

Issues in Successful Employee Assistance Programs

Training, Testing, Organization Culture

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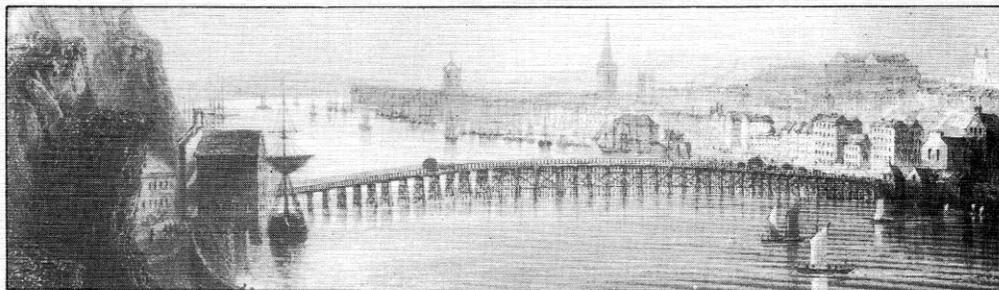
MANAGING POOR PERFORMANCE

• THE E A P RESPONSE •

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Organizational responses to alcoholism and other substance abuse have changed dramatically. The problems have become more serious. And responses have become more sophisticated with the development of Employee Assistance Programs. In the late 1980's the problem has become more complicated. The reasons include the rise of cocaine, new pushes for drug testing, and a new emphasis on performance in the workplace.

For employee assistance programs to be successful in this ever-changing environment, there is a need for a greater understanding of organizational culture, the issues related to drug testing, and training issues for supervisors, managers, and all employees. This paper explores these issues based on over 20 years of research into substance abuse in the workplace in the United States. The paper will pose a variety of questions for considerations on how Employee Assistance Programs will have to change for the future.

Specifically, this presentation will consider how principles of organizational excellence relate to employee assistance programs. It will examine how managers and supervisors must be trained, not just in issues related to substance abuse, but in basic management skills. It will look at how drug testing programs must be coordinated with employee assistance programs. Then drug testing policies of employment can work with, not interfere with a successful EAP.

The problem of substance abuse in the United States has been portrayed by experts as a "crisis" for several years now. The United States government in the last few years has attempted to upgrade its efforts and the country has officially declared a "war on drugs." And former President Reagan called for efforts to create a "drug-free workplace." These efforts have now been backed up with legislation demanding a "drug-free workplace" in regulated industries including transportation and government contractors. Estimates of the cost to United States organizations have ranged from 5 to 15 billion dollars annually. The losses due to traceable industrial accidents, to lost lives in train crashes, to the role of alcohol in the Exxon Oil spill, have been documented at millions of dollars in individual cases. We must note that estimating the costs of substance abuse, including alcoholism, in organizations in the United States is always a very inexact process. It is equally important to note that most estimates are probably conservative. There is more likely to be substance abuse that is not known than there is documentation of actual incidents.

In Europe and throughout the world, concern over substance abuse in the workplace is rising. There is little research to compare to the years of research in the United States. But there are several signs that the issues, problems, and solutions share very similar characteristics. Canada is mounting efforts to educate organizations that are patterned on United States models. But they do not have the power of a federal legislation calling for a "drug-free workplace." Some of the early research coming out of European countries cites problems in employee assistance that are identical to those in the United States. Identification of problems - earlier - and management skills for identification and counseling are major issues both in the United States and Europe. Recent news stories from the Soviet Union and Far East nations also suggest a growing awareness of the substance abuse problem in the workplace.

The problems of substance abuse seem similar in the United States and Europe. If the concerns about employee assistance programs are also similar, then the problems facing organizations in the United States are the same for European countries. Or they will be soon. This paper examines some key issues for successful employee assistance programs. It examines some basic issues that suggest changes in the basic employee assistance model. These changes can make the model more successful in dealing with the substance abuse problem. And it raises key questions for professionals in employee assistance to examine in making their programs successful. While comparing problems and responses in the United States and in European countries, the paper also looks toward potential problems of the 1990's for all countries.

The Problem

In 1987, the following were the major findings of a study conducted into the drug problem in organizations in the United States. The findings are part of a 20-year examination of substance abuse in organizations. These major findings provide a starting point for examining critical issues in employee assistance programming.

On-the-Job Substance Abuse Has Increased.

- 95% of organizations have had direct experience with employee substance abuse on-the-job. Fifteen years ago, only 36% of the responding organizations reported direct experience. Ten years ago, it was 50% and five years ago it was 82%.

A Majority Feel the Problem Is More Serious than Five Years Ago.

- 98% 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. Ten years ago, 71% felt it was the same or more serious. Five years ago, 85% of the organizations felt it was the same or more serious.

The Government's War on Drugs Is Not Seen as Very Successful.

- For the first time in fifteen years, the Federal Government, led by former President Reagan's "war on drugs" has directly targeted the work place. But only 10% of the survey respondents feel that this movement has better than a 50% chance of succeeding.

Education Is the Favored Technique for Eliminating Drugs in the Work Force.

- There is some movement toward tougher penalties, stricter policies, and an increased emphasis on testing. But survey respondents still rank education as the alternative with the most potential for eliminating drugs from the work place.

Drug Testing Is Increasing in Use and Being Considered by Many Organizations.

- 42% of the organizations are currently testing for drugs. Of the remaining, 38% are considering drug testing now and an additional 12% have made plans to begin drug testing within the next year.

Organizations Would Drug Test although Few Think It Will Become Mandatory.

- Just over 20% of the respondents feel that an attempt will be made to require drug testing. Most feel it has little probability of becoming a reality. While some organizations wanted to reserve judgement, most feel they would comply if drug testing were made mandatory.

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. Obtaining accurate information remains the number two problem, followed by getting management interested in the program.

A Significant Number of Organizations Still Do Not Have Written Policies.

- Despite all the available research the substance abuse problem in organizations has received, 22% of the organizations do not have a written policy on alcohol and drugs.

A Majority of Organizations Have Revised their Policies in the Last Five Years.

- 78% of the companies have written policies covering alcohol and other drugs. 55% of the companies revised their policies during 1986 and an additional 25% revised their policies since 1981.

Cocaine Is Viewed as a Different Drug in the Work Place.

- A majority of respondents feel that cocaine is different from other drugs in the work place. 24% of the organizations changed their policies because of cocaine. 44% increased training. And 32% started drug testing programs because of the growing cocaine problem. While on-the-job substance abuse increased in all categories since 1981, the increase in cocaine incidents was the greatest, from 21% in 1981 to 58% in 1986.

Job Performance Is the Number One Motivation for Policy Development.

- Job performance has been the number one motivating factor for policy development in each of the four studies. Absenteeism and the rise in cases among employees have had the next largest impact in the most recent study.

Major Questions Exist about Drug Testing and New Drugs.

- In the last fifteen years, three different "crisis periods" have occurred. The third is occurring right now with major increases in on-the-job drug use, questions about drug testing, and the widespread use of new drugs or drugs that were unpopular five and ten years ago.

Respondents Feel the Drug Problem Will Get Better in the Next Five Years.

- It is encouraging that 52% of the organizations feel the drug and alcohol problem will get better in the next five years.

Since the publication of these findings, several major changes have occurred. While positions on the extent of the substance abuse problem are always debatable, there is little evidence that the problem is any better. There was doubt whether drug testing would become mandatory. It has now been instituted in many areas of the transportation industry, most specifically the trucking industry and the airlines. It is required for many government contractors. Outside of the regulated industries, many organizations have begun drug testing programs on their own initiative -- or the initiative of employees or unions.

It is possible to compare these findings to those of McCarthy (1989), in his survey of "Employee Assistance Programs, A Survey of Practice in Work Organisations in Cork City and Country." There is a high degree of consistency in the identification of issues. In particular, there are similarities in problem identification and concerns about developing appropriate supervisory and management skills.

The Emerging Issues

In the 1990's the world's business community will be facing a wide variety of economic, political, and organizational problems and opportunities. The cost of fighting drugs at both the organizational and community level is likely to continue to escalate. For organizations, the key issues are already defined. They include dealing with the rising use of cocaine, the management issues of testing, excellence, and productivity, and the issues of training and education.

Rising Cocaine Use

Surveys on substance abuse in organizations, newspaper reports, and the public awareness of cocaine supply and cocaine use all support increased concern. This is a very specific and unique drug problem in organizations. In the 20-year span of the research cited earlier, no substance, not alcohol, not heroin, not marijuana, prompted as much concern and action. Even organizations with tough substance abuse policies and practices changed them during the last few years to mention cocaine specifically. While it is part reaction to the widespread media attention, it is also perceived as a much more widespread problem. And the growing incidence of the cocaine problem in the workplace supports these new actions. In the United States right now, there is new concern that LSD is making a return among youths. In the workplace there is always a concern that new substances will become substances of abuse by the workforce. This requires continual monitoring and updating of skills on the part of supervisors, managers, and EAP personnel.

Testing

The testing issue remains controversial. The United States Government has given it a major boost through legislation. But several management experts have spoken out against the practice as inconsistent with sound management practices. The number of U.S. organizations instituting drug screening programs has risen both dramatically and consistently over the last five years.

Drug testing is a complicated issue. There are questions related to its effectiveness, legality, and place in an organization's management strategy. Drug testing is growing in popularity. A 1987 survey finds 42% of the responding organizations are testing (Schreier, 1987). A study of Fortune 500 companies shows that 25% of these organizations are using tests (EAP Digest, November/December 1986). As a part of a strategy to deal with on-the-job accidents or behavioral incidents, it is an appropriate diagnostic tool. As part of a selection strategy, testing is increasing as a response to a growing problem. Mandated testing for organizations covered by government regulations is also contributing to the rise in testing.

European organizations face some of the same questions United States organizations were facing five years ago. Regulatory requirements have changed the position of several people. The continuing rise in the problem has even prompted employee groups to call for testing. But, testing is still a **reaction** to the increased drug use in the last five years. It is a reaction to the increased use of cocaine. **One of the first critical questions that must be answered is whether or not drug testing fits the organization's culture and management style.** If it doesn't, it has the potential do damage the morale of drug free employees as well as attempting to prevent drug using employees from working or being hired. In one very successful organization, which prides itself on its relationships with its employees and its positive management approach, I had the opportunity to discuss the issue of drug testing. The organization has less of a problem than most organizations its size, and **feels no need to begin a drug testing program**, because of its positive treatment of employees.

I've talked with middle and upper level managers about drug testing in the last year. Many of them are personally very strongly against substance abuse in the work force and many are developing stronger opinions against any drug use including alcohol. Yet they feel personally offended by a request to take a drug test as part of a selection process. **Many would not consider working for an organization that required them to do so.** Drug testing is also being heatedly debated in the courts. Even mandatory drug testing programs are being held up while unions, employee groups, civil rights groups, and attorneys debate the legal issues.

Productivity

If we view organizations from the United States position, productivity among the American workforce is not keeping pace with countries around the world. If we look at organizations in Japan, their highly productive advantage seems to be shrinking. The labor and productivity programs in some European countries have begun to receive a lot of attention in the United States. In the 1990's we are going to have to examine how to maintain high levels of productivity in the face of new freedoms and new economic structures. When we examine the wide open, worldwide competition that many have portrayed for the next decade, we come squarely to grips with a productivity issue. Yet the problems of substance abuse have a consistently negative effect on productivity. The number one problem, from the perspective of all organizations, is that job performance is the key issue when confronting substance abuse problems. Most of the secondary problems, like absenteeism, tardiness, accidents, and theft, are all related to concerns over productivity. The problems and solutions related to substance abuse in the workplace are pieces to the puzzle in examining national and international productivity issues.

Participation

Whether the question is asked from the productivity angle, the quality angle, or the people management angle, one consistent response to the needs of the people is the question of worker involvement. From earlier solutions to productivity problems like the quality circle to the now very popular work teams, soliciting and using employee input is a major strategy in improving both performance and job satisfaction.

Excellence

Tom Peters and his colleagues have provided organizations of the United States with a model for achieving excellence. From a "bias for action" to emphasizing selection and training, Peters has taken a clear stand for a strong culture and a focus on the people in the organization. Peter's "A Passion for Excellence" (with Nancy Austin), was focused almost exclusively on the people issues from the original "In Search of Excellence." In his latest book, "Thriving on Chaos," Peters continues his beliefs that organizations achieve excellence, high quality, productivity, and top-notch quality customer service, only through the people they successful recruit, hire, train, and support. Organizations with stringent anti-drug policies and procedures, and strict pre-employment and random drug testing, are instituting practices that run counter to

these ideas. The problem for many organizations, for example an airline, is how to support the philosophies of excellence and yet react specifically to mandated random testing programs. A tougher question, not yet answered by any serious research, is whether or not "excellent" organizations have less serious rates of employee substance abuse. While it is conceptually sound, some experts stand by their estimates that substance abuse affects most organizations at fairly consistent rates.

Making EAP's Work

The role of Employee Assistance Programs will have to change during the 1990's to respond to the substance abuse problem in organizations. EAP's will have to change to keep pace with the changing nature of the substance abuse problem in organizations and the changing forces in organizations. Fortunately, some of these issues are already being addressed with clear recommendations coming forth. Unfortunately, in some cases, experts are disagreeing over strategies. If the disagreement leads to new approaches for effectively working within organizations, the results will be positive. If the disagreements put EAP's at odds with other organizational forces, the effects will hinder the work of even the best EAP. Key issues for EAP's in the 1990's will be in the areas of a proactive stance, training and education, and organizational culture. While they are separate items in this discussion, they are clearly linked in reality.

Proactive Role

Substance abuse in organizations is no longer a human resource problem that can be tucked away with the personnel department, or the employee health program, or the employee assistance program. The issues of productivity, participation, and excellence are being discussed at the highest levels of organizational strategic planning and management. An organization's posture on its employees is the subject of major organizational focus and leadership. The voice of Employee Assistance Programs must be heard in these discussions.

Organizations are daily making decisions about drug testing, management training, changes in organizational culture. In some cases, these changes are being made without the input of employee assistance experts. The new testing program, the new supervisory training program, or the new two-year plan to change the organization's culture, is introduced. And the Employee Assistance Program finds itself lacking input into areas that might significantly affect its philosophies and ways of operating.

Employee Assistance Programs can no longer be a service provided to organizations by the human resources department or an outside vendor. The provider must work with the overall organizational development efforts to clarify issues and participate in the design of selection programs, training programs, and employee education efforts. Outside consultants providing EAP services are going to have to understand the role their EAP's play in the overall organization's strategy. They are going to have to develop their own skills in assessing and developing organizational culture, assisting in the design and delivery of supervisory and management training programs, and develop clear structures for making employee drug testing programs work with the EAP. Simply put, Employee Assistance Programs are going to have be heard from, more now than ever before.

Education/Training

Overall, more than two-thirds of all organizations say they have formal policies regarding substance abuse, but only about one-quarter conduct or sponsor training programs on identifying or dealing with substance abusers in their work forces.

Dale Feuer, "Workplace Issues," Training

The best tool for recognizing drug problems remains the eyeballs of concerned and in-touch supervisors and peers. Use these, and then provide counseling and help as needed...

*Tom Peters, "Drug Testing Kills Productivity,"
On Achieving Excellence*

The topic of "training and substance abuse" has received very little attention. New training materials are necessary to prepare supervisors and managers for dealing effectively with substance abuse problems.

*Jim Schreier, "Substance Abuse in Organizations,
1971 - 1986, Realities, Trends, Reactions"*

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. And there is a corresponding need for new training materials for substance abuse programs.

Organizations are not going to combat the problems of substance abuse effectively unless they take a broad, integrated approach. Organizations that have avoided (or successfully decreased) problems of substance abuse have done so with policy, organizational culture, qualified supervisory and management personnel, and training on both substance abuse and management issues.

Dealing with substance abuse is not solely a policy/testing issue. It involves values, motivation, stress, communication, change, conflict management -- all basic management skills.

These are the conclusions based on the first research project looking specifically at the actions, policies, and responses of organizations concerning training issues and substance abuse.

Key Survey Findings

- **65% of the responding organizations have formal employee assistance programs. Only 26.7% provide training related to employee use of alcohol or other substances.**
- **The majority of training conducted focuses on policy and procedures with the least training focused on confronting/counseling and legal issues.**
- **Training programs on substance abuse are not integrated well with other management training efforts. Nor are examples of substance abuse problems common in regular management training activities. Program information is sometimes shared or there is some coordination.**
- **Survey respondents believe that their training efforts should be increased in the area of prevention. And efforts should be decreased in the area of company policy and procedures.**
- **Attitudes toward an issue as complicated as substance abuse and training are difficult to measure. But survey respondents clearly believe that training can have a greater impact in combatting the problem than policy, rules, or testing. They also believe that the substance abuse issue is closely related to basic management effectiveness.**

Organization Culture

Organization culture, the elusive and very popular topic of an organization's values and driving forces, is another key issue for Employee Assistance Programs. The models for strategic planning, excellence, productivity, and quality all argue about the importance of an organization's culture, its values expressed by how it operates -- and how it treats its employees. One difficult issues for organizations to address is the role this set of values plays in relation to the substance abuse problem. It is probably the most difficult of the issues raised here for organizations to face.

To what extent does an organization's culture, its management practices, its policies and procedures, **contribute** to employee substance abuse? The debate can rage forever on whether particular types of substance abuse are hereditary, or a person's own decision, or caused by reactions to life events. But it is clear, in some cases, that unhealthy working conditions, or high stress jobs, are likely to experience more - and more serious - cases of substance abuse. To ignore this data is to be waiting for the statisticians to prove it with correlations. That may never happen. Simply listening to supervisors, managers, and professionals talk about their jobs will provide more than enough information to arrive at the same conclusion. Talking to employees working in factories, or insurance offices, or in customer service positions will support it. Many employees make decisions that lead to substance abuse because of work related pressures. The issues of organizational culture and values must be examined. Yet it is difficult. There is no topic that upsets top management more that raising what the organization might be doing to contribute to employee decisions to abuse drugs. But the issue must be faced.

In the United States recently, several organizations have re-examined policies on drinking and alcohol at company sponsored events. They have recognized that the three-martini lunch, the executive stocked bar, and other events have created an organizational tolerance for alcohol consumption. But few have openly looked at the issues of management practice and organizational culture to examine it for its impact on substance abuse. These types of examinations will have to take place in the next few years. If not, organizational culture, management training, and the efforts of Employee Assistance Programs will be proceeding down separate tracks. And they will not be working together to make real strides in reducing workplace substance abuse.

Conclusion

The problems of substance in abuse in organizations are going to have to be fought with as many resources as possible. Organizations face difficult tasks, working to deal with the many factors of earlier decisions, outside influences, and their own organizational culture and management practices. What organizations do must coordinate and add to what societies in general do to combat the drug problem. Employee Assistance Programs must take a strong, proactive stance - a leadership role - in these efforts. The leadership role will involve establishing the vision, getting the support of people throughout the organization, and working toward strategies that will have a clear impact on results for the organization.

Note: This presentation has been re-formatted and edited with minor grammatical changes.

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