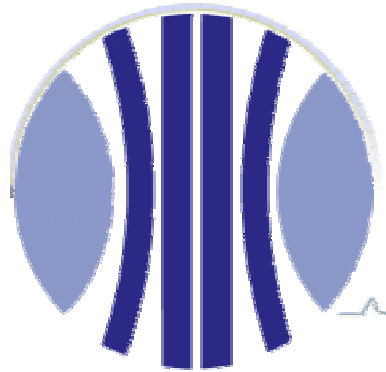


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General Management

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Critical Thinking Paper On Ethics

„DRUG TESTING AT WORKPLACE“

December, 2001

„I waited for the attendant to turn back before pulling down my pants, but she told me she had to watch everything I did. I am a 40-year-old mother of three children: nothing I have ever done in my life equals or deserves the humiliation, degradation and mortification I felt“

From a letter to the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) describing a workplace drug test

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1. Introduction & Overview

Drug abuse at workplace is a serious issue in our society and will become even more serious in the future. In America drug and alcohol abuse is already a grave workplace problem. The facts are that approximately 70% of all illegal drug users are employed. Employees usually don't leave their drug and alcohol abuse problems at the door when they enter the workplace. Companies have to face problems like the increase of accidents, medical claims, absenteeism, selling drugs to co-workers or stealing from employers. Complaining about less productivity and high insurance costs, companies search for possibilities how to solve that kind of disorders. Drug testing at work can be one way to implement a more efficient work environment and control or monitor such difficulties. Urinalysis is an example for drug testing which is sometimes done as a condition of getting or keeping a job. Even in some industries, taking a drug test is as routine as filling out a job application.

The objective of this critical thinking paper is to describe the problematic situation companies have to face by using drug tests at workplace. It will discuss the advantages and disadvantages by using drug tests and investigate if drug testing is important to business management today. Moreover it will focus on how my current employer, the Fraport AG, already handles this kind of challenge. The paper ends with the evaluation of the issues, the conclusion and an outlook.

2. Critical Thinking about drug tests at workplace

If companies decide to implement drug tests at workplace they can choose between different kinds of methods. The most often used ones in this context are urinalysis, blood and hair testing. All those techniques indicate varying attributes and come up with potential problems in practice.

One of the older and most critical discussed drug testing technology is the urinalysis. With this kind of method it is possible to detect drug use for the previous 2-3 days for most drugs. If the drug use took place more than three days ago, the body will have flushed out the substance. For that reason a drug user can simply abstain for a short period of time, drink water, take the urine test and pass.

The act of collecting a urine sample can be very intrusive and unpleasant. Often, another person is there to observe the employee to ensure there is no specimen tampering. Even indirect observation can be degrading.

The lab procedure is a second invasion of privacy. Urinalysis reveals not only the presence of illegal drugs, but also the existence of many other physical and medical conditions, including genetic predisposition to disease or pregnancy. In the past there had been occurrences in the United States where companies used urine samples collected for drug tests to screen female employees for pregnancy without their knowledge or consent.

Furthermore, human error in the lab, or test's failure to distinguish between legal and illegal substances, can make even a small margin of error add up to a huge potential

for false positive results. So it can happen that people could have been fired or denied jobs because of a mistake.

Another possibility to discover drug abuse would be by using hair tests. Psychomedics hair analysis can detect drug use for approximately the previous 90 days and cannot be evaded as in urinalysis since the drug residue remains permanently in the hair. It is just a cosmetically undetectable snip of hair and is easily collected without causing embarrassment. Moreover hair testing is fairer than urinalysis and does not impact the morale of employees who are aware that other tests can be evaded by some of their fellow workers. In addition hair testing provides a corporation with a greater deterrent to drug abuse by its workers. Employees know the hair test is reliable to detect their drug use.

With the fear of blood borne infectious diseases, drug testing with blood is not usually the preferred method companies use. Reasons are because of the invasiveness of the collection, the need for skilled sample takers and the short detection period.

All those kinds of drug testing methods are designed to detect irregularities, which may be punished by the employers, although these abuses occurred after work in private time. Employers who conduct random drug tests on workers who are not suspected of using drugs can police private behavior that has no impact on job performance. Furthermore, drug tests are often not work-related because they do not measure on-the-job impairment. A positive drug test only reveals that a drug was taken at some time in the past. Nor do they distinguish between occasional and habitual use.

Obviously, people who are responsible for others lives such as train engineers, airline pilots, truck drivers should be held fo high standards of job performance. Nevertheless urine testing will not help employers do that because it does not detect impairment. If employers in transportation and other industries are really concerned about the public's safety, they could abandon urine testing and test performance instead. Computer assisted performance tests already exist and, in fact, have been used by NASA for years on astronauts and test pilots. These tests can actually measure hand-eye coordination and response time, do not invade people's privacy, and can improve safety far better than drug tests can.

For this reason drug tests don't always prevent accidents because they don't address the root problems that lead to substance abuse. But good management and counseling can. Companies should provide employee assistance programs helping people facing emotional, health, financial or substance abuse problems that can affect job performance. They have to decide what type of help is needed: staff support, inpatient treatment, AA (Anonym Alcoholics) meetings, e. g. In this context, the goal would be rehabilitation and wellness – not punishment. Unfortunately, instead of adequately funding drug clinics and educational programs, the government has cut these services so that substance abusers sometimes have to wait for month before receiving treatment.

Although my current employer Fraport AG does not have a program of drug abuse testing currently, they do plan to implement such a control instrument. This is based on the fact that the airport industry is under immense pressure to safeguard passengers and public, because workers that behave irresponsible in one way or another may lead to fatal accidents.

At the moment they only use urintesting to detect diabetes. In the following year Fraport AG will try to implement a method to detect illegal drugs at every new applicant who wants to enter the company. If someone was tested positive, they will distinguish in their decision between young people, like apprentices, and adults. It will be provided that adults are responsible for their own life and already know which way to go, compared to young employees who still reside in a finding time of their life. Therefore they will give young people a chance to improve and change a little their view of life regarding drug abuse. Short time before these people finish their apprenticeship the work doctor will investigate if their drug abuse has decreased. If so, they will be offered to take on into a temporary work contract, instead of an unlimited contract.

3. Conclusion

As discussed above there is no question that substance abuse affects the workplace. Employers have the right to expect workers not to be high or drunk when on duty. It reduces the safety, morale, profits and competitiveness. On account of this it is no wonder why a lot of companies in the United States have already implemented drug free workplace programs.

In contrast I have found out, that for german companies the adoption of drug tests is still a grey area. However routine drug tests are more in common in Germany, proponents of drug tests get into trouble with trade unions and work councils, who share the opinion, that it is unfair to force workers who are not even suspected of using drugs to prove their innocence through degrading and uncertain procedure that violates personal privacy.

In any event, employers have better ways to maintain high productivity and security. Instead of only using drug testing methods, to decide if to hire an applicant or not, they should identify and help especially young employees with drug problems. From my point of view competent supervision, professional counseling and voluntary rehabilitation programs may not be as simple as a drug test, but they are a better investment. Although in some cases drug tests even will help to influence young people positively and assist them to find their way through competent advice.

For the future, I guess, it will be a challenge for companies to identify the right strategy to deal successfully with drug testing methods. At the bottom line every company has to decide whether drug testing is an effective tool for identifying drug abuse in the workplace or not.

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