

## **TAMING THE GREEN-EYED MONSTERS: REDUCING BACKBITING VIA ENAICMS JEALOUSY INTERVENTION**

Taming the Green-Eyed Monsters: Reducing Backbiting via ENAICMS Jealousy Intervention

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Issues related to jealousy in organization are rarely discussed openly among the management and employees. Yet, this strong emotion can lead to numbers of unpleasant impacts such as lowering employees' job motivation and decreasing company's productivity. A study conducted with 209 employees from a prominent private organization in Malaysia has shown that jealousy is the most influential factor that contributes to interpersonal relationship problem, which consequently affect the employees' job performance. With the usage of on-line survey namely Employee Need Analysis Inventory Online Counseling Management System (ENAICMS), it is found that employees with interpersonal relationship problem faced communication problems with the management and colleagues, as well as commitment to work in team. The chaining problems may eventually harm the organization if appropriate actions are not taken. This conceptual paper aims to illustrate how ENAICMS Jealousy Intervention can help the organization to reduce envy and jealousy problem among employees. Interventions such as individual and group counseling, workshop, awareness program, and transforming organization's policy are explained in detail.*

**Keywords:** Employee Need Assessment Inventory (ENAI), Employee Assistance Program (EAP), jealousy, counseling interventions, job performance and job motivation

## Introduction

“People don’t become soulless zombies when they arrive at the workplace”, Crabtree (2004) had brilliantly stated this phrase in his article to illustrate the impact of workplace relationship in one’s personal life. Moreover, he also emphasized that it is becoming increasingly apparent that workplace relationship *are* personal. An earlier study following the lead of Brief and Weiss (2002), Watson and Slack (1993) as cited in **Boone (2001)** mentioned that job satisfaction is an important life domain, thus it may lead to more general life satisfaction and better emotional adjustment.

The fact that people in organization striving to keep personal and professional feelings realm separate, has lead to ignorance of **the existing** negative emotions especially jealousy. According to Dogan and Veechio (2001), envy and jealousy have been recognized as powerful forces and it has been a managerial tradition to discount or try to ignore these emotions. The belief that organization interactions should be grounded in rational economic-based has left strong feelings and emotions a tiny space in business-related social interaction. Holding firmly to this belief may cause the management to overlook one important thing which is the potentials of these negative emotions to bring tangible impact upon organization’s productivity and performance.

Studies related to affect in organizations had begun in 1930s due to the perceived need for understanding worker’s feelings (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Many of the earliest researches have shown that job dissatisfaction is caused by maladjustment emotional tendencies, and daily affect levels have significant relationship with daily performance levels. In fact, current studies related to emotion in organization showed almost similar results. For instance, a study by the Gallup Management Journal found that negative workplace relationship is the factor of employees’ job disengagement (Crabtree, 2004). Worse, Dogan and Veechio (2001) claimed that if feelings of envy and jealousy persist, it may contribute to job withdrawal, and the people who leave the company may be the employees that managers value most highly.

The terms “envy” and “jealousy” are often used interchangeably in our everyday language, even though they actually carrying different meanings. Envy is defined as the discomfort felt when another’s achievement or accomplishment are perceived superior than ours, while jealousy is experienced when a personal relationship is threatened by a rival (Boone, 2001). However, in Malay language, both terms are described by one word which is *cemburu*, albeit there is an idiom which has the same meaning – *iri hati*. Thus, in this current study, the term “jealousy” used by participants in describing their interpersonal problems is referred to both “envy” and “jealousy” definitions. Further findings are discussed in the following sections.

Most people may readily acknowledge their feelings of pride, shame, and guilt rather than discussing about jealousy that they possessed, even though the feeling is considered normal and experienced by every person (Bedeian, 1995). This is because envy and jealousy have always been portrayed as a feeling related to hostility and aggression. Both emotions are viewed as dangerous, capable to disrupt interpersonal relations and trigger violence. In fact, the word envy itself derived from the Latin word, *invidere*, which means to look at another with malice (Boone, 2001). Possessing and portraying negative emotions are usually unaccepted in most cultures and religions. Hence, for a person to admit having those kind of feelings is definitely difficult to deal with. Besides, an anthropologist, George Foster,

mentioned that admitting to envy is tantamount to conceding inferiority with respect to another thus it is often hard to be done without damaging one's ego (Bedeian, 1995).

By not admitting and putting further efforts to control the growth of jealousy within oneself, a person may remain trapped in unhealthy negative emotions. This subsequently leads the person towards more harmful consequences. Jealousy can cause unpleasant implications for individual's interactions with others and for their general happiness (Bedenian, 1995). Not only that, it can also lowering the person's work motivation, creates conflicts and unhealthy competitions among co-workers, drop in productivity, and increase in job

dissatisfaction. Furthermore, there might be health implications involve such as cardiovascular disease.

According to Dogan and Vecchio (2001), with the existence of jealousy, employees tend to spend less time working and more talking to coworkers about the issue or scrutinizing events to determine if their fears were justified. This may influence the quality of work as the feeling cause stress and undermine the ability to work collaboratively. The teamwork spirit is later affected, as they would be least likely to make friends with the person they perceived as rival (Boone, 2001).

Without any effort to intervene the jealousy, individuals may proceed to a stage, which involves an attempt to discredit the targeted person. They may venture to undercut the rival by starting a professional ambush such as negatively distorting the person's success (Bedenian, 1995), planning deliberate sabotage, manifesting rage, or pointing out the faults of the competitor (Dogan & Vecchio, 2001). In addition, the person who experienced jealousy may also react by requesting a transfer or quitting the organization (Dogan & Vecchio, 2001). According to Whitey and Cooper (1989), people leave when they are pushed out by dissatisfaction, and believe that improvement is unlikely to happen.

Other than affecting a person's professional life, jealousy could also influence one's personal feelings. Dogan and Vecchio (2001) mentioned that employees may experience fatigue, depression, a feeling of losing control and anger. In addition, Parrot (1991) **as cited in** Boone (2001) listed six (6) types of

emotions derived from jealousy which are longing, inferiority, agent-focused resentment, global resentment, guilt, and admiration. As there is a wide range of reactions to jealousy, some people may react in more positive manner than others such as "admiration" which is considered to be an appreciation and acceptance of another's positive qualities, or experience a motivation to work harder.

But due to the conceptualization of jealousy which is closely related to a sense of injustice and a feeling of fear that is perceived as a disadvantage, people most of the time react negatively following the arousal of jealousy. Some people experienced inferiority which impacts their self esteem and may result in depression, despair and anxiety. Some may focused on anger and hatred towards the targeted person. Others may experience the feeling of unfairness of life, fate and luck, while certain people may face moral struggle and feel guilty due to the negative thoughts towards the target.

Parallel to the above study is findings by Smith et al. (1999) where envy was correlated significantly with hostility, resentment, and maladaptive traits linked to inferiority such as depression and neuroticism. The study also showed that envy is negatively correlated with adaptive qualities such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and happiness.

Therefore, as the feeling of jealousy mostly affect people negatively, it is vital for the management to take actions in order to improve the working atmosphere.

## Sources of Jealousy

In order to identify suitable interventions to reduce jealousy, we should first be aware of the factors that contribute to this emotion. By understanding the sources of jealousy, both managers and employees can work together to overcome the unhealthy circumstances.

There are a number of sources which could lead to jealousy among the employees within an organization. Referring to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory **as cited in** Boone (2001), people tend to compare themselves to gain important information about the self, either using the upward comparison or downward comparison.

Upward comparison is when a person compares him or herself with individuals who perceived to be superior, while downward comparison is a person who compares with someone who is perceived as having less advantages. The purpose of comparing oneself with someone superior (upward comparison) is to have a benchmark on achievement, and to improve oneself to a higher level, at least at the same level of the person.

Downward comparison on the other hand is a defensive tendency one will use to gain a feeling of comfort. By comparing with someone who perceived to be worse, he or she will feel better about his or her personal situation. Upward comparison is said to be the source of jealousy, as by comparing oneself to someone who has more advantage the person might not feel secure. In addition,

Salovey and Rodin's (1983) Domain Relevance hypothesis **as cited in** Boone (2001) suggested that individuals prone to experience envy when comparing themselves to another whose accomplishments are better than one's own in the domains of wealth, fame, popularity and physical attractiveness.

Moreover, according to Dogan and Vecchio (2001), downsizing may cause envy or jealousy to those who remain in the organization. This happens in any situation where the remaining employees feel fear whenever decisions are made on who may be the next to leave the organization by the management level. Such threatening situation leads to anger, fatigue, and depression among the competitive survivors. Besides, organizations that take programmatic actions to remain competitive among employees may foster envy or jealousy (Dogan & Vecchio, 2001). Envy or jealousy is said to be the result of losing self-esteem, stress-related reaction, and a sign of insecurity. In fact, loss in work performance is actually one of the jealousy signs that may result from a desire to restore fairness in the situation. This deliberate drop in productivity can occur when employee opt to achieve a rebalancing of personal contribution and rewards by reducing their own efforts (Dogan & Vecchio, 2001).

Another source of jealousy is derived from a diverse workgroups that most of the organizations are currently practicing. With the differences in demographic background, skills and experiences, these create interpersonal conflicts among the members of the group due to the differences in opinions and ideas, as well as

decision making approaches. For an instance, if the promotion process is based on the employee's cultural background instead of the academic and work experience qualification, others may feel that it is unfair and thus, create a feeling of jealousy towards those who are deemed to be more qualified. Therefore, if the differences in culture are not being taken seriously by the management level, a sense of uncertainty, competitiveness and threat may arise.

Conflict among different generations may also cause jealousy at the workplace. Tensions exist when younger employees see the older ones as potential threats due to their years of experience, and that the older employees are more concerned on whether they will be replaced by the younger ones who are

perceived to be more enthusiastic. As for the younger generation, with better access to education, upon graduation, they tend to be hired directly at the management level. This could lead to feelings of envy among the older workers who had loyally worked in the organization for a number of years, but never had the chance to be promoted. Also, nowadays, employees from all walks of life tend to multi-task due to the increasing workload given by their supervisors. Having to juggle multiple role within a limited time frame could lead to job stress and in turn, has negative effects on mood.

Other source of jealousy as mentioned by Brief and Weiss (2002) is that individuals whose personalities are high in neuroticism, they tend to experience negative mood states such as anxiety, depression, hostility, and guilt. Brief et al.

(1995) **as cited in** Brief and Weiss (2002) indicated that individuals with high neuroticism have the tendency to brood on failures, distance themselves from co-workers and leaders which result in negative interpersonal interactions.

## **Current Study**

A study conducted with 209 employees at a prominent private organization in Malaysia has shown that jealousy is the most influential factor that contributes to interpersonal relationship problem, which consequently affect the employees' job performance. The usage of Employee Need Analysis Inventory Online Counseling Management System (ENAICMS), which is an on-line survey, has successfully collected information regarding employees' problems that affected their job motivation, productivity and work performance.

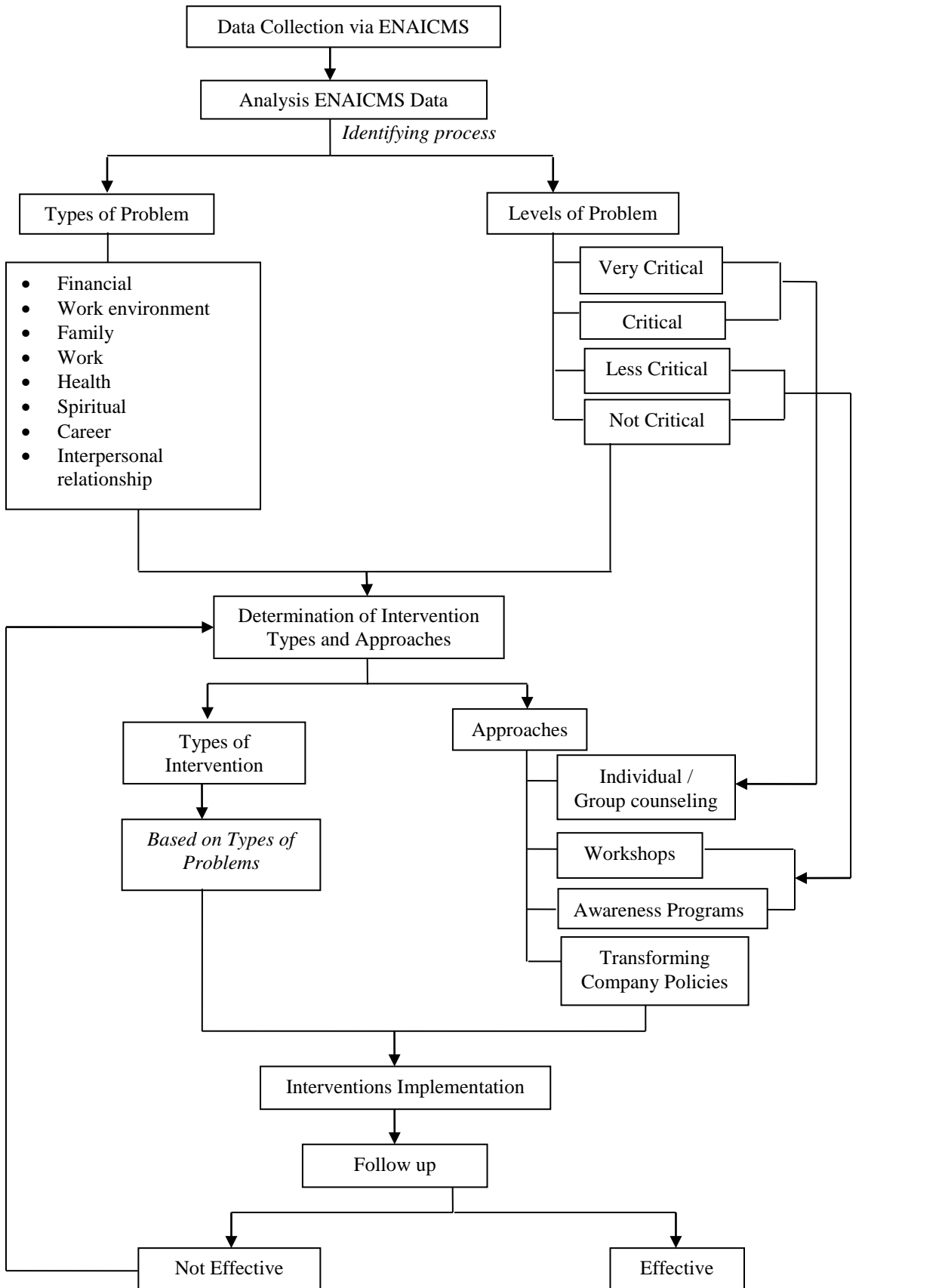
The Employee Needs Assessment Inventory Online Counseling Management System (ENAICMS) was initially developed in 2001 by Mohd Razali and Sharulazaman as an early detection system associated with the problems faced by the employees in the organization. An early detection is believed to help organizations to perform appropriate interventions in addressing the problems faced by the employee. Types of problem are categorized as financial, work environment, family, work, health, spiritual, career, and interpersonal relationship. Ever since then, this on-line personal assessment tool received numerous national and international awards. In 2011, it received a gold medal award at Seoul International Invention Fair in Korea, and in the following year, another gold medal was honored at the British Innovation and Technology Show in the United Kingdom. ENAI system is currently host at [www.enaieap.com/cms](http://www.enaieap.com/cms).

The study also found that by experiencing jealousy, employees are faced with communication problems towards the management and colleagues, as well as commitment problem to work in team. Table 1 shows the result of the analysis.

Table 1. ENAI Analysis Result for Interpersonal Relationship Problem at the Workplace

Item	Very Critical (%)	Critical (%)	Less Critical (%)	Not Critical (%)	Need EAP (%)
I have problems communicating with my colleagues of the same level	0	0.5	9.1	23.9	33.5
<b>I have problems communicating with the management</b>	0	5.3	9.6	33.0	<b>47.9</b>
I have problems communicating with my colleagues	0	1.4	8.6	29.2	39.2
<b>I have problems gaining cooperation from my colleagues</b>	0.5	2.4	10.0	30.6	<b>43.5</b>
My colleagues used to bully me	0	0	3.3	19.6	22.9
I cannot work in team	0	0.5	1.9	19.6	22.0
My colleagues show their dislike to me	0	1.4	3.8	31.6	36.8
<b>The management does not show much concern about my welfare</b>	1.0	0	12.9	33.0	<b>46.9</b>
My colleagues do not show much concern about my welfare	0	0.5	8.6	33.5	42.6

The result shows that the item “I have problems communicating with the management” carries the highest percentage (47.9%) which requires a need for an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The second and third highest items, “The management does not show much concern about my welfare” and “I have problems gaining cooperation from my colleagues” carries 46.9% and 43.5% respectively. Determination on types and approaches of intervention is showed in the following flowchart.



## **Managing Jealousy at Workplace**

Managing jealousy at the workplace requires efforts, cooperation and involvement from both managers and employees. Previous studies have suggested various ways in dealing with green-eyed within people in organization. One of the suggestions made by Bedenian (1995) is to use mediation such as employee assistance program (EAP).

EAP is a program offered to employees to help them deal with personal problems that might affect their work performance and adjustment at workplace. EAP generally includes counseling services, assessment, support and referrals to additional sources for employees. ENAICMS is a system developed to identify the employees' problems and offer suggestions on suitable interventions. By implementing EAP, this system is useful for the organization to gather early detection of employees' problems.

### **ENAICMS Jealousy Intervention**

As illustrated in the flowchart, the types of intervention and approaches that would be used depend on the person's type and level of problem. For those who reported to have very critical and critical level of problem, they are required to undergo counseling for intervention sessions. Such intervention can be handled via individual and group counseling. As for those who experienced less critical and not critical level of problem, they are encouraged to be involved in workshops and

awareness programs. Transforming company policies and practices is suggested for employers if the related problem is caused by company environment. Each of the approach is further explained as below where the type of problems discussed in this paper is related to jealousy.

#### Counseling Intervention

One of the approaches that can be taken by the management in dealing with workplace jealousy is via counseling program. According to Bedeian (1995), the number of companies which instituted counseling program in their organizations has increased tremendously. Through this program, employee can learn to deal with destructive effects of workplace jealousy in more positive manner. It also helps the individual to become a strong team member and gain healthier emotional quotient.

Counseling intervention is a professional helping service offered therapeutically to the client based on psychotherapy approaches. There are number of approaches nowadays, and in fact, more than 400 types of therapies are identified around the world. Each approach has its own style to help client overcome the problem. For instance, therapies under Cognitive Behavior approach such as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) would help a person to deal with problem rationally and reevaluate inferences and perceptions.

The process of therapy starts with discovering the significant problem. The individual will firstly be identified as experiencing jealousy towards another person, or considered to be a victim of jealousy. Exploration of problem involves identifying activating events, looking at the reasons of jealousy, and finding the causes of jealousy.

The intervention stage is the next phase after the exploration of problem has been done. In this stage, counselor will help individual to reevaluate their inferences and perceptions of what had happened based on their rational thoughts. Besides, counselor also will assist the client in understanding the reasons



they are prone to envy, the coping styles and adaptive methods that are suitable for them to deal with those feelings, and how to control negative emotion as well as tolerate with uncertainty. Via group counseling, people get to share their feelings of disappointment, listen to other's experiences, learn from others, and getting support. Indirectly the persons will feel confident by knowing that they are not the only one who faced jealousy problem. Indirectly they can learn on how to increase their self-esteem, overcome negative social comparison and help the person to realize his own strengths as well as build up spirit to compete healthily. Individuals can also discuss on how to sharpen the skill of emotional control, perseverance, and tenacity in the face of hardship.

## Workshops

Conducting workshops regarding jealousy is one of the ways to help employees to overcome jealousy. Under ENAICMS, workshop is offered to employees who are at the level of less critical or not critical on jealousy. The purpose of this intervention is to expose the employees about jealousy, the effects of jealousy and prevent from the seed of jealousy to grow further.

Various themes of workshops can be conducted such as "how to overcome jealousy", "tips on recovering personal power", and "healthy steps in dealing with jealousy". Besides, "assertive communication" workshop can also be conducted to help employees to be open in solving conflicts and dissatisfaction. Other than that, organization can also help individual to adapt with unofficial workplace rules and be alert to institutionalized practices intended to obviate envy (Bedeian, 1995).

## Awareness programs

Awareness program is also offered to employees who answered less critical or not critical level of jealousy on the on-line survey items. Employees are exposed on brief information about jealousy, the causes and signs of jealousy, as well as ways to overcome jealousy.

Pamphlets, flyers, and simple articles about jealousy can be distributed among employees to increase awareness among them. Besides, morning sharing sessions can also be implemented where each employee will take turn to talk about

jealousy such as "creative ways to overcome jealousy". Other than that, understanding other's culture is also vital as different culture has different perspectives in authority and favor different approaches in decision making. Some may think the manner or behavior shown by employer or coworkers portrayed as a lack of appreciation, and this can lead to jealousy. Hence, talking about one's culture can also help. Moreover, organization can think of other creative ways such as launching a program called Fighting the Jealousy Day.

## Transforming Company Policies and Practices

Role of employer is undeniably important. Under this intervention, a counselor will act as the mediator and suggest things that may need to change such as improving performance evaluation and creating fair environment. There are number of roles that can be played by the management to improve the situation.

It is important for an employer to avoid creating situation that can trigger the feeling of unfair treatment. Even though it is difficult for us as a human to avoid viewing certain individuals in more

positive light than others, employers need to be objective as rewards and recognition which are parceled out in an evenhanded and fair manner is less likely to generate jealous feelings and be more productive (Half, 1993).

Performance appraisal system must be seen as fair and consistent. When performance and evaluation processes are perceived by employees as unfair, they

contribute to feelings of envy and jealousy (Dogan & Vecchio, 2001). The system should rely on objective rather than subjective measures of performance. With objective and consistent measures, employees are less likely to feel resentment toward their peers.

Effective leaders usually will recognize that jealousy, envy, disappointment, anger, joy, fear, ambition, pettiness, love, hate and feelings of inadequacy go with the territory of supervising people. The management is supposed to be alert with the potential of conflict (Half, 1993) and signs of jealousy, as well as taking immediate action to alleviate the problem.

Employers should also practice open-door policy and make themselves available to the employees. Encourage open and informative communication is important to create an environment where employees feel comfortable approaching managers or coworkers if they are experiencing problem. Employers should embrace, accept and understand one's emotions which might show through the way of running the department.

Crabtree (2004) mentioned that in an employee engagement survey, it is found that there is a strong agreement with the statement "This person sets me up for success" among engaged group. Managers who want to boost workgroup engagement levels might benefit from developing, trusting and supportive relationship with their employees. Developing and maintaining strong relationships with employees is a key to creating a strong, productive workgroup. Moving

toward an "us" rather than a "we-they" mindset is an option the management can consider. Organizations such as Disney Production and Wal-Mart steer away from the use of "employee" in favor of "associate" and "team member" (Bedeian, 1995).

Furthermore, the organization can encourage teamwork spirit and implement mentoring system. Via mentoring system, the team members can blend personal empowerment with cooperation. Positive relations among employees can also be encouraged. When each member benefits from the success, it is less likely the feeling of insecurity and resentful aroused.

Hold regular meetings can also be one of the options. Everyone is encouraged to discuss any concerns including tension among employees. This provides opportunity for employees to voice opinions and discuss sources of stress.

## **Research Limitation**

The rationale of conducting this research was to identify the employees' problems and determine suitable approaches in tackling the problems. This research used quantitative method as the design approach and the instruments used in this research was the ENAICMS. In any research conducted by passionate researchers, there are several limitations involved throughout the entire phase of executing this research.

The first limitation is that only one organization was chosen to obtain the needed information for this study. Therefore, the result may not be able to be generalized due to the difference on working conditions and the demographic factors of employees from one organization to another. Another limitation

is that the system may have its own weaknesses for the design is still considered to be at an early stage of development and thus, require further improvement.

## **Recommendations**

After conducting and analyzing the research, the researchers concluded on several recommendations that could be used as future guidelines in similar research area. From the perspectives of human resource practitioners, the findings of this research study help to quickly identify the difficulties faced by employees that could directly affect their job performance, working relationship and overall well-being. Thus, it is imperative for the human resource practitioners to be well-versed on interventions to assist the employees in reducing their problems.

On the other hand, it is recommended for the human resource practitioners to be more aware on the subtle changes made by the employees, and immediately tackle the situation before it gets any worse. This can be done by observing their working relationship, create awareness program on work life balance and implementing team building programs.

Also, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) should be established in any organizations so that the employees will be able to inquire for further support in any problems that they faced. As for the perspective of future researchers, they are encouraged to find more suitable organizations so that comparison study could be implemented in order to gain more comprehensive study in similar research area. Also, apart from quantitative method, future researchers should look into the application of qualitative method, especially by interviewing selected employees to obtain new or more in-depth results for the study.

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