

ALCOHOL AND THE WORKPLACE

The place of alcohol in society and the attitudes that surround it have changed considerably over the course of history. There are few examples in which this change is as apparent as in the relationship between alcohol and the workplace.

Once quite commonplace in the work environment, alcohol has increasingly shifted into the domain of leisure. As the professional and skill levels required in a more complex workplace have grown, it has become apparent that the consumption of alcohol in certain venues may not be appropriate. The effects of alcohol on performance have been extensively documented.¹ Under certain circumstances and for certain professions, the risks associated with drinking and the workplace may have serious consequences and potentially affect a large number of people beyond the drinker.

This issue of ICAP Reports examines three industries in which beverage alcohol plays a special role, either because of its salience, or because of its potential impact. These three industries are the transportation industry, the beverage alcohol industry, and the hospitality industry. The report examines how the issue of alcohol and the workplace has been addressed in each and the approaches that have been used to ensure the safety both of employees and of others who may be affected.

A SHORT HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Throughout most of history, alcohol and the work environment were a ready mix. Baggage porters in 19th century London fortified themselves with stout beer in an effort to muster strength, and a morning glass of *aguardiente* helped the Spanish laborer brace himself for a day's work.² The "Rum Ration" was introduced by the Royal Navy in the 17th century, granting sailors a pint of rum a day, along with a gallon ration of beer, and a double ration of rum before battle. This practice provided fodder for the quip, centuries later, that "rum, sodomy and the lash" maintained the Royal Navy.³

Daily rations of "product" given to workers in distilleries and breweries were not only common, but an expected benefit of the job. In 1886 Germany, in addition to better living and working conditions and shorter work hours, the demands of the brewery workers' union of employers included the allocation of free beer.⁴

In the South African region of the Western Cape, the practice of wine in return for labor, the "dop" or "tot" system, dates back to the early 17th century. Farm and vineyard workers received wine at regular intervals during the day, often in lieu of wages, and particularly from employers who themselves were short of cash or reluctant to make it available to employees.⁵ The "dop" system became a powerful symbol of oppression, creating a layer of marginalized and alcohol-dependent farm laborers. Today, this practice is explicitly prohibited by the Code of Good Practice developed by the Wine Industry Association for Ethical Trade in the Western Cape,⁶ and by an International Labor Organization (ILO) ruling forbidding "the payment of wages in the form of liquor of high alcoholic content."⁷

The advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries saw the workplace move from the home environment into specially designated settings, marking a clear boundary between work and private life.⁸ Increasingly, alcohol became part of the private realm, often symbolizing the transition between work and leisure time. The nature of the workplace itself had changed. The use of machinery and increased hazards brought with them the recognition that adding alcohol to the mix might significantly increase the risk for injury and harm.

The mid-20th century witnessed a further shift in attitudes around alcohol in the workplace. The concept of alcohol dependence as a disease rather than a moral or religious weakness⁹ changed views not only about drinking on the job, but also on possible interventions. Approaches such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), offered to those with problems of alcohol abuse or dependence, were born, soon spreading from the United States into other parts of the world.¹⁰ In addition, the increased legal liability of employers for the wellbeing and safety of their employees in many countries has changed the way alcohol in the workplace is viewed.¹¹

A more recent shift in workplace policies around alcohol is the result of the increasingly widespread concept of corporate social responsibility in a broad range of industries, extending from sound environmental practices to the implementation of programs designed to benefit employees and their families. As regards alcohol and the workplace, the recognition that certain patterns of drinking may lead to harmful outcomes, coupled with a greater willingness to embrace responsibility on the part of employers, has given rise to policies and efforts intended to prevent harm before it has occurred.

Several approaches aimed at preventing harm have been used to address alcohol in the workplace.¹² They include limiting the availability of alcohol, offering education programs about alcohol and alcohol abuse, individual intervention for employees with drinking problems, EAPs and early identification of problem drinkers.

While much of the focus of prevention efforts has been on the problem drinker, the relationship between alcohol and the workplace reaches much further. Alcohol may decrease performance and reaction time, and, in some cases, considerably increase risk for harm to self and others. According to a report by the ILO, “simply because their numbers are [high], moderate and occasional drinkers account for the largest proportion of alcohol-related problems in the workplace.”¹³ In many service industries, potential problems associated with alcohol in the workplace extend beyond employees to the customers they serve on a daily basis, raising a number of important issues.

THREE INDUSTRIES

No industry is exempt from dealing with issues surrounding alcohol and the workplace. Potential problems are as likely to affect construction workers and bus drivers as they are doctors and lawyers.¹⁴ However, it should be acknowledged that certain occupational environments are, by their very nature, potentially more hazardous than others, and accidents are more likely to occur. Problems may not necessarily be the direct result of drinking itself, but may arise from coming to work intoxicated or hung over, and include absenteeism, poor performance, tardiness, or lost productivity.

In most industries in economically developed countries some formal or informal policies exist around alcohol in the workplace. These include explicit rules about the consumption of alcohol, rules about alcohol-related behavior, and a recognition of when enforcement may be appropriate or necessary.

Drinking norms that are established in the workplace set the tone for what is acceptable and what is not.¹⁵ The degree of permissiveness, as well as the degree of approval or disapproval of alcohol consumption in a particular work environment, be it among management or other employees, defines the culture around alcohol and serves as a guide to behavior. Drinking norms within a particular workplace also help shape the perception among employees of the degree to which any regulations in place are likely to be enforced and the repercussions of breaking them.

The Transportation Industry

The global transportation industry, comprised of air, surface and water conveyance of goods and people, is a powerful example of a workplace environment in which close attention needs to be given to the relationship with alcohol. The drinking patterns of employees of this industry and the degree to which they comply with existing policies have an impact not only on these individuals themselves, but also on the lives of many others for whose safety they may be responsible.

Alcohol in the civil aviation industry has been studied with respect to the occurrence of problems among crew, air traffic controllers and others.¹⁶ Occupational factors such as stress, prolonged and frequent absences from home and family, and boredom play a role in the alcohol consumption of those working in the aviation industry. With respect to the impact of alcohol on the performance of job-related duties, the relationship seems to be similar to that between drinking and driving. Alcohol reduces reaction time and impairs performance in a dose-dependent manner. While there is some evidence that at lower BAC levels impairment may, at least in part, be compensated for by a pilot's experience,¹⁷ any such compensation, to the extent that it exists, only applies to familiar or routine situations. The ability to perform in an emergency or an unfamiliar circumstance remains impaired.¹⁸

Policy on alcohol in the workplace within the aviation industry is determined on three levels – international, national, and by individual airlines.¹⁹ At the international level, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) determines the requirements for all 188 member countries.²⁰ Currently, the European Joint Aviation Authority (JAA) sets the standards for regulations in 37 European countries. Within the European Union, this body is being replaced by a new entity, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). In Africa, the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC / CAFAC) cooperates with the Agency for the Safety of Aerial Navigation in Africa and Madagascar (ASECNA) and the Africa Airlines Association (AFRAA).²¹

National policies are generally enshrined in legislation, with oversight under the jurisdiction of specialized bodies, such as the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the United Kingdom, the Civil Aviation Administration in South Africa, or the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) in the United States. Many such national bodies mandate a maximum permissible BAC level for pilots and other crewmembers. For example, the German authority, Luftfahrt-Bundesamt (LBA), has set the limit for pilots at 0.03 BAC.²² In the U.K., this level is set at 0.02 BAC by the CAA, in compliance with the JAA's Operations Regulations.²³ The U.S. FAA sets its limit at 0.04 BAC.²⁴

Some individual airlines have their own sets of rules that may exceed international or national codes in terms of strictness or enforcement. A survey of existing policies among airlines suggests that the majority implement their own standards. Out of 92 international airlines surveyed, 76 (or 82%) had their own policies. Twelve (13%) complied with the Aviation Authority policy for their particular country, and the remaining 4 had no policy at all.²⁵ The survey also found that, in general, policies required that BAC of aircrews on duty either be at “zero” or kept at a minimum.

Research evidence suggests that after a heavy drinking episode, the performance of aircrew may continue to be impaired for several hours after BAC has returned to “zero” (i.e., below 0.005).²⁶ In order to avoid potential problems and to ensure a “zero” BAC, an additional level of safeguards is also implemented, the so-called “bottle to throttle time,” or required interval between the time of consumption and the onset of active duty.²⁷

Some, like the U.K.’s 8-hour waiting period, are mandated at the national level, while others are implemented by the airlines themselves. Most airlines have an 8-hour abstinence period, although some, like Air New Zealand, require 10 hours and others, including Lufthansa and United Airlines, require a waiting period of 12 hours.²⁸

The aviation industry is not alone in the transportation industry in setting and enforcing standards surrounding alcohol and the workplace. Operators of commercial vehicles are also subject to policies regarding permissible levels of blood alcohol. In the U.S., the maximum allowable BAC is 0.04 for truck drivers, which applies both to U.S. and foreign-based carriers operating in that country.²⁹ In addition, drivers whose BAC is found by random testing to be between 0.02 and 0.04 must be removed from sensitive duty for 24 hours. In Austria, the allowable BAC levels for commercial vehicle drivers is set at 0.01. Anything above that is subject to fines, with suspension or revocation of licenses above 0.08.³⁰ Finally, the permissible BAC in Germany is currently set at 0.03.³¹ Across the European Union, a 0.02 BAC is being considered for certain “high risk” groups, such as bus and truck drivers.

High profile maritime accidents involving alcohol impairment in the workplace, like the 1989 grounding of the tanker Exxon Valdez in Prince William Sound in Alaska, have brought attention to the issue as it relates to the shipping industry. The BAC limit for commercial ship personnel is set at 0.04 in the United States and 0.03 in Germany, for example.³² In Australia the limit is comparable. However, recent increases in the number of accidents have pushed the Australian Transport Safety Bureau to recommend the Australian Maritime Safety Authority seek greater ability to conduct breath analysis and subsequent enforcement from the Federal Government.³³

Ideally, in maritime shipping, the goal is that stated by the Oil Companies Marine Forum, which represents the global tanker ship industry, that “the objective should always be to ensure that . . . the blood alcohol content of the seafarer is theoretically zero,” even when laws in individual countries may allow these levels to be higher.³⁴ In Europe, the newly created entity of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) will be responsible for regulating navigation and ensuring this task.³⁵

The Beverage Alcohol Industry

Industries in which alcohol features prominently in the workplace must take their responsibility to ensure the safety of employees seriously and implement policies that draw a line between the presence of alcohol in the work environment and its (responsible or reckless) consumption.

Workers in the beverage alcohol industry, in particular if they are part of the actual production of beer, wine, or distilled spirits, are in constant close contact with beverage alcohol. The relationship between the work environment, drinking patterns and the incidence of problems has been studied in production workers.³⁶ As the section on the hospitality industry discusses there is evidence that those involved in the retail aspect of the beverage alcohol industry, notably publicans and bartenders, have a higher rate of alcohol abuse and problems than the general population.

A comprehensive study carried out in Germany examined the approaches and attitudes regarding the relationship between alcohol and the workplace among producers and retailers of beverage alcohol, mostly brewers.³⁷ Thirty percent of these companies did not allow alcohol on their premises. In others it was offered in employee cafeterias, although non-alcoholic beverages were generally a considerably less expensive option to encourage their selection. The survey, which included 250 large companies from a variety of sectors outside the alcohol industry also showed that companies not involved in the production of alcohol were generally less likely to offer it to their employees.

The strongest influence on the availability of beverage alcohol in the workplace appears to be a culture. Attitudes about alcohol in the workplace, including whether it is served in company cafeterias or acceptable as a beverage at lunch, vary across the globe. It is not uncommon to find beer or wine among the offerings in cafeteria coolers in many countries, though prohibited outside the lunch-hour while “on the job.” Nor is it uncommon for a large corporation operating in several countries to have different, country-specific policies regarding beverage alcohol.

As the examples in Table 1 illustrate, many international producers of beverage alcohol, whether in the beer, wine or spirits sector, have codes around alcohol and the workplace. These codes cover a range of areas – drinking while working, possession of alcohol in the workplace, and, in some cases, a specified maximum allowable BAC. It should be noted that many of those employed in the production of beverage alcohol are responsible for tasting the product, for offering samples to potential buyers, or for visiting licensed premises in which the products of their companies are offered. For some, therefore, alcohol consumption is part of the job. As a result, there is a particular need to ensure their safety and that of those around them.

TABLE 1: CODES AND REGULATIONS ON ALCOHOL IN THE WORKPLACE FROM A SAMPLE OF BEVERAGE ALCOHOL PRODUCERS

Company	Code on alcohol in the workplace	Consumption while working* prohibited	BAC as test of fitness for working	Employee Assistance Programs
Allied Domecq PLC	yes	yes	"Below the legal driving limit"	yes
Bacardi-Martini**	yes	yes	zero-tolerance	yes
Brown-Forman Corp.	yes	yes	none specified	yes
Coors Brewing Company	yes	yes	none specified	yes
Diageo PLC	yes	yes	none specified	yes
Fosters Group Limited	yes	yes	0.05	yes
Heineken N.V.**	yes	yes	none specified	yes
SABMiller PLC**	yes	yes	0.024	yes

*Excludes tasters or others whose work necessarily involves consumption of alcohol, as well as consumption during meal breaks, but prohibited in jobs involving driving or other safety-sensitive positions.

**Policies may vary between different countries.

The Hospitality Industry

The service and hospitality industry covers a broad range of work environments from international chains of hotels and resorts, restaurants and bars, to small inns and bed-and-breakfasts, and family-owned taverns and pubs. Workers in this industry find themselves in an environment in which alcohol is viewed favorably and is abundantly present. It has been reported that among these individuals, the rates of alcohol cirrhosis mortality and other alcohol problems are higher than in many other professions.³⁸

Serving beverage alcohol is part of the daily routine for many in the hospitality industry, but in certain serving establishments, drinking with the customers is actually mandatory for employees. Among these are the *cantineras*, women who are hired to drink with and entertain the male clients of working class Latino bars.³⁹ *Cantineras* drink to make a living, receiving a commission for each drink they are able to sell. As a result, these women have developed a series of strategies to cope with the volume of beverage alcohol they consume and maintain a degree of control – food intake is carefully regulated, drinking is paced, and the women know the limits of their ability to consume alcohol.

While most workers in the hospitality industry are not faced with the extreme conditions that *cantineras* have to deal with, there is nevertheless a need to ensure that consumption of alcohol in the workplace does not interfere with their ability to perform their jobs. Policies around alcohol consumption in serving establishments attempt to ensure this. Such policies have been in place for some time in many countries. As early as the 1920s, the British Columbia Hotels Association in Canada, for example, prohibited its members working in beer parlors from drinking on the job.⁴⁰ More recently, a survey of members of the Norwegian Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union showed that policies around alcohol in the workplace also overwhelmingly discourage drinking on the job.⁴¹ Alcohol consumption in the workplace is confined to special events and celebrations (e.g., birthdays, New Year's Eve, staff parties).

Alcohol in the workplace within the context of the hospitality industry reaches beyond the employees of establishments and to the patrons who frequent them. There has been an effort within that industry to ensure that customers do not engage in excessive or hazardous drinking and to avoid consequences of drinking and driving. In addition, servers need to ensure compliance with existing legislation around the legal drinking age. In the hospitality industry, the legal liability of the establishment for any harm that may befall customers is a strong incentive for the implementation of policies.⁴²

One of the most significant changes that have occurred over recent years in the hospitality industry is the implementation of server training programs. These programs are intended to train hospitality industry workers to recognize drinking patterns among their patrons that may result in harm and to try to limit them. Training may include information about drinking and driving and the legislation around it; measured serving practices using standard drinks sizes and offering alternative beverages; monitoring patrons to ensure crowd control; dealing with intoxicated patrons.⁴³

Server training exists in a number of countries and at various levels of implementation. According to the results of an international survey conducted by ICAP,⁴⁴ some 15% of countries globally include server training as part of their national (or local) policies around alcohol. Most of these are found in mature markets. In addition, a number of initiatives exist in other countries that are implemented either by the hospitality industry itself or by entities and industries related to it.

In New Zealand, for instance, there is a requirement that applicants for certificates and licenses within the hospitality industry be trained in host responsibility.⁴⁵ The initiative was developed by the hospitality industry

itself in an effort to improve safety and standards. Similarly, the Responsible Service of Alcohol program developed by the Irish Health Promotion Unit in conjunction with the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland⁴⁶ is intended to train those working on the supply side to limit the potential for harm. Server training mandated at the regional level exists in states around the U.S.,⁴⁷ as well as provinces in Canada.⁴⁸

Other private sector initiatives include the Training for Intervention Procedures (TIPS)⁴⁹ program in the United States, Smart Serve Ontario, offered through the Hospitality Industry Training Organization of Ontario,⁵⁰ and programs implemented through Social Aspects Organizations (SAOs), supported by the producers of beverage alcohol, in a number of countries.

Evaluation of these programs suggests quite strongly that they are effective in changing the behavior and atmosphere in serving establishments in a way that is conducive to reducing the potential for harm and the incidence of problematic behavior, especially where the implementation of these programs is accompanied by enforcement of existing regulations.⁵¹

SUMMARY

Historical changes in the role of alcohol in society, coupled with changes that have accompanied the increasing complexity of everyday life, have shifted alcohol consumption more and more into the realm of leisure. As a result, it is now generally accepted that there may be instances in which alcohol consumption may be inappropriate. The workplace is one setting in which the consumption of alcohol may not be desirable and safeguards need to be implemented to ensure the wellbeing of employees and others who may be affected.

As the example of three industries – transportation, beverage alcohol and hospitality – shows, an effort has been made to implement specific codes and policies around alcohol and the workplace. These policies are the reflection of a view that harm reduction around alcohol is a necessary approach and that it is important to avoid even the potential for harm. It is important to note, however, that education measures alone are insufficient and should be accompanied by enforcement and compliance with existing rules.

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ICAP
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