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Alcohol at Work: A Poststructuralist Perspective

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Abstract

The key aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of how alcohol use or misuse in the British workplace could be constructed as a 'problem' following Michel Foucault's approach to social phenomena. In this regard, the research focuses mainly on alcohol use and 'misuse' in the workplace and intends to shed light on how alcohol is constructed as a 'problem', the dimensions of the 'problem' and how these are shaped by the numerous discourses. Furthermore, the research aims to achieve this by evaluating the interaction between the organisational discourses and the actual practices regarding alcohol in the workplace while ensuring to give the same importance to the diverse organisational discourses. Nonetheless this research, unlike the traditional studies on alcohol in the workplace, is not intended to provide an absolute answer to the issue of alcohol in the workplace but to contribute towards a better understanding of the actual practices related to the use of alcohol in the workplace, and why, how and when the use of alcohol could be considered as a 'problem'.

This paper will involve the genealogical dimension of Foucault's method of analysis; that is, the Poststructuralist approach the research has adopted will be fully effected in this study through the consideration of the archaeological phase of the project which addressed the different discourses, the dynamics of power and knowledge, diverse interest. The paper will address the research aim presented in order to understand the historical context of alcohol use or its misuse in the workplace based on insights generated from the discourses unearthed.

Keywords: Alcohol; Poststructuralism; Management; Control; Power

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Introduction

The use of drugs and alcohol affects all classes of society in all parts of the world, and those involved do not conform to any stereotype (Ghodse, 2005). Not only can their use lead to significant health problems but anyone under the influence of drugs or alcohol can be a hazard to themselves and others. It is important to point out that it is not only illegal drugs that cause problems at work. The mis-use of legal ones, including prescription drugs and alcohol, can also have harmful consequences on the individual and the wider society. Notwithstanding these arguments, many individuals have conditions that require drugs to help then live a normal live and could not work without them.

As stated in the TUC Health and Safety Report (2019), alcohol is not just a problem for drivers, construction workers, machine operators and emergency staff but also an issue for all groups of workers. At present, the principal legislation in the United Kingdom for managing with the misuse of alcohol is the Health and Safety Work etc. Act 1974 (HSW Act). According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2007), nearly all alcohol misuse and/or dependence liability are covered by it. The enactment of HSW Act was to ensure that employers took the responsibility of the welfare of their employees. However, with the introduction of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the onus has fallen on both employers and employees, with the latter expected to maintain their own well-being.

Understanding how alcohol use or its misuse affects employment, the work organisation and the wider society has been studied by many researchers and institutions but often from a functionalist approach which have typically employed a traditional "managerial and hierarchical" approach that dwells on what experts/managers have to say while overlooking/excluding other organisational stakeholders. That is, the 'problem solving' approaches that have guided most managerial research such as that advocated by the Charter Institute of Personnel and Development have all reflected such perspectives. However this research plans to steer clear of such perspectives of addressing the issue of alcohol in the workplace and rather aims to 'problematise' the very conception of alcohol as a tangible/well-defined 'problem' in the United Kingdom workplace.

Therefore the research will draw on the work of Michel Foucault which focuses on power relations, interactions between power relations and discourses to understand why and how some organisational discourses and practices override others over time and similarly ascertain why and how alcohol use has become 'problematised' in the workplace. This will be addressed in part by conducting semi-structured interviews with certain organisational actors to try and capture contrasting and varied experiences regarding alcohol use in the workplace and their perceptions about the phenomenon. Based on the above premise, this research intends to utilise Foucault's Poststructuralist approach to to explore the discursive shaping of alcohol misuse in the workplace which has made it a legitimate cause of concern in the United Kingdom.

Alcohol and Employment

Alcohol misuse in the workplace has long been perceived as being associated with accidents, inefficiency and absenteeism (Gill, 1994). In response to these claims, a considerable amount of literature has been produced and these relate to drinking habits and alcohol-related problems amongst workers in different settings and to initiatives designed to curb, prevent or

respond to alcohol misuse in employment. According to Newman and Sell (1992), the initial problem related to alcohol misuse in the workplace is finding a realistic definition for the term "misuse". Even the widely accepted medical definition which characterises it as a long-term disease creates much controversy. It is added that the conflict over the diverse views on the definition of alcohol misuse or abuse will not be resolved soon. Banta and Tennant (1989) made two observations on the issue. Firstly, while there is a debate over whether alcoholism is an illness and what causes it, most definitions agree that it is a condition of dependency on alcohol. Secondly, alcohol is, of course, a drug and suggestions have been made that efforts employed in addressing alcohol misuse in the workplace should be similar to that of drug misuse.

Woodhouse (2007) argues that the effects of alcohol in the workplace invariably have harmful implications on the health and well-being of employees and employers in the workplace However, IAS Factsheet (2017) points out that, notwithstanding the major high costs of alcohol-related harms to organisation, some employers continue to nurture drinking cultures at several stages of employment life among staff, from first initiation with colleagues and as a motivation for socialising through to rewarding individual or group achievements. Furthermore, Klotz and Veiga (2018) mentioned that alcohol consumption, in general, is a divisive issue; that is, not everyone views the idea of drinking in the workplace as a benefit rather than a detriment.

Alcohol Consumption and its Effect on Organisational Performance

Alcohol use in the workplace has often been examined in terms of productivity, absenteeism, accident rates and the turnover rates of employees (see Bassols and Castello, 2018; Ghodse, 2017). The effects in the workplace have usually been linked to alcohol use in leisure time, at the workplace itself and in the 'grey' area between work and leisure such as after-work activities, office parties or other work-related occasions. Previous research have aimed to quantify the supposed effects, from an employer's perspective, (Observer and Maxwell, 1959; Godfrey and Parrott, 2005) of alcohol on employees' performance; surprisingly, other studies have argued that there have been no significant relationships identified between effects of substance misuse and productivity or wages (Register and Williams, 1992; Kaestner, 1991; French et al., 1998).

Absenteeism

It is evident that absenteeism may incur a number of costs to organisations, mostly as a result of decreased output due to days individuals are not available, tardiness, early leaving and unscheduled and frequent breaks. Godfrey and Parrott (2005) argue that although chronic use of alcohol may be associated with longer-term absences from work, the United Kingdom in this respect usually have shorter-term absenteeism cases reported in their particular workplaces. It is added that the relationship between recreational, acute or binge episodes and chronic use of alcohol or illicit drugs to shorter workplace absences in the United Kingdom is under- researched. It is therefore difficult to create a link between alcohol use and absenteeism because employees are unlikely to admit absences are related to alcohol-use behaviour. Godfrey and Parrott (2005) therefore admit that the extent of the effect of alcohol use on absenteeism among the United Kingdom workforce is problematic to assess, hence

researchers have often had to resort to estimations as well as assumptions to support their claim.

Even so, a recent study by Ervasti et al. (2018), conducted in the United Kingdom, Finland and France found those who drank alcohol in moderation were less likely than teetotallers to take sickness absence for a range of illnesses. Previous researchers who have aimed to quantify alcohol-induced absenteeism (Frone, 2013; Bacharach et al., 2010) have been challenged by Joeman (1992), who on the basis of data obtained from a General Household Survey, concluded that there were no direct and reliable differences in rates of absences between light, moderate and heavy drinkers. It was identified that a relationship between alcohol intake and absence became apparent only when general health and smoking were taken into consideration. Furthermore, Ervasti et al. (2018) argued that people with some health problems avoid alcohol because it may make their condition worse and even cited socio-economic backgrounds and ill-health as contributory factors to absenteeism when discussing alcohol and work attendance.

On the other hand, there is no universal agreement on the most appropriate method for measuring or monetizing 'presenteeism', particularly with respect to employees coming to work ill and performing below par due to illness), or suboptimal performance at work (Schultz et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2008). It is usually calculated as the costs related to reduced work output, errors on the job or failure to meet organisational targets and standards.

Nonetheless, the role of alcohol consumption in establishing rates of absence is very vague and the number of absences that can be linked to alcohol is uncertain (Henderson et al, 1996). This indicates the difficulty in determining the costs associated with alcohol-related absences, although calculations have been adopted on the basis of employees' gross earnings and other employers' costs to arrive at figures. Henderson et al (1996) argue that the accuracy of such figures and the true cost to the organisation cannot be justified. It is further stressed that in present working environments, absenteeism should not be included as a cost in the same manner as accidents and job performance losses can be. Besides, Martin et al. are of the view that:

> "…substance abusers' absenteeism reflected efforts protect themselves from harm that might occur if they tried to work; obviously this protection can extend to co-workers and to the workplace itself. While seeming absurd, the suggestion that absenteeism can serve positive functions stands in the face of very imperfect systems of detection of employed substance abusers or implementing effective means for their behavioural change" (Martin et al, 1994).

This point of view thus exposes a positive side to absences from work that may be due to alcohol. For instance, in a workforce that has a developed drinking culture, absenteeism could be viewed as beneficial since it would prevent accidents and poor performance that may result from intoxication. Hence, the cost from absenteeism which is regarded as a major cost in most organisations as a consequence of alcohol use is usually estimated on the amount of time lost and the value of the lost production. However, it is clear that such calculations are open to dispute and therefore more accurate information on the nature and causes of absences and employee-employer agreement when assessing such costs would best clarify the association.

Accidents

The presence of alcohol use in the workplace has been characterised and highly publicised by its relationship with accidents. Alcohol consumption has been implicated in many high profile cases, particularly involving transportation and although it has not always been possible that alcohol has been the cause of most of these accidents (Henderson et al, 1996), it has always been cited as a possible factor. Findings from a number of studies (HSE, 2018; Davies and Teasdale, 1994) imply that alcohol consumption is likely to be related to accidents both within and outside the workplace. However, the precise relationship is poorly understood and precludes any accurate assessment of the exact part played by alcohol consumption (Henderson et al, 1996).

Job Performance and Working Relation

Alcohol consumption may affect human performance in a number of ways including gross motor coordination, reaction times and attention (Hernandez et al., 2010; Anderson et al. 2011). Thus it has been concluded in most studies that working under the influence of alcohol may affect efficiency and accurate at work. However, Henderson et al (1996) argue that as it is difficult to calculate the overall effect that alcohol consumption has on performance, the decrease in productivity due to alcohol consumption, can only be guessed. Most of the effects that the consumption of alcohol has on behaviour and emotions are well documented (Critchlow, 1983), most especially its effect of lowering a drinker's inhibitions. Thus lowered inhibitions and the perceived benefits that this provides are totally opposite to the general view and often stated unwanted side-effects of alcohol consumption in the workplace. While such effects may be acceptable within a social setting, especially the United Kingdom, they have a particular relevance to the working environment.

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive and negative consequences of alcohol use within the workplace and some have attributed thefts, aggression, lost promotion and encouraging informal groups (Gustafson, 1983; Pernanen, 1991). In contrast, Davies (1981) notes that alcohol use may sustain informal groups, improve relationships between management and employees, and also help with team-building and work as a reinforcer to a certain extent. Example is given of how alcohol plays an important role of reinforcement, at company gatherings, for reaching production targets or reaching particular organisational goals.

Henderson et al (1996) stresses the point that it is very difficult to quantify the costs, as done in numerous studies, be it positive or negative of alcohol consumption has on job performance or working relations. This is because such beneficial effects are rarely taken into account when cost of alcohol consumption is being calculated while consumption of alcohol in small quantities may not highlight many of the negative impediments cited in several studies.

The Working Environment and Alcohol Use

Most organisations, and employers for that matter, often see the development of substance misuse policies and measures as a proactive and responsible stance, without and understanding of the reason for the problems, it critically misses the vital issue of workplace culture. Henderson et al (1996) dwell on the need to identify the relationship between general levels of drinking and particular working environments and how consumption may relate to the type of work conducted and the role played by 'normal and accepted' working practices in enabling and maintaining drinking in the workplace.

According to Allsop and Pidd (2001), workplace culture is of central importance to in framing workplace expectations and social environment and the use of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco and illicit drugs. For example:

> "In a variety of cultures, formal and informal pressures encourage weekly after work team building and relaxation based on alcohol consumption. Sanctioned drugs such as caffeine and tobacco have been embraced in ritualised breaks in worktime". (Allsop and Pidd, 2001, pp.5).

Along with a study of workforce alcohol consumption by Midford (2001), it was identified that alcohol consumption level among both white- and blue- collar jobs was on par. In addition, Rigby (2005) notes that, in relation to the white-collar environment, drug and alcohol addiction in the financial services and the pressures that lead to addiction have been celebrated as part of popular culture since the coke snorting, heavy-drinking yuppie made his debut in the 1980s. One of the most important and well-known accounts of this behaviour in this environment is perhaps the story of Jordan Belfort (2008), the so-called 'Wolf of Wall Street' (Harel, 2015).

Callus and Lansbury (2002) suggest that the changes in the nature of work over the past couple of decades has seen increased pressures of work intensification and job insecurity permeate all types and levels of work. Ames and Grube (1999) also add that issues such as lack of control, alienation and stress linked with the individuals perceptions of powerlessness are important factors in substance misuse in all kinds of workplaces.

The Nature of Multinational Firms in Britain

According to Watson (2003), work organisations are important to the way in which modern industrialised civilisations are ordered. Thus at the heart of the history of contemporary societies have emerged organisational activities which are often undertaken inside bureaucratised corporations and formally structured ones employing individual in accordance with organisational managers ' instructions (Watson, 2003). Strati (2000) in explaining the relevance of organisations to modern societies refers to them as the centre of gravity of contemporary societies.

Nonetheless, members of society have always had a 'love-hate' relationship with these MNCs and often criticise such organisations for being bureaucratic, inefficient and intrusive in its member's private lives (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). On the other hand it is argued that the 'downsides' of their activities are highlighted over the 'upsides' like their contribution to society as a provider of employment, public services and private services. In addition to this role these organisations provide the society, they also are involved in the system of government and the birth, education, leisure and welfare of people throughout their lives (Watson, 2003).

It is therefore important to acknowledge the role that contemporary organisations play in the lives of individuals in terms of structuring and moulding it, within and outside the workplace. As Morgan (2002) suggests, complex political, economic and social organisations of a web of individual and social relationships offers its members an opportunity to partake in the wider society at local, national and even global levels. Valero-Silva (2007) makes a reference to the

central role and contribution that institutions like the prison, clinic and school have made to human existence. However, they also make constant demands on individuals for the latter to adjust to and comply with their internal procedures in the names, for instance, of efficiency and improved service (ibid).

METHODOLOGY

As the research questions stated in the introduction indicated, this study is mainly concerned with the way in which the 'organisation' and for that matter, Management, has become accepted and recognised as something that all forms of life must appeal to; the way that all domains are now potentially open to Management; the way that being has become subject to Management (Cummings and Worley, 2005). This position goes basically unchallenged as Management's prominence in most organisational debates now seems 'taken-for-granted' or normal.

Numerous researchers that have been influenced by Foucault's ideas usually present the discourses in their fields of study and analyse them according to the power relations that they have unearthed and consequently shedding more light (Hajer, 1995; Richardson, 2000). Nonetheless, the method of how to conduct a discourse analysis motivated by Foucault's ideas has received limited systematic attention (Howarth, 2005; Holguin, 2007). Hoggart et al. (2002) point out that with reference to critical discourse analysis, as well as ideas inspired by Foucault, discourse analysis is "something like bike riding…which is not easy to render or describe in an explicit manner" (p.165), and the same observation applies to other modes of discourse analysis.

Yet, if researchers are to incorporate discourse analysis in their studies, it is important to gain some appreciation of how to do it (Hewitt, 2009). However, to prescribe a methodology would be 'un-Foucauldian', since "to do so would afford a particular position the status of truth in a perspective where truth is always conditional" (Gilbert et al., 2003, p.792).

Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three office-based organisations in the Midlands. These firms were selected through purposive sampling. The sampling strategy was adopted because it enabled the selection of information-rich cases. Because the aim of the study was to 'problematise' the very conception of alcohol as a tangible/well-defined 'problem' in the United Kingdom workplace, it was important to gather discourses among employees, which may be overlooked in most mainstream/managerialist workplace-based studies. Hence justifying the adopted approach. Furthermore, the selected firms offered a wide range of employees that would exhibit broad range of opinions and social backgrounds thus and possibly highlighting extreme cases to illuminate the research question at hand.

Qualitative Analysis: Michel Foucault's philosophical stance

Foucault was interested in understanding the origin and definition of problematic situations in Western societies by focusing on the process of normalisation of certain aspects of human experience (Holguin, 2007). Foucault viewed the assessment of history as a way towards the understanding the process of normalisation, by focusing on the transformation of discourses, identities and power relations. Moreover, throughout his work, Foucault analysed different discursive formations regarding the 'problem' of human beings. Foucault's aim was to create a history of different modes in which people become subjects in our culture (Foucault, 1983).

For the purpose of this study and following Foucault's poststructuralist ideas, the focus will be on the importance of institutions in the study and understanding of wider social processes. In the course of conducting his critical analysis, Foucault began with the development of particular institutions such as the clinic and the prison. Although he had interest in certain historical events, he did not have interest in particular personalities; his primary focus was in identifying certain discourse that take a particular institution as their main subject, the social relations to which these refer, and the identities offered to/imposed upon individual (Valero-Silva, 2007). Based on Foucault's work, this article will focus in the different discourses that are involved in the discussions of alcohol use in the workplace and its relations to a wider process of normalisation of 'alcohol use' and the definition of the 'alcoholic employee'.

For the Archaeological analysis, the semi-structured interviews give some indication of how a Foucauldian approach has influenced the research methodologies used. The significance for potential discourse analysts is that Foucault's ideas are sufficient to provide a way of thinking when conducting research using traditional methods, such as desk research, interviews, action and research, which produces new insights (Hewitt, 2009).

The second stage of this research will be the genealogical analysis which will aim at producing an account of the interplay between the social artifacts identified in the archaeological analysis. Consideration will be given to the dynamics of power relations, interactions between power relations and discourses (expert and lay knowledge) and finally the interaction of power relations and discourses (Foucault 1982) in the production and modification of certain identities.

Consequently, in line basis for the adoption of the above approaches, Foucault defined his own early work as instances of 'archaeology' or the description which resulted from analysing the strategies used, and the principles governing the strategies, within his fields of interest (Hewitt, 2009). He developed 'genealogy' in his latter works to analyse the power relations within a specific struggle, paying "attention to the processual aspects of the web of discourse…its on-going character" (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p.31).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Management and Work-culture

The issue of management and how employees perceived their role in the workplace, with respect to how they approach the subject of alcohol, was raised to explore and gain an understanding of how the interviewees perceive managements' when it comes to the issue of alcohol use in the workplace. They were therefore asked to recount the last time they saw or witnessed any colleague disciplined for any alcohol-related issue in their workplace. Interviewees were asked if they had ever witnessed the response of the management in a workplace alcohol-related incident and most responded no; but even so, the only respondent who replied affirmatively stated:

> "*And I have, in a job that I did in the past, had to send somebody home who had had alcohol*"

Another interviewee in a senior role explained that they themselves had on an occasion had to dismiss someone from their job because the person had been consuming alcohol on work premises. Yet, the interviewee explained that this had come about after several warnings and disciplinary actions had failed. Delving deeper on this topic, the respondent admitted that this individual was not dismissed primarily on the basis of drinking but as a result of other activities that they as senior management perceived as resulting from the individual's drinking habits.

Consequently, the interviewees were asked how often they had come into contact with any guidelines or policies relating to alcohol use in their various workplaces. All of them stated that although they may have come across such a policy, it would have been during their induction into the companies or at the time of signing their contracts. A couple of the interviewees who were in senior roles in their companies, and had been on some occasions responsible for recruitment of new employees, stated that they had not come across these policies but were aware of the fact that their companies had it. However these interviewees stated that there was definitely the presence of an alcohol misuse guide in their respective workplaces.

> "*No, not on a notice board or anything but they do get a copy of their contract and it is written in their contract. But not to the point that I have to point it out that this is this*"

Most of the interviewees further stated that they had not seen such guidelines or policies displayed anywhere in the company, be it notice boards or intranet portals but admitted that they were aware of a workplace alcohol policy. One interviewee acknowledged:

> "*It has never been mentioned but I would say that management don't tolerate drinking, so if they would spot the problem then I would say they would try and resolve it: verbal warning or a written warning. It follows a procedure*"

Thus, in order to understand their opinions towards management's reaction to incidents involving alcohol and identify whether their stance, the interviewees were asked how they would react if a colleague was disciplined due to an alcohol-related incident. Majority of them stated that they would be sympathetic with the colleague unless the incident had been 'extreme' like causing harm to another party. An interviewee however explained that as a manager in a previous office-based role, the interviewee had had to send an employee home for the day due to alcohol consumption. The interviewee clarified that the employee was not 'punished' further after it came to light that the drinking had been a result of family problems and the incident was classified as an 'exceptional' circumstance.

> "*Yes, it was some family problems with this person and they had gone to have a little too much vodka and lager as well because you can't really smell the vodka, it was the lager I could smell and it was exceptional circumstances and it wasn't like this person did this on a regular basis. I had worked with the person and they were on half day anyway so we just let him go and came back to work fine after that*"

However the other interviewees stated that regardless of the reason, if incidents of such nature were repeated often, it would lead to disciplinary action. Similarly, another interviewee said that they had witnessed a colleague being dismissed due to drinking on-the-job and stated that although most of the other colleagues were sympathetic and felt sorry for

the individual, they were aware that this individual had been advised on numerous instances about the 'seriousness' of their act and the consequences of persistent rule-breaking:

> "*It did happen in the previous one but even with that one, I think the management knew he was drinking all along but they tolerated it because he was good at his job, but in the end it was getting too serious and hence they fired him. They gave him few warnings but whether or not he was a good employee, they just could not tolerate it anymore*"

Leading from this and in trying to understand management's acceptance of alcohol and the extent to which alcohol would be tolerated in the various office-based work environments, the interviewees were asked whether alcohol was ever served during office functions and whether management played any part in the availability of alcohol. Most of the interviewees said that this was indeed the case although there was an exception to the case as one interviewee stated that they have a strictly no-alcohol policy in their workplace and therefore this meant that there was a no-alcohol policy in effect in any office-related activity, even in out-of-work premises.

In contrast, the rest of the interviewees stated that alcohol was served during office parties, employee leaving-dos and celebrations but always off-work premises. A few of them said that the only occasions that they had witnessed alcohol being served on their work premises were the 'occasional celebratory champagne'. One such interviewee said:

> "*In my present job, no, but my previous job, yes. It was a special occasion. Someone got married and champagne was brought out for a toast*"

The next question was posed to identify whether management felt some sort of pressure from employees to serve or provide alcohol during office-related functions. However, this question needed clarification as most of the interviewees, including ones in management roles, asked for further explanation and therefore an example was given to clarify it. Hence the question of what the interviewees' reaction would be if alcohol was banned from any work-related activity was added and all of the interviewees, including those in senior roles, stated that it would be unacceptable and even unreasonable especially in a British workplace:

> "*In this country I think it would have a detrimental effect. I would be considered as a big huge conservative individual trying to impose my way on everybody. But the big thing is, most individuals know that if they are going to be at some sort of office function they are not going to get crazy and all drunk. For example, Christmas time there is going to be an office party with all your colleagues there. Now in this country every single staff party I have been to, somebody has gotten so drunk or belligerent that they puke. Now that's something that you wouldn't see back in the States*"

The above point was supported by some of the interviewees who also highlighted the fact that alcohol was a 'part' of the culture in the United Kingdom and it would be unfair for anyone in management, be they a teetotaller or otherwise, to impose their views on the entire workplace. Such views highlight the debate on possible permeation of the British culture into the British workplace and the need to include the workplace culture and society when discussing the 'problem' of alcohol in the workplace.

Alcohol and Productivity

Finally the question of organisational efficiency was presented to the interviewees to identify whether they believe that the use of alcohol in the workplace can be a cause of low productivity, absenteeism and high staff turnover. Thus the interviewees were asked to share their perceptions on how much they felt alcohol use did or could impede the levels of productivity in their particular workplaces. Although most of them stated that they felt drinking could affect productivity in any workplace, majority stated that this would be the case in more blue-collared jobs that the white-collared ones that they worked in:

> "*I think that people in British society drink a lot, they are drinking people, and they are drinking than most nationalities because they drink everyday. I personally don't drink because it is not in my personal nature. But I think typical British factory workers do drink and it causes lots of trouble*"

One interviewee in a senior role stated that in terms of absenteeism and general performance, alcohol was highly related to productivity. The interviewee explained that in the monthly performance appraisals that were conducted in their workplace, it was evident that absenteeism and poor work performance often occurred on weekends or at the start of the working week. In the interviewee's opinion, even though there was not much evidence to attribute this trend to alcohol, it was important to acknowledge that it could be partly due to it as some employees had admitted to calling in sick due to alcohol use the night before:

> "*But could you prove that those were related to alcohol? Not really, but pretty much yes. I mean it was no definite proof like they came in with bottles or came in drunk but to consistently be sick this time of the month and especially these days you could tell. And also people would say they saw them out in clubs the night before and they don't come into work the next day, you don't have to be a detective to figure out what the problem is*"

On the issues of the British society's attitude to alcohol and whether interviewees felt that alcohol was a problem in the British workplace, all of them answered in the affirmative. Some said that because alcohol forms part of British culture in general, it was not regarded as much of a problem in the workplace. Particularly in the case of an office-based working environment, most interviewees felt alcohol use was not as much of a problem as it would be in other industries like the manufacturing or entertainment sectors.

Moreover some interviewees stated that if alcohol was consumed in moderation, its effects on the workplace would not be as bad or detrimental to productivity as it currently portrayed in the media. As a matter of fact, most of the interviewees mentioned the possible benefits alcohol could have on the individuals in the workplace in terms of team-bonding and socialising, although all of them stated clearly such effects were only possible in out-of-office work functions:

> "*Sometimes alcohol does make people loosen up and act friendlier and so at the party after work then it would help bonding and employees can work closer*"

Such points raised by the interviewees flagged up the potential or perceived positive effects that alcohol may contribute to the workplace.

GENEALOGY

The Problem: Alcohol and the nature of work

As has been discussed throughout this study and at various stages of the analysis, alcohol consumption in the workplace is not a recent development in the United Kingdom. Alcohol as a substance was debated as an issue originally in manual-labour jobs where there emerged a growing concern about workers' attitudes to their work commitments, especially after they had ingested alcohol. However, in the same respect, alcohol had been seen as offering the opposite effects on the workers in that they were invigorated, alert and rather exuberant having consumed alcohol in their working day. Nonetheless, such occurrences could be referred to as part of the genesis of the debate on work performance and organisational aims and the impact that alcohol had in the working environment.

The general view of alcohol in British society has also been shaped by diverse discourses and various 'experts' and with contrasting viewpoints. Such views have been shaped by, for example, medical experts who have at some point classified 'overconsumption' of alcohol as a disease or by religious and moral experts who have viewed the substance as a 'poison' to the human soul. Along with such views have also come control measures relating to the use of alcohol by means of governmental legislation on the level of alcohol that an individual operating in a particular physical role like driving is permitted to have. Such legal requirements pertaining to the use of alcohol have found its way into organisations like factories where employees deal with heavy machinery.

With the changing nature of the workplace particularly in the United Kingdom and the rise of knowledge intensive firms, there has also been a similar shift in how individuals in the workplace define their working time, timelines, and in some cases the role they believe their superiors should have in their working and private lives. While there are still unclear areas in terms of alcohol use in blue-collar industries, the debate becomes fuzzier when it is moved into the white-collar industries. The discourses relating to alcohol in the workplace have at times muffled the barriers and disparities between the factory and the office, and some 'experts' have ignored the conditions of work in these different industries and have often generalised the findings from the usually investigated blue-collar workplace, in terms of alcohol, to the white-collar ones. As Foucault explains of blue-collared jobs; "in the large factory, everything is regulated by the clock…the workers are treated strictly and harshly" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 174-175).

Production of Power and the Manageable Subject

Based on the previous discussion, the complexities and ambiguities that are inherent in the debate, particularly concerning the organisational regulations relating to alcohol use and the actual practices in the workplace, become apparent. Furthermore, following the interviews, it became apparent that the organisations being studied have utilised alcohol policies and regulations as part of their disciplinary technologies through which they assert authority over the relation between knowledge, the work and the worker. For instance, by setting strict guidelines on how alcohol should be consumed in the workplace and by legitimating and justifying these measures with economic or medical reasons, the employees at times convince themselves that management is implementing such measures for benefit of the workforce and the organisation as a whole.

From the interviews, it was clear at clear at times that some of the employees believed or accepted management's decision to enforce strict alcohol policy in the workplace based on the reasons that were stated by the management. Hence these workers become governable due to their agreement of knowledge that is offered by management. In the case of the office-based work environment and Knowledge-intensive firms the reason that management gave for implementing strict alcohol guidelines range from absenteeism to poor job performance.

Consequently some of the employees that 'accepted' these reasons, recounted 'stories' of when they felt other colleagues might have been absent allegedly due to alcohol intake with most basing these precisely on information present in the company's alcohol guidelines. In other words, although they admitted to not being completely certain whether alcohol consumption had been the reason for these cases of absenteeism; they stated that the signs and clues had pointed to alcohol misuse. In such situations therefore, they agree to see and measure themselves according to management's assumptions, technologies and metrics. This provides management resources to implement a range of tactics and techniques to inculcate workers such that the conduct of workers is conducted to continually reinforce and translate management discourses and strategies (Winiecki and Wigman, 2007).

Thus when employees have accepted the truth claims made by the organisation about alcohol, and the precise collections of knowledge making them possible, they act in a way as to maintain these 'truths' even in instances where these alcohol guidelines may not explicitly permeate. Therefore the employees partake in the production of power that affects them and through their practices and exploits substantiate and reinforce it; its perceived authority and its rationality.

Resistance to Alcohol Regulations

One of the main issues that kept surfacing during the discussions with both management and employees was confusing and contrasting nature of messages that the former seemed to be sending the latter. As discussed in the previous sections, while the management of all the organisations studied acknowledged the strict nature of their workplace policy on alcohol, most of them justified this not only with organisational wellbeing as the focus, but, more importantly employee wellbeing. However it was easy to sense some level of resentment among some employees whom stated that the topic of alcohol use tended to be a 'them-and-us' issue.

From a Foucauldian perspective, resistance merely serves to demonstrate the necessity of that discipline that provokes it as it becomes a target against which discipline may justify its necessity by virtue of its lack of omnipotence (Clegg 1994). Occupations such as medicine and psychology have created obedient, docile bodies through application of knowledge, not just that specific to members of their profession, but also knowledge gathered about subjects (Weiss, 2005). Consequently Foucault argued that such controls have spread to the workplace as a result of the growth in the apparatus of production, which was becoming more and more extended and complex, thus necessitating a move from just the owner's control to various managers, supervisors and to some extent fellow colleagues (Foucault, 1977).

CONCLUSION

In today's contemporary organisation, one of the supporting views for enforcing an alcohol policy has been the wellbeing of the individual worker. However, the actual practices have at

often times gone against these rules and policies because the management have also recognised the other sets of discourses that have had a positive outlook on alcohol consumption. Nonetheless it is clear from the research that the dominant view held by management and expressed through the 'official' documents and media is one that recognises alcohol's harm to the individual worker.

It could therefore be argued that management in the mix of these different and often contrasting discourses may be under pressure to strike a decent balance between these views and therefore have to use their own discretion to assess when alcohol use in the workplace is acceptable or when an individual could be deemed as flouting the alcohol policy.

However, from the analysis in this research, it seems that this is not the case and that it is rather the individual worker who is at the receiving end of this complexity of discourses; that is, he or she is forced to regulate his or her actions, views and opinions about alcohol to fall in line with what the prevailing discourse(s) in the organisation is. In other words the role of the individual worker in ascertaining whether the 'official' discourses or the actual practices are that which will appease management is further complicated by the fact that he or she may have a particular worldview that may need to be rejected in order to satisfy those in power.

Foucault (1973) sums this up by saying that a subject's ability to speak is ontologically bounded by the discourses through which his or her subjectivity is constructed; a process that is always determined by the subject's position in a specific institutional landscape of a particular social formation.

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