

**EFFICACY OF PERFORMANCE COUNSELLING IN THE INDIAN  
AIR FORCE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

<sup>1</sup>Gp Captain Mukund Mohan  
Dayananda Sagar University,  
Bangalore, India  
*mukundmohan1709@yahoo.co.in*

<sup>2</sup> A. Suryanarayana  
Faculty of Management  
Osmania University,  
Hyderabad -500 007 (Telangana State), India  
*professorsuryanarayana@gmail.com*

**ABSTRACT**

Performance Counselling (PC) in the Indian Air Force (IAF) was evolved over the years and has been made mandatory recently. However, it is not known if the process is effective and is actually helping improve the performance of IAF Officers. Hence, a survey was carried out to obtain the opinion of Appraisees and Initiating Officers (IOs) on their understanding of the process and determine its effectiveness. A total of 306 responses from all branches of the IAF were obtained and a cross-section of officers was also interviewed to obtain their views. Data has been collected from various stations in the IAF that are heterogeneous and is considered sufficient as a true sample for the study. Data collected was analyzed and also checked for independence concerning any variations in the different branches of the IAF. It was found that the process of counselling, though formalized as a procedure, has not been fully integrated into the IAF as yet. Most of the officers go through it as a formality that has to be undertaken in appraisal reporting. Most of the officers consider counselling necessary only when the appraisee is perceived to suffer from some kind of serious behavioral problem, thereby conveying a negative connotation. PC as a tool for improvement has neither been understood nor appreciated. PC is carried out invariably as a one-way dialogue wherein shortcomings are pointed out and the officer is asked to show improvement. It is concluded that the process is largely ineffective and does not successfully enhance the performance as was originally envisioned. It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to sensitize and educate the officers on the concept and the benefits of PC and give them training on the methodology of conducting PC.

*Keywords: counselling, performance counselling (pc), training and development, Indian Air Force (IAF)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's fast-paced corporate world, there is virtually no organisation whose employees are not affected by stress. Employees get depressed or could be suffering from anxiety arising from various workplace-related issues like managing deadlines, meeting targets, shortage of time to fulfil personal and family commitments, or bereaved and disturbed due to personal problems, etc. Having realised the importance of a stress-free, motivated, and capable workforce, many companies have introduced integrated counselling services in their organisations and have made Performance Appraisal and Counselling (PA & C) a part of their culture. PA & C are essential ingredients of the Human Resource Management (HRM) of any organisation. They help in assessing an employee's performance to ensure that he is effectively achieving what is intended for the organisation. At the same time, the process also helps formulate a reward system, punishment, promotion, placement, termination policy, and aspects related to training and special assignments. However, the PA & C benefits will only be effective if the employee completely understands the assessment and believes that it is being done in his interest. Such an understanding will enable employees to try and rectify their mistakes willingly, overcome perceived shortcomings, and improve upon solid points.

The process of bringing the performance to the employee's notice in terms of his achievements, shortfalls, shortcomings, and strengths while guiding him to achieve his full potential is broadly termed Performance Counselling (PC). In the Indian Air Force (IAF), PC was first introduced in the early nineties but

was only formalised in 1997 when it was made mandatory. Since then, the IAF has come a long way in increasing awareness about the concept of PC. However, there has been no recorded study regarding the relevance and effectiveness of PC in the IAF. For any process to be effective, it is essential that all members of the organisation are fully aware of the benefits of the process and its nuances. Since the process involves dealing with human beings and their aspirations and fears, extreme care is required while handling counselling assignments. Skills required for therapeutic counselling are far more involved and specific and therefore, specialised training is a pre-requisite for such tasks.

However, there is a difference between PC and the therapeutic counselling process, and no specialised training is necessary for PC. A certain degree of training is still necessary for individuals involved with the process of PC as specific cases may require techniques and processes to address the observed weaknesses and areas for improvement.

This research study aims to study the relevance of the process of Performance Counselling (PC) followed in the IAF for officers and suggest measures to improve the effectiveness of the process and the counselling skills. The hypothesis for the study is “Performance Counselling process followed in the IAF is effective and helps enhance performance”. The scope of the study is limited to Performance Counselling (PC) for the officer cadre. Presently, PC is carried out only for officers below the rank of Wing Commander. Although PC for personnel below officer rank has also been introduced, it is still at a preliminary stage, and it is felt that it would be premature to go into details of PC for them. The study also does not attempt to deal with *therapeutic*

*counselling*, for which a formal process has also been introduced recently in the IAF to deal with cases such as alcoholism, drug addiction, marital friction, maladjustment etc. This study is restricted to PC conducted by Initiating Officers (IO) in the officer cadre only.

## **PRESENT SYSTEM OF PERFORMANCE COUNSELLING IN THE IAF**

The IAF follows a process where every officer works directly under an Initiating Officer (IO) who appraises all officers working under him. The next level of appraisal is the Reporting Officer (RO), forwards the appraisal to the Senior Reporting Officer (SRO). Officers of the rank of Group Captain (Gp Capt) and above are not expected to be counselled. Neither would it be feasible as many officers at this rank are not co-located with the IO. Periodic counselling of senior officers would therefore not be administratively possible most of the time.

PC is required to be carried out for all officers of the rank of Wing Commander (Wg Cdr) and below, by the IO, at least once every quarter <sup>[1]</sup>. It is also felt that an officer's personality would be reasonably mature at the level of a Gp Capt and that PC would not have a significant effect at such an age or rank. PC is expected to be carried out transparently in a free and fair atmosphere exercising diligence and sincerity, with the intention of bringing out both strong points and weak areas of the officer's performance and his personality. The IO is also expected to spell out the targets and the Key Result Areas (KRAs) for each officer and gauge the displayed performance against the same. The officer's signature in the PC register implies that he agrees with the appraisal and the counselling provided by the IO, making it potential

documentary proof of PC. The RO is at liberty to ask the IO to do the same for him for perusal. While on inspection visits to the unit, all staff officers are required to verify if it is being maintained and handled as per the official instructions. The IAF follows a closed system wherein the AR is not shown to the Appraisee and is not privy to the final grading given by the IO or even to his pen picture. However, a Performance Feedback is forwarded to every officer once in five years, giving his average grading in both professional and personal traits separately, indicating the officer's progress as a part of the PC process. However, its utility is limited as it does not indicate the officer's weaknesses or strengths nor provide suggestions for improvement.

In the latest version of the Air Force Order on Appraisal Reporting, the term 'Performance Counselling' has been changed to 'Performance Review (PR)', and it is now mandatory for the PR to be carried out at least once every six months for all officers up to 16 years of service. PR for officers beyond 16 years of service could be resorted to at the discretion of the IO and is not mandatory <sup>[2]</sup>. The PR aims to communicate goals and targets to the appraisee and bring out strengths and shortcomings while reviewing the progress made in achieving the set goals and targets. Of late, a standardized format is included in AR for conduct of PR to be signed by both the IO and the appraisee who is also free to record any disagreement with the points brought out by the IO. RO's signature in the PC register at least once in six months is mandatory as it is treated as a legal document and handled accordingly. PR is a right of the appraisee and he can ask for it if it is not carried out regularly.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Air Force Order 2/2008.

<sup>[2]</sup> Air Force Order 6/2012.

### **Counselling in a Military Environment**

Though Appraisees can demand PC that has been made mandatory, they still face practical difficulties. The military environment demands implicit obedience by subordinates to all orders from the higher-ups without raising any questions lest they should be singled out as a poor candidate for military service and labelled as a rebel. Moreover, extremely competitive scenario and losing out on the limited vacancies for promotion in a highly steep pyramidal structure further discourages questioning of authority. As a result, PC or any counselling is tilted strongly in favour of IOs. As such, counselling in the military has often been restricted to psychological counselling to help deal with specific problems, and counselling itself is viewed negatively by a broad cross section of the personnel in the military.

### **Training for Performance Counselling**

IOs and ROs conducting PC are not given any specific training for PC conduct except through annual Appraisal Workshops conducted at Air Force stations. At any time, about 10% of IOs and ROs could be expected to attend such workshops conducted in the area under each Command HQ. Most of these workshops are predominantly focused on the appraisal system and a passing reference is made to PC as per the manuals just for the sake of documentation. With no format laid down for PC, IO records the session in the words he deems fit. On noticing serious issues related to behavioural or inter-personal relations such as alcoholism, marital discord, etc., the IO is expected to refer the case for professional counselling at the Station Counselling Cell (SCC) manned by the President of the local wing of Air Force Wives Welfare Association (AFWWA), suitable representatives from each unit, Senior Medical Officer (SMO) or any other doctor. Air Force stations are also encouraged to employ

professional counsellors to provide professional guidance to officers and their families. However, in most cases, stations fail to do so either due to their non-availability in the area or limited compensation that can be paid. In the absence of trained counsellors at SCCs, the IO and the RO mostly decide on the best PC method as they are expected to gain experience before they reach the supervisory level. Though the directives do clarify the need for PC, the negative feelings that PC conjures up in military service get crystallized over many years. Changing the mindset would require much more than a mere directive to effect an attitudinal change towards PC.

### **Impediments to Performance Counselling in the IAF**

In the IAF, which is a high rank conscious and hierarchical organization, the IO is required to conduct the PC as he is directly in contact with the appraisee and is responsible for their tasking, training, well-being, progress, and supervision. He is considered to be adequately knowledgeable to understand and list the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. However, PC is much more than that, especially when performance shortfall or higher potential is observed. Then the process takes on a different dimension becoming challenging to proceed without any formal training. In view of the officers' organizational structure, seniority consciousness, and the very nature of the IO-Appraisee relationship, the atmosphere may not essentially be conducive for free, fair, and effective PC. By design, IOs/ROs may become judgmental as they are required to be so by design, and the Appraisees may also not freely discuss various aspects. Limited tenures of all officers not exceeding two years at any place in the units of IAF may give at best cursory attention to PC. Individual seriousness notwithstanding, the systemic reasons are overwhelmingly stacked against effective PC.

## **A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FROM SURVEY OF LITERATURE**

It is often seen that performance can slip below the required standard at the workplace. Feedback and counselling are an integral part of addressing these problems for any organisation that wants to achieve the goal of high performance. However, while management of performance that is below desired standards is necessary, it is an unpleasant and challenging task and managers tend to avoid taking action as often as they should; many would instead put up with poor performance than conduct performance or disciplinary interview. This lack of desire to manage poor performance is of particular concern as there is evidence that work performance intervention may be the most effective and one of the most critical management tasks<sup>1</sup>. Counselling is a process of clarifying a problem held by another person, enabling him to take appropriate responsibility for that problem, and then assisting him to arrive at some form of solution to the problem. It is essentially a long-term developmental process, not a technique or a one-time answer to a problem<sup>2</sup>.

If the reasons for performance decline in an employee who has been functioning normally are analyzed, work-related factors such as poorly defined goals, lack of training, and lack of effective recognition affect work performance. In addition, there are many personal factors like alcohol dependency, family problems or financial worries, which can also cause

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<sup>1</sup> Buon T, *Employee Counselling and Performance Management*, [www.buon.net/files/acwsummer05.pdf](http://www.buon.net/files/acwsummer05.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Redman Warren, *Counselling Your Staff*, Kogan Page India Ltd New Delhi P-28.



employees to lower the quality of their work<sup>3</sup>. Feedback is usually the first action taken when performance deterioration is noticed. It is generally affected in an informal interaction and involves exchanging information in a range of situations about how the employee can move towards achieving the goals of the organization. Motivating employees is an essential part of the job of management, and recognition is a crucial element of the motivation process<sup>4</sup>. Counselling is a formal process initiated when an employee has not responded to advice and assistance provided on a less formal basis after a decline in performance has been noticed. Many situations involve a combination of feedback and counselling or a progression from feedback to counselling. Feedback must be communicated clearly so that the employee is clear of what is expected in terms of work performance and conduct and also clear about the extent to which those expectations are met<sup>5</sup>.

Counselling has been described by Krumboltz (1965, p 384) as the process that consists of ethical activities a counsellor undertakes to help the client (individual in need of counselling) engage in those types of behaviour which will lead to a resolution of the problem. The 1980 American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) Licensure Commission's defined counselling as “. . . the application of counselling procedures and other related areas of behavioural sciences to help in learning how to solve problems or making

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<sup>3</sup> Buon T & Compton B. (1990). The development of alcohol and other drug programs in the workplace, *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety* – Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup> Hawkes DJ, *Counselling for better work performance*; Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment  
[http://www.ocpe.nt.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/53675/counsellingbk.pdf](http://www.ocpe.nt.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/53675/counsellingbk.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

decisions related to careers, personal growth, marriage, family or other interpersonal concerns”<sup>6</sup>. As per Burks and Steffle<sup>7</sup>, counselling is a professional relationship between a trained counsellor and a client, designed to help clients understand and clarify their views of the life-space and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices and the resolution of problems of an emotional or interpersonal nature.

These definitions may appear to indicate that Psychotherapy and counselling are synonymous. However, Brammer and Shostrom<sup>8</sup> indicate that while the two activities may overlap, counselling, in general, can be characterized by such terms as “educational, vocational, supportive, situational, problem-solving, conscious awareness, normal, present time and short term”. Psychotherapy on the other hand can be characterized by such terms as “supportive (in crisis setting), reconstructive, depth emphasis, analytical<sup>9</sup>, focused on the past, emphasis on ‘neurotics’ and long term”. In short, counselling may be viewed as a process designed to address problems that are not too involved and are related to interpersonal relations, incongruence, perceptions, etc. Blocher (1966) distinguishes between psychotherapy and counselling by pointing out that the goals of counselling are ordinarily developmental, educative, and preventive, and those of psychotherapy are generally re-meditative, adjusting, and therapeutic. However, he suggests a

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<sup>6</sup> George Rickey & Cristiani Therese. (1979). *Counselling Theory & Practice*, Prentice-Hall, Inc New Jersey, p-3.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert M. Burks H.M. (Jr.) & Steffle B. (1979) *Theories of Counselling*, McGraw Hill.

<sup>8</sup> Brammer L.M and Shostrom E.L. (1982). *Therapeutic Psychology: Fundamentals of Counselling and Psychotherapy*.

<sup>9</sup> George Rickey & Cristiani Therese *ibid*, p-4.

great deal of overlap between the two processes. To differentiate more clearly between counselling and psychotherapy, Blocher lists five basic assumptions about the clients and counsellors' insight in view of large overlaps.

As per Krumboltz (1966), the goals of PC should be stated differently for each individual and are required to be compatible and tailor-made for the needs of each personality and the problems of each person and are invariably different in each case<sup>10</sup>. Counselling helps improve the individual's effectiveness. Blocher (1966) suggests that counselling seeks to maximize an individual's possible freedom within the limitations supplied by himself and his environment. It also seeks to maximize the individual's effectiveness by giving him control over his environment and the responses that are evoked by the environment<sup>11</sup>. An attempt to assist an individual in need of counselling is called an intervention, which could either be therapeutic or reformatory. Performance Counselling would predominantly strive to undertake potential identification and development, growth, effectiveness and efficiency enhancement etc.

Determining at what point a decline in work performance or a failure to observe the appropriate standard of conduct warrants formal counselling is a matter of judgement on the part of the manager, and it is not always easy to decide when to move from providing informal comments to a more formal approach. Generally, people should be praised in public and criticised in private. Communication is one of the most important aspects of counselling, and it can be said that counselling is entirely dependent on good

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<sup>10</sup> George Rickey & Cristiani Therese *ibid*, p-7.

<sup>11</sup> George Rickey & Cristiani Therese *ibid*, p-8.

communication. Counselling focuses on communication from the individual needing counselling as a stimulus and from the counsellor as response and reinforcement. During the counselling process, the counsellor attempts to bring about specific changes in the individual's behaviour to achieve the purpose of the intervention. However, research shows that all behaviour is a necessary consequence of the interaction of forces operating at the display of behaviour. Past events have no necessary relationship to current events but represent the historically accidental circumstances of the individual at that time<sup>12</sup>. There are five types of social power bases that could be identified. Invariably the counsellor would be required to use a combination of two or more power bases to deal with the problem effectively.<sup>13</sup> To achieve the best results, counselling, like feedback, should be based on open, two-way communication. It is also essential to establish a time frame to achieve the agreed goals and review the success of the strategy that has been mutually agreed<sup>14</sup>.

Resistance arises typically when the individual with a problem perceives the influencing attempts as stemming from illicit motives on the the counsellor. If the individual sees and understands everything transpiring in the transaction, it is more likely that the encounter would be meaningful, and better success could be expected. The term Congruence is used to describe these relationship aspects <sup>15</sup> . The counsellor must experience an accurate empathetic understanding of the individual's private world and be able to communicate

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p-30-31.

<sup>13</sup> Patri Vasantha R ibid pp30-40

<sup>14</sup> Hawkes DJ, Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Patri Vasantha R ibid p-60

significant aspects of that understanding. Feelings or attitudes must be experienced by the counsellor and perceived by the individual being counselled.

Genuineness of feelings, sensitivity, empathetic understanding, warmth, acceptance of the individual as a valuable person and unconditional positive regard are the cornerstones of successful interactions.<sup>16</sup> The release of emotions is usually invaluable for getting the individual to recognize his true feelings, which is extremely important in counselling. Focusing on feelings has the advantage of enabling the individual to experience the emotions underlying many a problem. Relating feelings to specific experiences have immense value in problem-solving.<sup>17</sup>

### **Performance counselling**

PC effectively helps an employee in (i) understanding himself—his strengths and weaknesses, (ii) improving his professional and interpersonal competence by giving him feedback about his behavior, (iii) setting goals and formulating action plans for further improvement. PC cannot be effective if the subordinate does not trust his boss. The subordinate must feel free to participate without fear or inhibition in the dialogue. The phases of PC are: Rapport Building, Exploration, Action Planning, and Follow Up. In the -building phase, a good counselor establishes a climate of acceptance, warmth, support, openness, and mutuality. The appraisee must be made to feel wanted and that his superior is

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<sup>16</sup> Patri Vasantha R ibid p-64.

<sup>17</sup> Patri Vasantha R ibid pp.49-50.

genuinely interested in his development.<sup>18</sup> In the exploration phase, the counselor should attempt to help the employee understand and appreciate his own situation, problems, needs, and strengths and weaknesses. Counselling sessions should ideally end with specific plans of action for the development of the appraisee while suggesting alternative ways of dealing with a problem. Good counselling sessions fail to produce effective results due to a lack of follow up and sustained feedback on the recommended course of action<sup>19</sup>. Feedback should be checked and verified. This will ensure that the subordinate has not misinterpreted the feedback received from his superior<sup>20</sup>. Adequate Pre-Interview preparation has to be made before the actual conduct of the PC interview. It is of utmost importance to be sincere, informal, and friendly.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A survey was carried out among officers of the IAF to obtain opinions to determine their perceptions about the effectiveness of the PC process. PC is mandated to be carried out for officers up to 16 years of service. So, it would essentially cover most of the officers up to the rank of Wing Cdr. While all these officers would fall in the category of Appraisees, a few of them would also be assessing other officers as Initiating Officers (IOs). However, all officers of the IAF with their present roles or earlier experience would be able to comment on the PC process and have an opinion on its efficacy. Two questionnaires were designed to obtain views of Appraisees and IOs of the rank of Wing Commander and below. The first was specifically meant for

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<sup>18</sup> Tanya Ganola, *Performance Improvement and Appraisal for Employees*, <http://www.chillibreeze.com/articles/Performance-improvement.asp>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Appraisees being counselled by their IOs, and the second was meant for IOs. Most Air Force stations had a mix of officers from all branches of the IAF, and views of the entire cross-section of the officers were obtained, with the largest group coming from the flying branch in stations at a senior level. From among the approximately 6000 officers of Wing Commander and below, it was planned to obtain about 200 responses for the survey. 212 and 94 responses were received from the Appraisees and the IOs, respectively.

Officers were also interviewed for their detailed views on the PC process, its effectiveness, and suggestions for increasing its effectiveness at CDM and at Air HQ. Views expressed by officers were recorded and correlated with data obtained from the questionnaire. The respondents were from diverse geographical areas, different branches of the IAF, and serving under different IOs. Therefore, the views of the respondents could be taken as representative of the views of the entire population of IAF officers. Difficulties faced in addressing specific issues of PC, limitations and solutions were some of the aspects more succinctly brought out through interviews. Questions were asked based on different facets such as diligence and the atmosphere in which counselling was carried out, potential, strengths and weaknesses, guidance for improving performance etc. Inference about the effectiveness of the process was planned to be derived based on the number of negative answers to these questions. It was seen that neither the counsellors nor the Appraisees were fully aware of the nuances of the process.

There were several misconceptions regarding the correct method of implementation of the process and individual perceptions about its utility. Some of the common responses were as follows:

PC is a one-way process wherein the IO must intimate his assessment of the appraisee's performance, leaving no scope for any contribution from the appraisee.

PC cannot be effective for people over ten years' service as a person forms rigid views and is therefore closed to suggestions.

Whenever IO brings out weak areas, the appraisee would switch off and become demoralised.

More time has to be spent with officers displaying inadequate performance and not with those whose performance is perceived to be satisfactory.

To check if there were any variations in the assessment of effectiveness of PC by the respondents, Chi Square Test of Independence with respect to different branches of the IAF was carried out.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Test of Independence:**

The officer cadre in the IAF consists of officers from the Flying branch, the Aero-Engineering branch, and various support branches like Administration, Meteorology, Logistics, Medical, and Education. A test of independence was conducted to analyze if officers of all branches of the IAF felt similarly about the most important factors on which the hypothesis was based. Since most of the flying and engineering branch officers operate in a slightly different environment as compared to those working in other branches, it is possible that their perceptions about Performance Counselling (PC) would be different. Therefore, the test was carried out to determine if variations in the responses of officers of different branches were merely by chance or if there was a significant difference in their outlook towards PC and its effectiveness. The



test determines if characteristics for elements of the same population are related or independent.

### Chi-Square Analysis:

The test aims to determine whether differences between ‘observed’ and ‘expected’ frequencies occur by chance or whether these differences reflect a significant difference in the opinion of different groups of officers who participated in the survey. Responses to Question No 6 that directly deals with the aspect of PC's effectiveness in improving individual performance of both the questionnaires used and as shown below were considered for this analysis to check whether the officers of all branches of the IAF hold similar opinions about it.

**Table 1: Initial Contingency Table of Observed Frequencies**

S. No	Parameter	Branch			Total
		Flying	Aero-Eng	Others	
1	Agree with Effectiveness	36	16	23	75
2	Do not agree with effectiveness / Neutral	136	38	57	231
3	Total	<b>172</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>306</b>

The problem at hand is to determine if the opinions of officers of the IAF are independent of the branch to which they belong, with the desired level of confidence.

**Table 2: Contingency Table for Expected Frequencies**

S. No	Parameter	Branch			Total
		Flying	Aero-Eng	Others	
1	Agree with Effectiveness	42	13	20	75
2	Do not agree with effectiveness / Neutral	130	41	60	231
3	Total	<b>172</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>306</b>

**Table 3: Computation of Chi Square**

S. No	Parameter	f <sub>o</sub>	f <sub>e</sub>	(f <sub>o</sub> -f <sub>e</sub> )	(f <sub>o</sub> -f <sub>e</sub> ) <sup>2</sup>	(f <sub>o</sub> -f <sub>e</sub> ) <sup>2</sup> / f <sub>e</sub>
1	Flg Br agree	36	42	-6	36	0.90
2	AE Br agree	16	13	3	9	0.58
3	Others agree	23	20	3	9	0.59
4	Flg Br disagree	136	130	6	36	0.29
5	AE Br disagree	38	41	-3	9	0.19
6	Others disagree	57	60	-3	9	0.19
<b>Chi Square Calculated =</b>						<b>2.7335</b>

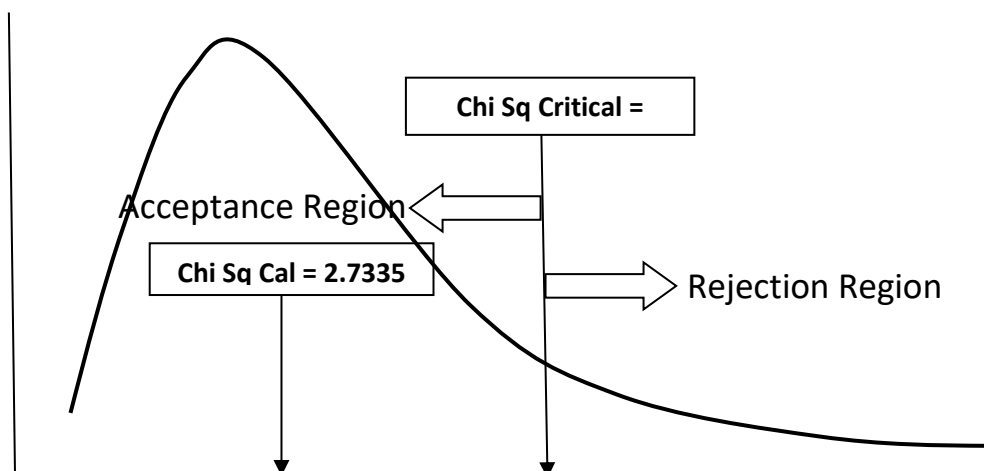
(i) Degrees of freedom: 2

(ii) Level of Significance: 0.05 (for a level of confidence of 95%)

(iii) **Chi-Square Critical: 5.9915**

(derived from Excel using CHIINV function for 2 degrees of freedom and LoS 0.05)

### Determination of Acceptance Area



As is evident from the figure, the Chi-Square Calculated value of **2.7335** is less than the Chi-Square Critical value of **5.9917** and falls in the Acceptance Region. The test of independence (Chi-Square Test) proves that all officers from all branches of the IAF have an almost *similar* opinion on PC's effectiveness as no significant difference was found between the views expressed.

**Hypothesis Testing** was used to determine the extent to which the sample data represents the actual population data and the limits between which the population mean would lie for the opinions expressed by the respondents of the survey. Research Question and the hypothesis, which states that PC is effective and improves individual performance, was tested for acceptance with the sample data collected from the survey of Air Force officers. Since question No 6 of both Questionnaire No 1 and No 2 directly deal with this issue, the responses from both types of respondents were analyzed with an aimere analysed to determine if the sample data significantly establishes a high level

of confidence the hypothesis. The sample size is 306. Since  $n > 30$ , the data can be assumed to have the characteristics of a nominal distribution.

Coming to the '**Estimator**', the proportion of officers who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' was taken to represent the case in support of the hypothesis as the others disagreed that PC was effective and improved individual performance. We call the proportion 'p'. Many 'neutral' respondents who remained unaware that PC is supposed to improve performance are also considered to be against the hypothesis. The **level of confidence** necessary to prove the hypothesis was taken to be 95%, which would imply a level of significance of 0.05. This would determine that interval estimate of the population within which would lie the population's opinion concerning the hypothesis in question. Going by the interval estimate based on a confidence level of 95%, the hypothesis would be accepted if it is determined that a significant number of the population believes that PC was effective.

### **Critical Value**

$p = 0.24373$  (This is the proportion of officers who strongly agreed or agreed that performance counselling was effective and improved performance).

$q = 0.75267$  (This is  $1-p$ )

$= 0.02454$  (estimated standard error of the sampling distribution of proportions)

Z at 95% CL = 1.96 (Level of Confidence)

Thus  $E = 0.0481$  (Error of the estimate)

The confidence interval, therefore, is 0.19562 and 0.29183. ( $p-E$  and  $p+E$ )

This implies that it can be deduced, with 95% confidence, that the number of Air Force Officers that would agree with the hypothesis is between 19.56% and 29.18%.

### **Validation of Hypothesis**

The hypothesis that the 'PC process followed in the IAF is effective and helps enhance performance' has been deliberated in-depth and statistical analysis reveals that the PC in the present system is ineffective. It can be concluded with a 95% confidence level that only 19 to 29% of the population of the IAF agrees with the hypothesis. Moreover, many of the officers conducting PC are themselves not very convinced about the utility of the counselling itself. There was also a misinterpretation of the order confusing psychological counselling that is normally carried out for problem solving with the performance counselling that IOs have been asked to carry out.

The alternative hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) thus stands *invalidated* and rejected because at an average of 71% or more of the IAF officers have opined that PC in the present form does not help enhance performance.

### **FINDINGS**

The primary objective of PC is to provide an objective analysis of the performance of the counselee during the period for which PC is being carried out. This can be achieved only when both the IO and the Appraiser are fully aware of the purpose of PC and are also in agreement with the need and necessity to carry out such an exercise with the communication between them being free and frank for achieving the desired objectives. It is also necessary that the dialogue and discussion between them result in agreed outcomes with a performance improvement. However, it is evident from the analysis that PC

is not achieving the desired result, and it is not being carried out in the desired manner and frequency and to the expected satisfaction of the Appraisees. The resenting officers strongly feel that PC is being carried out as a fault-finding exercise with IOs indulging in a monologue and informing the Appraisees of areas where they felt their behaviour or performance was not up to the standard while giving no guidance to them to improve on their performance. Not understanding the theoretical underpinnings of HRM and the rationale for PC by the IOs can be cited as the direct and primary reason for its failure in implementation. Moreover, IAF had made no effort either to train or provide guidance and counselling to them although the HR branch of Air HQ, which deals with such aspects, issued an order directing all IOs to carry out such counselling. Nor a standard format was provided to IOs to base their counselling.

Most IAF officers felt that they were more than competent to provide PC just by dint of their experience in dealing with man management for the best part of their career. However, there is a danger that such an approach is open to individual interpretation about the true nature of PC. The officers could not distinguish between PC and behavioural counselling, which is primarily psychological in nature is amply evident from the responses of the officers who participated in the survey. The very purpose of providing PC got defeated because most of the IOs neither understood the rationale of PC nor its imperativeness. Surprisingly, many a time, even signatures of the Appraisees were not obtained in the counselling registers. It is no wonder that such registers are being maintained only to fulfil the formal requirements and subsequent inspections.

Even though Appraisees are very much aware of PC as a mandatory requirement, they could never insist upon its proper execution. In a rigidly hierarchical organisation like the IAF, such a stance could be construed either as a defiance of authority or an act of indiscipline. Maintaining stoic silence about all PC related issues is understandable as promotional avenues in service are always extremely limited due to the pyramidal nature of the force structure. It is no wonder the responses provided by Appraisees would have been significantly different if they were asked to reveal their names and true identities during the survey. And not surprisingly, almost all the respondents chose not to mention their names on the questionnaires through an option given to them.

Conversely, it can also be argued that IOs themselves had been Appraisees at one time and had been counselled before and hence should have understood the need for counselling. However, PC was never taken very seriously as most of the present IOs might have passed through their initial years without being counselled by their IOs. That PC is synonymous with admonishment is ingrained in the IOs as they must have experienced such a belief while undergoing PC themselves and conducted by their own IOs. Their present reluctance to take up PC not seriously but as an unpleasant task to somehow complete it as quickly as possible is quite understandable. Any task performed with total lack of conviction and devoid of the seriousness of purpose would hardly yield any positive outcomes and impacts, and PC could hardly be an exception in this regard.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite having been formalized as a procedure, the process of Performance Counselling (PC) has not been fully integrated into the working of IAF as yet. Most of the officers go through it as a formality that must be undertaken as a part of appraisal reporting. Many of them have not understood PC thoroughly and do not consider it necessary unless they perceive a particular officer to be having some serious behavioural problem. The mere fact that an individual has been counselled is perceived negatively. Though PC is a tool for an individual's improvement and development, it has neither been understood nor appreciated in the proper perspective. If at all an IO decides to carry out PC, it is invariably being carried out as a one-way dialogue, wherein the individual's shortcomings are pointed out, and the officer is asked to show improvement and rarely is it undertaken as a process designed to enhance performance making it largely ineffective in the final analysis. It is highly recommended that a concerted effort be made to educate officers on the concept and the benefits of PC and give them training on the correct methodology for conducting PC.

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