remaining in contact and continuing an interest in the former organisation may prevent the retrenchee from 'ending' the previous job. These findings contribute to new knowledge in the field of retrenchment as they indicate that outplacement does not, therefore, assist retrenchees with the effects of retrenchment by assisting with general counselling as stated in the final expectation:

Further, outplacement professionals need to offer more than a standard model. The people providing the advice need to be able to adapt as required which could be difficult within the fixed price model that is offered for organisations to be able to purchase such a service. As outplacement providers are paid an all inclusive up front fee (Morgan & Banks, 2000) there would appear to be a business need to get retrenchees into the system as quickly as possible and then to move retrenchees through the system as expediently as possible. Additionally, quick employment of retrenchees makes the outplacement provider appear successful on the current success criteria. In order for the outplacement provider to provide such a service at profit, it needs to be able to process retrenchees as effectively as possible and that is with the conclusion of the retrenchee gaining employment or no longer considering themselves unemployed, such as starting a business. What the retrenchee is looking for appears to be support, individual assistance and time to transition into the next stage of their life with or without employment.

Based on the data, the results of the interviews and the literature reviews, outplacement appears to lack a holistic approach to the loss of a job for the retrenchee. This raises several concerns. The literature review revealed differences of opinion about when retrenchees should start their outplacement activities (Latack et al., 1995; Westwood, 1998; Fisher, 1999; Arslan, 2005; De Witte et al, 2005). This research indicates that the outplacement experience is commencing too early for retrenchees, who are not psychologically or emotionally ready.

If retrenchees' readiness factor is not considered by outplacement providers it may engender poor job search attitudes, creating a greater negative outcome than if the

retrenchee were to commence their outplacement activities when they were ready to look for a new job. Outplacement could be more beneficial if retrenchees were given a period of time to deal with the involuntary job loss, not job searching. A lack of readiness to find a new job may also lead to the retrenchees' requiring more assistance from outplacement providers.

However, outplacement providers are in a precarious position, given that the retrenching organisation pays for the service. Outplacement providers could be confused about who the customer truly is. If the ultimate customer is the person receiving the outplacement, then the program needs to consider the retrenchees' needs. However, as there are two customers with competing and, in some instances, conflicting needs, outplacement providers appear to be driven by the payer rather than the receiver of the program. The findings of this study are critical for outplacement providers, as they may need to adjust their success criteria to incorporate the retrenchee's point of view.

These findings also advance current knowledge by indicating readiness as a factor to consider when dealing with retrenchees along with providing a greater focus on job searching activities. The advancement in knowledge is that retrenchees may be influenced by their readiness to gain a new job. The outplacement providers must be more aware of the retrenchee's requirements within the process. While there is a need for outplacement providers to offer more than job searching assistance they must also balance the level of intensity of other assistance provided with the retrenchee's level of readiness to look for a new job.

By differentiating the services provided to the retrenchees, outplacement providers can address individual needs and assist retrenchees with their specific requirements. Clearly, by tailoring programs and meeting expectations of the participants, the experience of outplacement will become of greater benefit to the retrenchee and provide more suitable assistance to these people in difficult circumstances.

AUTHORS

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Peter Miller is an Associate Professor in management at the Graduate College of Management, Southern Cross University, New South Wales, Australia. He has spent more than 35 years working in a variety of organisations including 25 years management and senior management experience in the public sector in a variety of government departments, in the private sector particularly in the mining industry and in tertiary educational settings. He has authored and co-authored 5 books and numerous international journal articles on leadership, management development, organisational change and development, corporate governance and organisational learning.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

What period of service has the average employee in your organisation?

If the average length of service is only 3 – 5 years then consider what services you want the outplacement provider to provide. If the employees have changed jobs in the last three years, then outplacement may be better replaced with a serviced office and some counselling specific to their needs

What does the outplacement provider really offer?

Make the outplacement provider accountable for the type of personnel who will deal with your employees and also know exactly what services will be offered. Consider seeking a payment arrangement with them whereby the full amount is paid once the retrenchee has found new employment.

What do your employees really expect?

It is the disparity between expectations and the reality which most concerns retrenchees. Making sure the provider gives written information about the process before they are asked to attend outplacement is important.

Is the outplacement provider able to tailor what is required by individuals or is it a group or bulk program with little flexibility?

Ask the outplacement provider for how they go about tailoring the services. Get them to provide examples of how this has assisted retrenchees in their previous contracts. Visit their offices and see if it will work for your people. Remember this is not about ameliorating your responsibility it is about assisting people who have just lost their jobs, income, and often friends in the process.

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