

THE ROLE OF WORKPLACE COUNSELLING IN PROMOTING A POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: A NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Employees in different industries often face occupational stress and other psycho-social issues that may affect their overall well-being and contribute to a negative organizational culture. Although many businesses have implemented workplace counselling as a solution to these problems, it has not been successful in all organizations. This study aimed to show how workplace counselling can create a positive organizational culture. The current study involved a qualitative secondary study design. In this study, a narrative literature review was conducted. Ten peer-reviewed journal articles were selected from different industries through purposive sampling from various databases. Following the initial selection, thematic analysis of the selected literature was conducted. As a result, five themes were identified from the study. The results of the current study suggest that workplace counselling can increase employees' overall well-being and productivity, promote employees' psychological well-being, improve workplace relationships and communication, enhance the accessibility and use of counselling services, and create a positive work environment. However, lack of awareness and accessibility, confidentiality issues, and lack of managerial support are some of the challenges that affect workplace counselling. The current study provides solutions to the challenges and makes recommendations to human resource managers and organizational leaders on how to improve employees' well-being and promote a positive organizational culture. Although the study's scope was limited to reviewing the existing literature on workplace counselling and positive organizational culture, the themes identified in the study can guide different industries in implementing workplace counselling services. The next step in this research would be for future researchers to carry out a similar study in their industries to establish applicability and differences, if any.

1. Introduction

Employees in different industries and geographical locations are exposed to high occupational stress, emotional strain, and other psycho-social risks in their work environments, which negatively impacts their performance (Fahim & Karim, 2026; Kim & Jung, 2022). Consequently, different businesses have introduced workplace counselling as a formal and informal intervention to help employees deal with their personal and work-related problems (Lakmali,

2021; Onsare & Ng'eno, 2022). Workplace counselling refers to a formal and informal process in which counsellors, human resource practitioners, and leaders facilitate post-conflict solution building and manage diverse psychological issues affecting an employee's capacity to perform their duties effectively (Din, Khan, & Khan, 2021; Shaleh, Awad, & Rezki, 2022).

In addition to improving employee wellness, organizational culture has been identified as a key

variable that influences general working conditions within a company. Organizational culture is a reflective belief of the values, attitudes, and perceptions of employees, as well as leadership within an organization, where the former is significantly influenced by the latter (Monteiro & Joseph, 2023). Studies indicate that organizational culture and employee wellness are closely interconnected, where companies with a negative or toxic organizational culture do not support employees' socio-emotional wellbeing, and those that lack employee support structures lead to poor employee wellness (Monteiro & Joseph, 2023; Kim & Jung, 2022).

Although different organisations have implemented the concept of workplace counselling, its presence does not guarantee a positive organizational culture (Ahimie & Musa, 2026; Lakmali, 2021). According to the literature, workplace counselling is not always efficient in resolving employees' occupational, emotional, and psychological problems due to various issues, such as poor accessibility and other issues (Lakmali, 2021). However, some studies report contrary results, noting that workplace counselling has a dual effect on employee motivation and organizational citizenship behaviours in the absence of a significant performance outcome (Dangalla, Prabuddha, & Amarasinghe, 2024). Therefore, the topic of workplace counselling and organizational culture has been widely discussed in the literature, but relevant evidence is limited, possibly due to the diverse industrial backgrounds that have participated in such studies. The relationship between workplace counselling and organizational culture needs to be better understood within the context of different business sectors.

The apparel sector is one of the most labour-intensive industries in Sri Lanka (Lakmali, 2021). However, unlike other industries, limited academic literature discusses the effectiveness of workplace counselling in this setting. Therefore, this study focuses on the qualitative secondary analysis of ten (10) manuscripts to determine the general effect of workplace counselling in different industries. The findings of this study will provide theoretical and practical insights for human resource managers and professionals in the field of human resource management.

The present article is a qualitative secondary research study that focuses on completing a descriptive literature review of a total of ten (10) manuscripts. The objective of this study is to determine how workplace counselling affects

organizational culture. Specifically, the following research questions are central to this study:

1. How does workplace counselling affect organizational culture?
2. How is workplace counselling linked to organizational culture?

Since this study aimed to determine the general effect of workplace counselling within diverse industries, ten (10) research studies that employed the use of qualitative methods were reviewed. The manuscripts that were reviewed were distributed among multiple industries, including textile and apparel, the hotel and restaurant industry, education, maritime and logistics, and public administration. Therefore, this literature review is intended to provide a general understanding of how workplace counselling and organizational culture are interrelated, and to develop empirical evidence that can be the foundation of a more comprehensive industry-based study. The findings of this study will benefit human resource practitioners and managers that are involved in workplace counselling interventions to improve organizational culture. Additionally, the findings of this study will benefit future researchers who would like to investigate the effect of workplace counselling in different industries.

2. Research Methodology

This study involved a qualitative secondary research design where a narrative literature review approach was adopted. A narrative review was justified for this study because the study intended to pursue the goals of conceptual synthesis and reinterpretation and not testing a hypothesis, as is normally the case with systematic reviews. In other words, this study aimed to show and re-express the findings of different pieces of literature that had investigated the role of workplace counselling in organizational culture with a view to identifying thematic patterns that bind the reviewed literature together. It is important to note that this study did not generate new data for analysis and synthesis. Rather, information was borrowed from the existing pool of knowledge, critically examined, evaluated, and presented thematically.

The target articles for this study were ten peer-reviewed publications selected from a larger number of documents that matched the inclusion criteria. The search for this study was conducted in the last ten years (2016-2026) and deliberately selected based on relevance. No exhaustive search

was conducted because this study did not require exhaustive hermeneutic analysis, as is the case with a systematic review. Nevertheless, a large number of literature in the form of journal articles, books, and conference proceedings were examined in the process of completing this study. The reason for adopting this strategy was that a narrative review allows for greater flexibility in conceptualising a research topic. Specifically, the selected articles

examined the impact of workplace counselling on organizational culture in different industries and regions. The selected articles were from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Korea, Kenya, and India. In short, a wide range of geographical locations and industries were deliberately selected to identify common thematic patterns that bind the workplace counselling literature together.

Table 1: Summary of the ten selected studies according to author(s), year, country, industry, and research design.

	Author(s) & Year	Country	Industry / Sector	Design
1	Fahim & Karim (2026)	Bangladesh	Textile / Garment	Mixed methods
2	Lakmali (2021)	Sri Lanka	Apparel manufacturing	Mixed methods
3	Dangalla et al. (2024)	Sri Lanka	Hospitality	Quantitative
4	Monteiro & Joseph (2023)	India	Cross-sectoral review	Literature review
5	Precious (2016)	Zambia	Education	Quantitative
6	Kim & Jung (2022)	South Korea	Manufacturing & services	Quantitative
7	Shaleh et al. (2022)	Indonesia	Higher education	Qualitative (case study)
8	Ahimie & Musa (2026)	Nigeria	Cross-sectoral	Descriptive survey
9	Onsare & Ng'eno (2022)	Kenya	Maritime / public sector	Quantitative
10	Din et al. (2021)	Pakistan	Higher education	Qualitative (focus groups)

Data extraction from each study focused on the research aim, context, methodology, key findings relevant to workplace counselling and/or organizational culture, and limitations. The extracted findings were subjected to thematic analysis, following a process of familiarisation with the full set of findings, systematic coding of recurring concepts, and iterative grouping of codes into broader themes. This process produced five overarching themes: (1) workplace counselling enhances employee well-being and performance; (2) workplace counselling enhances employees' psychological well-being; (3) workplace counselling enhances workplace relationships and communication; (4) workplace counselling promotes the accessibility and effective utilization of counselling services; and (5) workplace counselling creates a supportive organizational environment. These themes form the structure of the findings and discussion presented in the following section.

3. Results / Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the thematic analysis, organized under the five themes identified across the ten reviewed studies. Each theme is discussed with reference to the specific studies that informed it, followed by a discussion of how the theme contributes to understanding the relationship between workplace counselling and positive organizational culture.

3.1 Workplace Counselling Enhances Employee Well-being and Performance

Some of the articles reviewed for this study indicate a positive association between workplace counselling and employee engagement, motivation, and performance. Lakmali (2021) reported a positive correlation between the implementation of both group and individual counselling and increased employee engagement in a Sri Lankan apparel manufacturing company. Precious (2016) observed

that most teachers and administrators surveyed in a Zambian study were of the view that counselling in the workplace promotes a motivated and productive workforce, with most participants associating it with lower levels of staff absenteeism. Onsare & Ng'eno (2022) demonstrated through their research that employee counselling in the Kenyan public sector significantly improves performance, with the increased morale and productivity of staff in the Kenya Ports Authority manifesting in higher levels of punctuality and attendance in most departments. Din et al. (2021) reported similar results from their study among university staff in Pakistan, which observed that the majority of respondents associated positive attitudes towards counselling with higher levels of productivity, particularly during periods of personal or professional challenges.

Overall, all the above findings indicate that the active use of counselling services within the workplace has a positive effect on employee engagement, motivation, satisfaction, and performance, as well as attendance and productivity in specific cases. This outcome was consistent across all industries examined in the review, suggesting that the benefits of counselling services cut across industry divisions and workplace types.

3.2 Workplace Counselling Enhances Employees' Psychological Well-being

A closely related theme is the protective capacity of counselling for the psychological well-being of employees. Fahim & Karim (2026) identified that occupational stress among Bangladeshi textile workers was caused by job-role disappointment, frustration, poor working relationships, and unfavourable physical environments, and that intervention, which included communication and stress-awareness components, lessened the number of dominant stress factors experienced and improved workers' levels of psychological well-being; while Monteiro & Joseph (2023), having undertaken a broad review of the literature, concluded that supportive resources, such as employee assistance programs and counselling services, protected employee mental health from the risks of post-traumatic stress following particularly difficult incidents and reduced the stigma surrounding mental health. Precious (2016) found that the majority of respondents indicated that counselling reduced work-related anxiety and depression and improved their overall mental well-being, while Onsare and Ng'eno (2022) identified that counselling relating to depression, anxiety,

trauma, and accident recovery had a strong positive effect on employees' emotional recovery and thus improved their performance; finally, Din et al. (2021) discovered that stress and depression were consistently identified as the primary issues employees wished workplace counselling services to address.

It is notable that these findings highlight the role of workplace counselling as a protective factor, mitigating the emotional impact of occupational stress on employees' well-being. It should also be added that a number of these studies (Fahim & Karim, 2026; Monteiro & Joseph, 2023) identified that the protective effect of such services was most apparent when they were part of broader structural or cultural support systems.

3.3 Workplace Counselling Enhances Relationships and Communication

The reviewed literature also demonstrates the role of counselling in building interpersonal relationships and communication in organisations. Fahim & Karim (2026) established that poor working relationships were among the main predictors of job dissatisfaction, and that interventions targeting communication were effective in reducing interpersonal conflicts and promoting co-working. Lakmali (2021) similarly identified unresolved workplace friction and interpersonal conflict as precipitating factors for seeking the help of counsellors, although several respondents experienced structural barriers in accessing such services. Shaleh, Awad & Rezki (2022) in their qualitative case study of a higher education organisation in Indonesia revealed that counselling informed by local cultural values promoted the airing of grievances and thus de-escalation of tensions and prevention of prolonged disputes that would undermine efficiency. Monteiro & Joseph (2023) similarly identified open communication and social support as elements characteristic of positive workplace cultures. Finally, Din et al. (2021) demonstrated that the way confidentiality is addressed in the counselling relationship influences employees' willingness to seek assistance.

This theme highlights the fact that the relational aspects of counselling, such as providing a safe space for social interaction, may be at least as important as its therapeutic role. The ability of counselling to address disputes and promote open communication, as demonstrated by the case study in Indonesia (Shaleh et al., 2022), promotes a culture conducive to building a positive workplace.

3.4 Workplace Counselling Promotes the Accessibility and Effective Utilization of Counselling Services

A recurring and cautionary theme in the literature concerns the accessibility of counselling services as opposed to their mere availability. Lakmali (2021) reported discovering an operational disconnect when evaluating the use of a counselling service in apparel manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka: although a service was available, employees who had personal or work-related difficulties were not accessing it, since their rigid production schedule allowed only for short tea or lunch breaks, insufficient for a standard counselling session, and many employees were unaware of the service's existence. Ahimie & Musa (2026), on the other hand, discovered that Nigerian organizations displayed stark differences in workplace counselling use depending on the hierarchical level of the employee: top management and specialised staff were far more likely to report using such services, even though all categories were relatively equally satisfied with the services' quality. Finally, Din et al. (2021) discovered that confidentiality was a major concern for administrative staff, who generally would not consider using the services unless they knew that personal information would not be shared with subordinates, while academic staff had mixed opinions on such sharing.

This theme suggests that simply providing the service would be insufficient for reaping cultural and well-being benefits; instead, the importance of scheduling flexibility, general awareness campaigns, guarantees of confidentiality, and other factors should be considered. Notably, this is the theme in which evidence from the literature is most cautionary: while all three papers (Lakmali, 2021; Ahimie & Musa, 2026; Din et al., 2021) focus on fundamentally different populations and come to different conclusions, the question of accessibility is still a major issue of interest for the study and the industry alike in three separate cases.

3.5 Workplace Counselling Creates a Supportive Organizational Environment

The final theme pertains to the broader workplace environment in which counselling takes place. Dangalla, Prabuddha & Amarasinghe (2024) revealed that in the context of the hospitality sector of Sri Lanka, counselling had a significantly positive association with employee motivation and organizational commitment, while its direct impact on performance turned out to be unexpectedly negative, which the authors explained by the special

need for counselling to be properly aligned with performance-related goals in order not to undermine them. Surprisingly, organizational culture in this study did not have a direct impact (positive or negative) on performance; instead, it indirectly influenced it by positively affecting motivation and commitment. Monteiro & Joseph (2023) conceptually supported the idea of the indirect impact of organizational culture on employees by suggesting that it is the leaders' ability to provide the workforce with satisfying job conditions, realistic expectations, and effective policies that shapes a healthy workplace culture of support. Kim & Jung (2022), in their turn, demonstrated through a contingency analysis that a "clan"-style organizational culture (emphasising community and flexibility) was associated with a significantly lower level of stress in employees who scored high on the adaptability scale compared to a "market"-style culture (prioritising competition), thus proving that the outcome of such factors as organizational culture depends on the match between an employee's personality traits and organizational context.

Overall, this theme provides substantial evidence that workplace counselling and organizational culture are two interrelated concepts that make up the bigger frame of a supportive and motivating work environment within which employees are likely to succeed. Counselling seems to be more effective at boosting motivation and commitment when used in combination with organizational culture, namely, by addressing employees' actual needs instead of imposing externally motivated changes. The puzzling finding of Dangalla et al. (2024) concerning counselling's negative impact on performance should be taken as a crucial warning that it is not enough to introduce new practices, including counselling, without considering the broader workplace context; rather, any changes should involve a comprehensive analysis of the organizational environment and its alignment with employees' personal characteristics.

3.6 Challenges and Barriers to Effective Workplace Counselling

Across the five themes identified, a number of similar challenges emerge, which temper an otherwise relatively positive outlook on the role of workplace counselling in organizational culture. Lack of awareness of available services among employees was reported in the Sri Lankan apparel sector (Lakmali, 2021), the Kenyan public sector (Onsare & Ng'eno, 2022), and among teachers in

Zambia, where a third indicated that they had never formally used workplace counselling despite its informal availability (Precious, 2016). Accessibility was also identified as an issue in the form of rigid production or work schedules that left little time for scheduled sessions, most notably in apparel manufacturing (Lakmali, 2021) and was reflected in job-level differences in the availability of counselling in Nigerian organizations (Ahimie & Musa, 2026). Confidentiality, notably the impact it would have on an employee's willingness to use the service, was a deciding factor for administrative staff in their decision to use workplace counselling or not (Din et al., 2021). Finally, a lack of managerial and structural support, for instance in the form of an absence of a central location or professionals offering the service, and of coordination with human resource departments, was identified as a reason counselling would not confer benefits to the workplace (Lakmali, 2021).

The challenges across the five themes identified suggest that the association between workplace counselling and the positive features of organizational culture is conditional; counselling services help to improve employees' well-being, relationships at the workplace, and the broader culture, but only if the employing organization acknowledges its role and begins to address specific challenges, particularly those related to the accessibility and confidentiality of the service as well as levels of managerial and structural support.

4. Conclusion and Implications

This narrative literature review aggregated the results of ten studies on the topic of workplace counselling services to determine their impact on the construction of a positive organizational culture. The review identified five themes central to the discussion of the effects of counselling services provided in a work setting: workplace counselling has a positive effect on employees' performance and well-being; workplace counselling services protect and promote psychological well-being; workplace counselling services improve relationships and communication; counselling services benefit the workplace culture on the condition that the employees can use them; and counselling services are most effective when they are used in combination with other supportive measures provided by an employer. Taken together, the themes suggest that workplace counselling services operate by addressing employees' psychological needs, which in turn affects the broader organizational culture by contributing to

various aspects of it, including relationships, communication, motivation, and commitment.

The review's theoretical and practical contributions stem from its focus on the effects of workplace counselling services. This review's theoretical contribution consists in providing an aggregate view of how counselling services affect a range of factors associated with a positive organizational culture, with benefits stemming from both individual-level and workplace-level perspectives. Unlike many previous studies limited to a single industry or country, this review aggregates findings from different fields, including the apparel manufacturing industry, the hospitality industry, education, and government affairs, representing both developed and developing countries. These differences allowed the review to highlight the importance of distinguishing between the presence of counselling services and employees' actual ability to use them, which counselling services review articles focused exclusively on a single industry or country might not note. This review's practical contribution builds upon the theoretical one by discussing the practical implications of the reviewed studies' results. Workplace counselling services are an effective tool, but they are not an end in themselves. To truly benefit the organization, counselling services need to be appropriately scheduled, their confidentiality ensured, and their presence acknowledged and supported by the company in its culture-building efforts.

This review offers several implications for human resource management practitioners, particularly those working in large MNCs with multiple service departments. First, such organizations need to recognise that providing counselling services is insufficient; they need to ensure that employees understand what services are available to them and how to use them. It is important for large-scale employers to schedule counselling services in a way that makes them feasible for all employees, including those working shifts, such as those prevalent in the apparel manufacturing industry. Additionally, it is crucial that employees trust the confidentiality of counselling services, which should be ensured by appropriate procedures, such as non-disclosure agreements. Finally, as discussed in detail in the review, counselling services must be part of a larger complex of supportive measures offered by the company, as counselling alone is not sufficient to build a positive organizational culture. This is most pertinent to developing countries, particularly when it comes to Sri Lanka's apparel manufacturing industry, where stressful working conditions often

undermine employees' well-being while remaining unaddressed formally through workplace counselling services.

The review has several limitations stemming from the design of the narrative review itself. First, the review relies solely on secondary sources, which means that it cannot offer primary evidence but rather synthesizes the findings of others' works. Second, the review uses only ten articles, which limits the scope and applicability of the findings. Although the ten studies reviewed offer a broad perspective on the effects of workplace counselling services, they originate from different fields, countries, and approaches. As a result, while the review may highlight the similarities between the effects of workplace counselling services across these industries, it does not offer specific implications for any one of them, such as the aforementioned Sri Lankan apparel manufacturing industry. Therefore, future research should identify additional scholarly articles on the topic and conduct original research into the effects of workplace counselling services. For the most part, future research should focus on individual countries or regions, such as investigating the effects of workplace counselling services in the Sri Lankan apparel industry by analysing the human resource management practices there. Specifically, such a study would be helpful in identifying whether workplace counselling services in this particular region and industry are effective, and if so, to what extent and under what conditions.

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