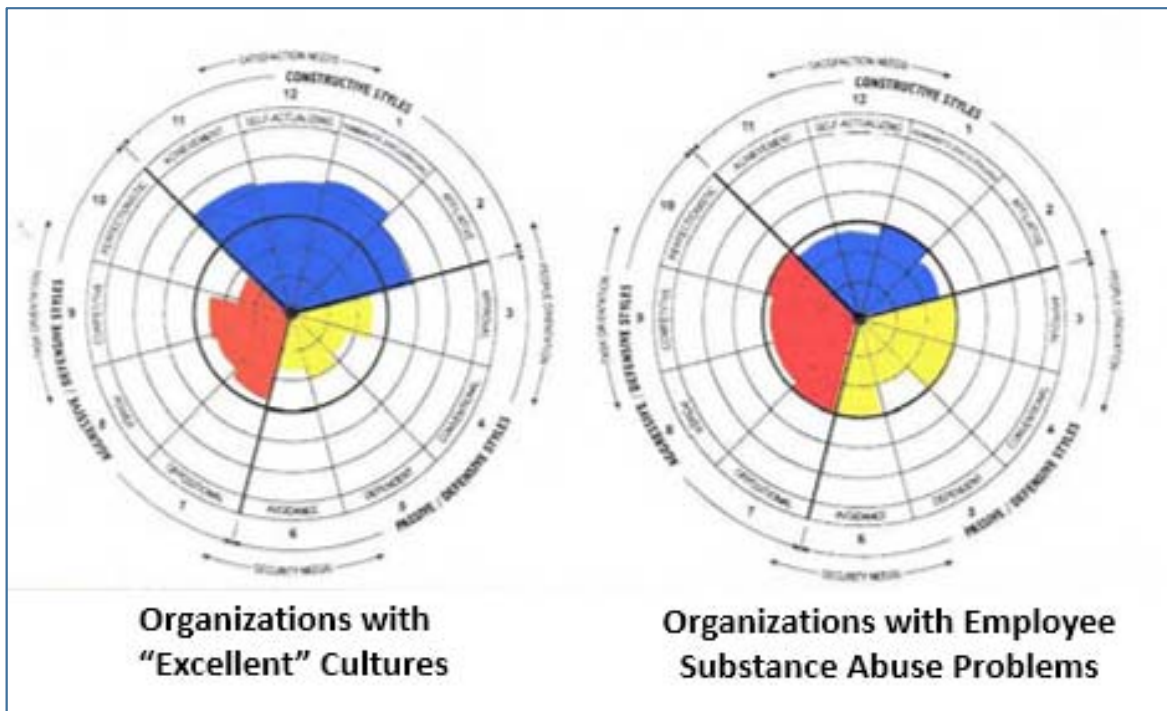


Substance Abuse in Organizations

*Three Decades: Perspective
1971 - 1999*

A New Century: Implications



James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR



**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

Preface

1999 represents the 30th year that I have been involved with the subject of substance abuse in organizations. Throughout the years, what began as a very personal motivation became a professional career goal. Then it became an academic research goal, and now again, a personal and professional commitment. It started simply. While inside a large organization in 1969 and 1970, I was shocked to watch disciplinary action taken against young employees who were assigned boring, repetitive tasks. I struggled with why these young, intelligent employees would waste their minds by getting "stoned" every night, why they would report for work in highly important (although boring) positions unable to function effectively. I struggled equally with the inconsistencies in management practices. And I determined to work helping organizations manage employees in a way that would reduce the possibilities and effects of substance abuse.

For this project, Human Synergistics Incorporated provided significant support by supplying Organizational Culture Inventories as part of the survey. Their support made this project possible.

*The report is dedicated to workers everywhere,
individuals who deserve to work in a drug-free workplace and
who deserve to work drug-free and enjoy the satisfaction of
productive employment and well-managed organization.*

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Introduction

Over the years, the Human Resource profession has faced numerous challenges: economic, social, and organizational. Some of these have become crises – summoning fast and powerful responses that have been successful sometimes – failures other times.

A positive organizational culture will drive a successful substance abuse program – could even be a preventative factor. Strong management competencies, listening skills, giving clear information, and thinking clearly, will make it much easier to deal with diversity or sexual harassment or substance abuse – and will have an impact on prevention.

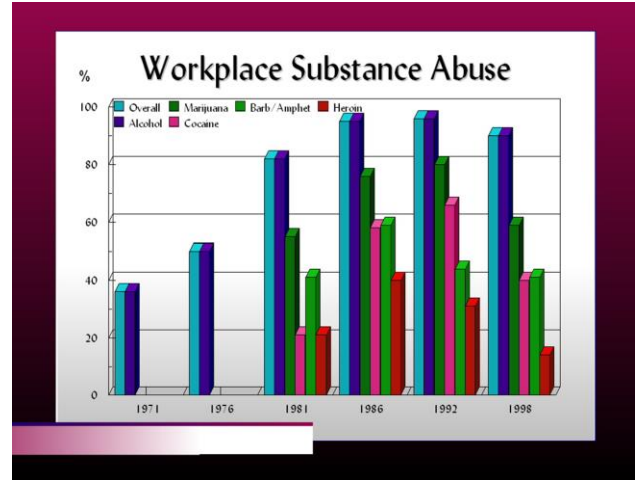
Substance abuse in organizations has become one of many organizational problems that are affecting productivity, costing organizations money - and costing individuals productive careers and lives. It is important to examine real organizational experiences, policies, and practices. Very few organizations have been able to escape the problem. The results described in this study are based on 30 years of research. Surveys done at regular intervals in 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1992 and 1998 have gathered data about organizations' experience with substance abuse.

Major Findings

The last few years have had continued emphasis on positive management techniques and full employment. But with the positive news comes mixed results -- about substance abuse in the workplace. The sixth survey in a thirty-year study of organizations reveals the following:

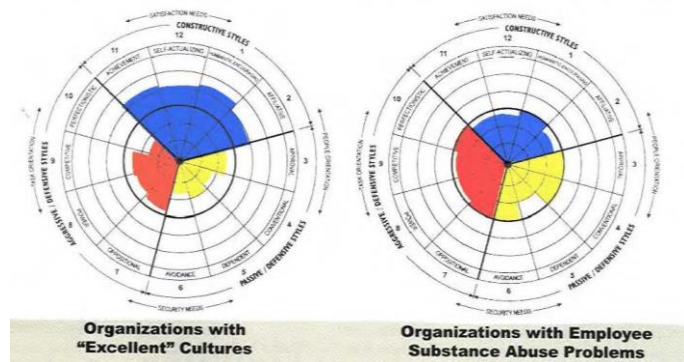
Workplace Substance Abuse Is Down - Maybe!

- 90% of organizations have had direct experience with employee substance abuse on the job. Experiences with alcohol remain steady, while experiences with cocaine, marijuana, heroin and barbiturates/amphetamines are down, some slightly, some dramatically.



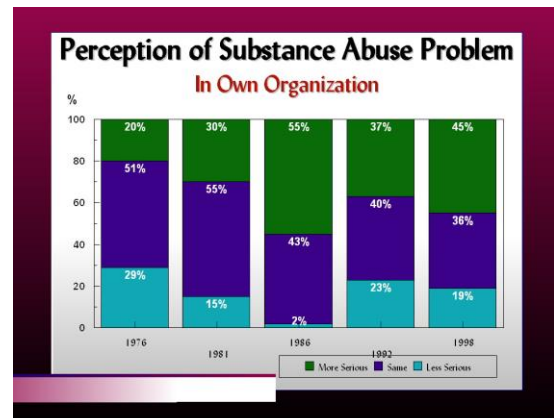
The “Culture” of Organizations that Have Experienced Substance Abuse Is Different from the Culture Measured in “Excellent” Organizations and in Those that Have Stressed “Quality and Service.”

- In addition, the latest results support earlier research that showed organizations who have had less actual experience and those who believe that their experience is "less than 5 years ago" have scores significantly higher on positive management practices.



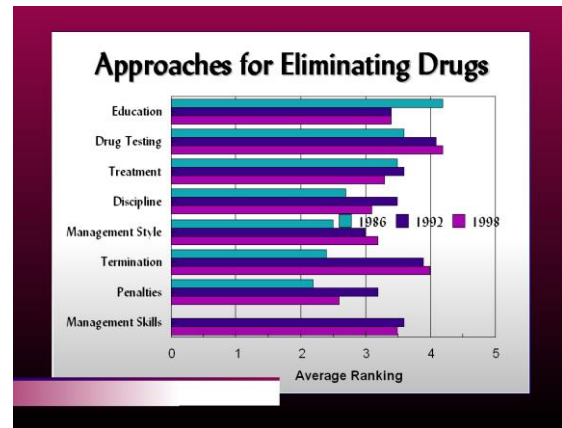
A Majority Feel the Substance Abuse Problem Is the Same or More Serious than Five Years Ago

- 81% of organizations feel that the alcohol and drug abuse problem within their own organizations is the same or more serious than it was five years ago. This is an increase, particularly in the “more serious” response from five years ago.



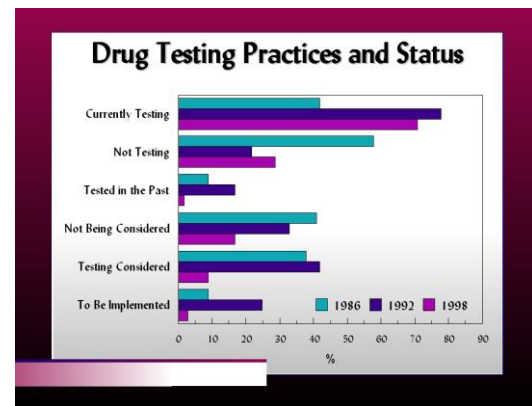
Testing Is the Favored Technique for Eliminating Drugs in the Work Force – Termination Follows Closely

- A significant movement, started ten years ago, toward testing and tougher penalties, particularly termination, continued and got stronger. Education remained in a distant fourth place as a strategy compared to the first place it held consistently until ten years ago.



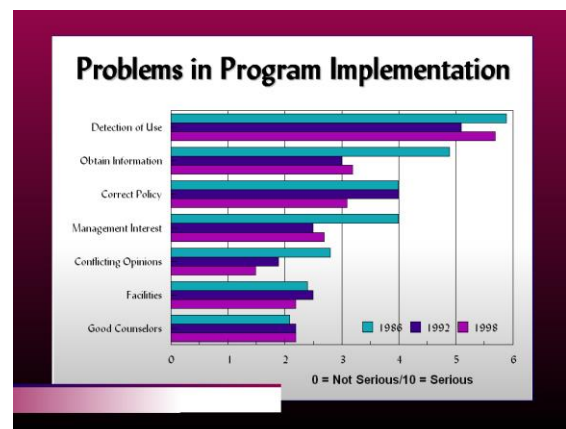
Drug Testing Is Being Used in a Majority of Organizations

- 71% (up from 42% ten years ago - down slightly from five years ago) of the organizations are currently testing for drugs. Interestingly of those who don't test, very few are considering it while over half of those who didn't test five years ago were considering it.



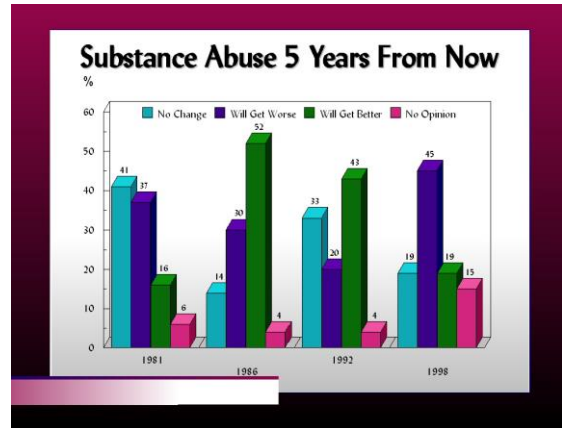
Detection of Drug Use Is the Most Serious Problem for Most Organizations

- Detection of drug use has always been the most cited problem by the organizations in the data base. Determining the correct policy and obtaining accurate information continue to exchange second and third places recently – right now they're almost equal.



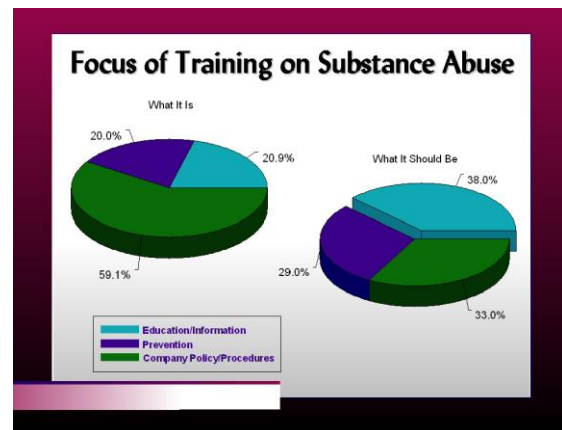
Respondents Feel the Drug Problem Will Get Worse in the Next Five Years

- 45% of the respondents feel the drug and alcohol problem will get worse in the next five years - a dramatic increase from only 20% five years ago. The optimism has disappeared, only 19% of the respondents, feel the problem will get better.



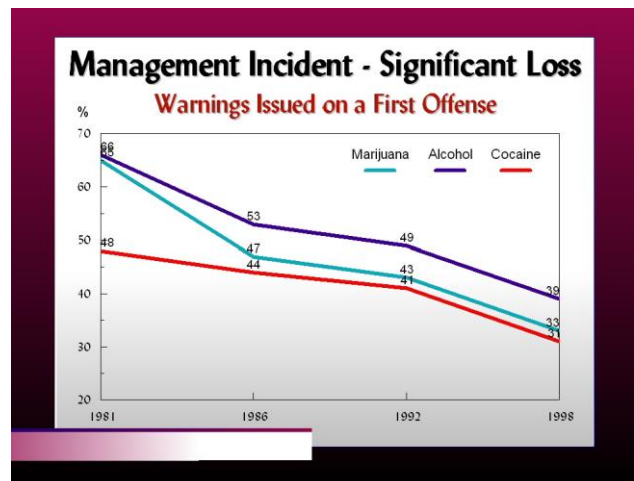
Policy and Procedure Are the Primary Focus of Most Training

- Respondents reported that 55% of organizational training efforts related to substance abuse focus on policy and procedure. But they believe this should be substantially less - with a much greater emphasis placed on education and prevention.



Reactions to Substance Abuse Are Quicker and Tougher

- While responses to specific incidents of substance abuse have changed dramatically over the years, some of the most significant changes in the responses have appeared in the last two surveys. Organizations responded again with quicker early referrals to employee assistance programs - followed by much quicker terminations. And there's a continued rise in terminations occurring on a first offense.



Recommendations

Throughout this report, a number of recommendations are made concerning drug use, policies, training, organizational culture, and management issues. The following are highlights of the major recommendations.

1. Organizations cannot afford to deal with substance abuse problems in a superficial, policy-driven fashion. It is a problem that is not going away, despite changes in experience. It is a problem that cuts across rules, policies, management practices, and organizational culture. Therefore, it is a problem that must be addressed from a strategic viewpoint that is consistent with broader strategic goals of the organization.
2. Based on the two most recent research projects conducted over the last ten years, there is ample evidence of link between substance abuse and management practices, and between substance abuse and organizational culture. Organizations today want to implement sweeping management initiatives, whether it is quality, customer service, teams, or re-engineering. Organizations will have to recognize that culture will have an impact on success. To the extent culture interacts with other factors to create substance abuse problems, it will have to address substance abuse issues from a broader perspective than "identify it, deal with it, and write it up".
3. Organizations must develop creative solutions to the problems of substance abuse and creative strategies for preventing substance abuse in the work force. This means new policies for intervention and treatment, new training programs, new programs for employee productivity and morale, and new programs for job and individual enrichment. An integrated (systems) approach that includes management style, organization culture, and employee assistance efforts must be considered.

(Note: this recommendation was first made as part of this research ten years ago -- it's been modified only slightly since then – I suspect it's going to continue to be made in the future.)

4. Training is not the only element in an organization's effort to confront substance abuse. But its absence seriously hampers efforts for successful implementation of a policy or employee assistance programming. Organizations must increase training efforts. While most organizations recognize the importance of training, the emphasis it actually receives has declined.
5. There must be a more intense examination of the factors that might contribute to substance abuse in the workplace. The evidence on management strategies and organizational culture is too strong to ignore.

The Study Author

James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR is the founder of Beyond the Far Cliffs. In addition to the Ph.D., he holds lifetime accreditation as a Senior Professional in Human Resources.

Dr. Schreier has been researching the problems of alcohol and drug abuse in organizations for 30 years. He has conducted major national surveys of company experiences, problems, and policies in 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1992, and 1998. Dr. Schreier has spoken throughout the United States and in Europe about various aspects of the drug abuse problem in organizations and education. Dr. Schreier has appeared on numerous radio and television talk shows to discuss the drug abuse problem in organizations. He has published extensively on the problem and has participated in national efforts, including the 1986 "Controlling Substance Abuse" report, published by The Conference Board. The results of this on-going research have been published in **Training and Development Journal**, **Personnel**, **Psychology Today**, **EAP Digest**, **John Naisbitt's Trend Letter**, and numerous other professional publications.

In 1990, Dr. Schreier presented at the 5th Annual European Employee Assistance Conference in Ireland. In 1991, he was asked to return to make the opening address at the 6th Annual European Employee Assistance Conference.

Beyond the Far Cliffs is a management consulting organization, dedicated to improving both individual and organizational performance.

HR-Tracks.com regularly conducts research projects into critical human resource and management issues. Current projects include the on-going, thirty-year study of substance abuse in the workplace, research into the ethical issues of recruitment, selection, and job-hunting practices.

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