

Organizational Readiness in Corrections

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IMPROVING OFFENDER REENTRY has become a primary concern of many correctional agencies due to the growing size and cost of incarcerating individuals. Over the last 3 decades, the criminal justice system has grown to control one in thirty-one adults (Pew Foundation, 2009). This amounts to approximately 7.3 million adults either incarcerated or on some type of community supervision (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). The increase has been reflected in the increasing corrections budget, estimated at 68 billion dollars, outgrowing the spending on any other government service (Pew Foundation, 2009). Furthermore, Langan and Levin (2002) examined 1994 recidivism data from 15 states and found that approximately 68 percent of individuals were re-arrested within three years. The same data revealed that a little over half of those released were re-incarcerated for either a new sentence or a technical violation within the following 3 years. As a means of addressing these rising numbers, many correctional agencies are pursuing the use of evidence-based practices in reentry to increase public safety and the opportunities for individuals to succeed once released. However, implementation of these practices is often met with resistance and challenge. This article examines the impact of a continuous on-site training model to advance the implementation of evidence-based practices in correctional settings.

Organizational Readiness for Change

Implementing change in any organization is a difficult process. However, the readiness of an organization to change can greatly impact the ability for an innovation to take hold. This readiness of an organization is “reflected in organizational members’ beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization’s capacity to successfully make those changes” (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 681). A few of the organizational factors associated with readiness for change are organizational climate, commitment to the organization, and resource availability. Measuring the readiness of an organization is highly important to understanding why an innovation may or may not be successfully implemented. These measurements also enable administrators or researchers who are implementing change to adapt their change strategies to address challenges such as resistance from staff. Implementing new practices often fails due to insufficient understanding of the

organization's readiness for change and preparing the organization's staff members for the change process (Schein, 2004; Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005).

Research demonstrates how improved measures of organizational readiness influence outcomes of clients as well as innovation adoption. Lehman, Greener, & Simpson (2002) found that treatment units with better communication, autonomy, and change orientation had clients with greater treatment satisfaction. Treatment units with better mission clarity, autonomy, cohesion, communication, and change orientation had clients who reported better rapport with their counselors. In a study examining Australian state government adoption of an automated computing system, Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths (2005) found readiness for change mediated the relationship between culture of an organization and the actual usage of the system post-training.

Studies using the National Criminal Justice Treatment Practices Survey (NCJTPS) demonstrate several organizational factors associated with evidence-based practice implementation. Friedmann, Taxman, & Henderson (2007) found that correctional programs that had a performance-oriented and open learning environment, less punitive beliefs, and an administrator with a human services background were more likely to use evidence-based practices (EBPs). Using the survey of wardens/directors of adult prisons and jails, Oser, Staton-Tindall, & Leukfeld (2007) examined the factors influencing adoption of HIV testing. Organizations without centralized power and more professional development and training opportunities, greater resources, more full-time staff, and those not as interconnected with judiciaries were more likely to adopt HIV testing. Grella and colleagues (2007) used surveys of program-level administrators of correctional and community agencies to determine staff perceptions of community treatment. These surveys revealed that staff members perceived community treatment as important and the ability to influence treatment improvement was associated with an organizational focus on cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Resistance to Change in Corrections

Adopting evidence-based practices that involve changing the environment of corrections presents a case where measuring and learning from measurements of organizational readiness is especially important. The environment of corrections is primarily a command and control, punishment-oriented culture (Duffee, 1974; Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Miller, 2000). In this environment, rehabilitation is often a periphery goal, if it is supported at all. Therefore, when implementing evidence-based practices that support a pro-social, rehabilitative environment within corrections, resistance to implementation is an anticipated challenge due to the perceived misalignment of these practices (Lehman, Greener, & Simpson, 2002). Resistance can be displayed in passive or active behaviors that sabotage implementation. An example of passive resistance would be for staff to continuously claim lack of knowledge about the program and purposely fail to cooperate in using the new skills. Active resistance would be staff acknowledging the implementation of the new program, but stating the old way is better and sabotaging even other colleagues' use of the skills (Hodson, 1995; Martin & Meyerson, 1998). Resistance to change, while sometimes limited to a few individuals, is most likely to arise from an organizational culture that prefers the traditional way of doing things.

Measuring organizational readiness for change can offer insight to an organization about steps that can be taken to head off or counter resistance to the innovation being implemented. For instance, if a correctional agency recognizes that climate measures (e.g., understanding of future directions for the organization and perceptions of staff development opportunities) are low among staff, then there are steps that can be taken to make improvements as implementation occurs. The agency could hold town hall meetings between staff and decision-makers as well as distribute answers to frequently asked questions about the change (Lerch, James-Andrews, Eley, & Taxman, 2009).

Implementing Change

To advance implementation, coaches and external facilitators have been recommended to help staff use material learned in training sessions (Fixsen et al., 2002). Continuous on-site training is a tool that includes intensive coaching combined with coaching staff after the training. Continuous on-site training could be offered and supported by administration to ensure that staff have the time to learn the desired new skills in the place where they work (Lerch, James-Andrews, Eley, & Taxman, 2009). These types of strategies counter resistance by addressing climate discrepancies between existing values and beliefs and new innovations being implemented. Most important, these types of approaches promote change in more effective bottom-up strategies within an organization (Zeffane, 1996).

Using a continuous training model, this article examines the impact of implementing change in a corrections environment on organizational readiness measurements as well as communication strategies used by staff. The continuous training model includes initial communications training of staff, followed by on-site booster sessions by an expert trainer. The following research questions will be addressed: 1) does implementing a continuous training model on communication between staff and offenders improve communication strategies used within the reentry facility? and 2) does the change process improve organizational readiness for change within a reentry facility?

Methods

Prison-Based Work Release Center

The Prison-Based Work Release Center (PWRC) is a work release center located in an urban area (Lerch, James-Andrews, Eley, & Taxman, 2009). This facility is operated by the state Department of Corrections. PWRC is an all male facility that typically employs 35 correctional officers and five case managers. The average age of the staff is 40 years old, while on average, staff members have been employed by the department for approximately 11 years. During the first two years of data collection, an average of 72 percent of the staff was female, but by the third year the percentage declined to 60 percent. Approximately 89 percent of staff is African-American, and 69 percent of staff has at least a high school diploma.

Change Process

As part of a larger agency initiative to adopt evidence-based practices, the PWRC has undertaken an organizational change process that focuses on altering the culture and climate of the facility. The goal of this change is to create a pro-social learning environment that best supports the outcomes of the offenders serving time at PWRC. As part of this change process, a continuous training model was implemented as well as an evaluation of organizational change.

The change process began with a two-day communications training focused on building the skills of staff to communicate effectively with offenders. This process identified in-house change agents who have acted as peer trainers to assist in enhancing the learning environment for communication skills. The purpose of these change agents is to create sustainable change, where the agents become the models and advocates for other staff members of the skills being taught (Rogers, 2003; Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). A professional skills trainer provided on-site coaching and assistance to staff in the time following the intensive training. Through this continuous training model, the goal is to create a more open team learning environment and to improve communication in order to increase safety and improve the outcomes of the offenders. For more information on the model used please see Taxman (2008) and Lerch, James-Andrews, Eley & Taxman (2009).

Sample and Measurements

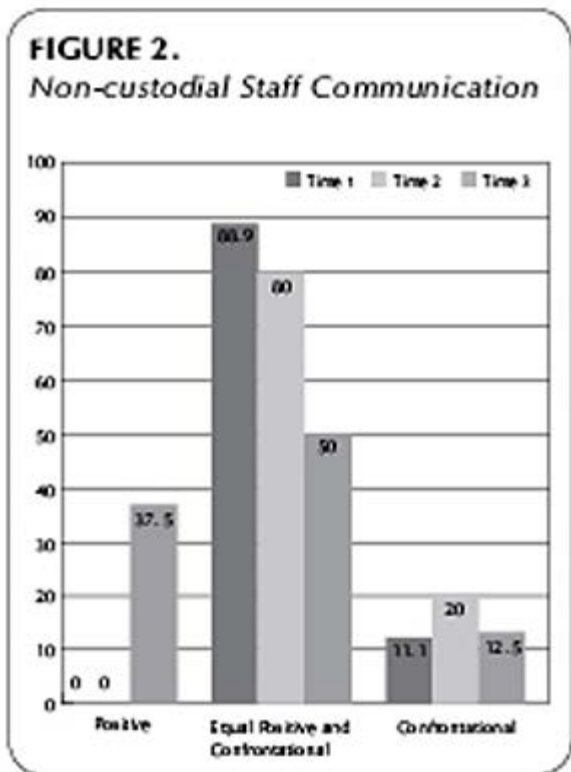
FIGURE 1.

Organizational Readiness for Change Measures

- **Organizational commitment** indicates the extent to which staff feel committed and attached to their employer (Caldwell, Chatman, & O'Reilly, 1990). This eight-item scale had an average alpha of .62.
- **Organizational staffing** and funding needs reflects the extent that staff feel there is sufficient staffing and funding for the organization (adapted from Lehman, Greener, & Simpson, 2002). This six-item scale had an average alpha of .57.
- **Organizational climate** measures the degree to which employees feel their organization is open to change and supportive of new ideas (adapted from Scott & Bruce, 1994; Orthner, Cook, Sabah, & Rosenfeld, 2004; Taxman, Young, Tesluk, et al., 2007). This eighteen-item scale had an average alpha of .97.
- **Cynicism for change** measures the extent to which employees are pessimistic about the organization's ability to change procedures or improve (Tesluk, Farr, Mathieu, & Vance, 1995). This five-item scale had an average alpha of .85.
- **Support for case planning** measures the priority that management and supervisors place on case planning (Young, 2009). This six-item scale had an average alpha of .90.

organizational survey was administered at PWRC at three time points: baseline (prior to intensive training sessions), one-year follow-up, and two-year follow-up. There were 28 staff members who took the survey at all three collection points. A total of 73 staff members took the survey, but 45 were either transferred to another facility or were no longer employed. The surveys were administered on-site by a member of the research team. The average response rate across the waves was 93 percent.

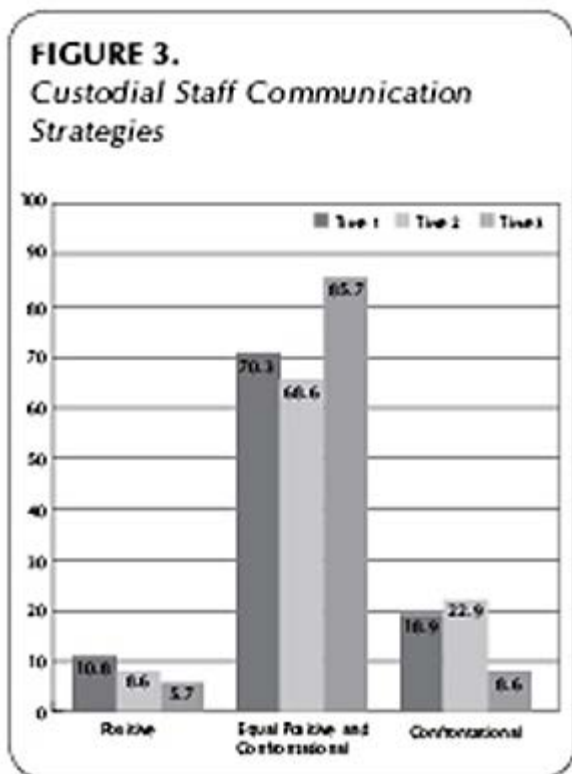
The organizational readiness for change measures were organizational commitment, organizational staffing and funding needs, the organizational climate, the level of cynicism about organizational change, and the support for case planning (Figure 1). All of these measurements ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on a likert scale.



Additionally, measures were taken on the *communication strategies* used by staff. These measure the use of both positive and confrontational communication skills when interacting with offenders (Young, 2009). Positive communication reflects the use of motivational interviewing techniques such as open ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening, and summary (e.g., “Summarize what the inmate said to allow him/her to hear his/her own ideas”). Confrontational communication reflects the use of more directive, commanding language when interacting with offenders (e.g., “Tell the inmate that he/she needs to change his/her behavior or else receive a charge”). This eighteen-item scale ranged from 1 (very uncomfortable) to 5 (very comfortable). The ten items measuring positive communication had an average alpha of .96, while the eight items measuring confrontational communication had an average alpha of .92.

Findings

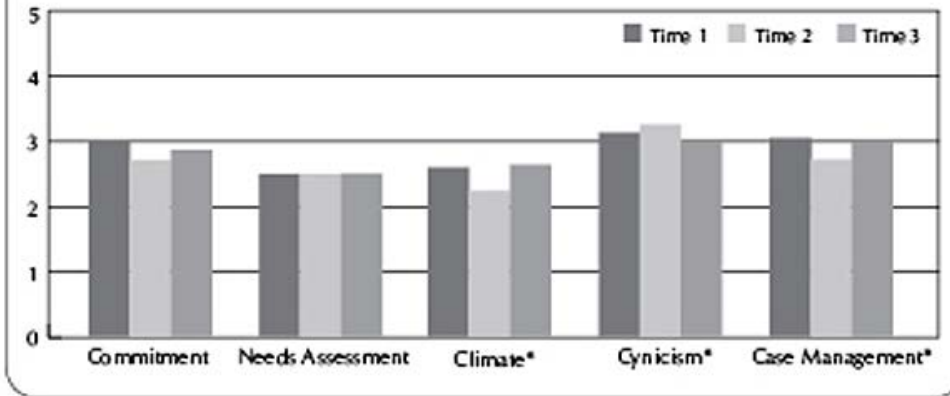
Overall, the use of positive and confrontational communication strategies did not significantly change across the waves of survey collection. Further examining these scales, the individual differences between responses to the positive and confrontational communication scales by collection time point and staff position (non-custodial versus custodial) were calculated. Custodial staff includes all ranks of correctional officers, while non-custodial includes case management, maintenance, dietary, nursing, and support staff. Evident among both non-custodial and custodial staff was a strong reliance on confrontational communication strategies, despite the continuous training targeting communication strategies and this being a reentry environment. As seen in Figure 2, at baseline 11.1 percent of non-custodial staff reported primarily using confrontational strategies, which increased to 20 percent at year one follow-up and then decreased to 12.5 percent at the second year follow-up. None of the non-custodial staff demonstrated primarily using positive communication strategies at both baseline and the one year follow-up. Then, at the two-year follow-up, there is a drastic shift toward greater use of positive communication strategies (37.5 percent). This increase in positive communication largely shifted people away from equal use of confrontational and positive communication strategies, while some individuals also reduced their primary use of confrontational communication. Among non-custodial staff, 88.9 percent reported equal use of positive and confrontational communication strategies at baseline, 80 percent at year one follow-up, and 50 percent at year two follow-up. However, these findings are statistically insignificant, most likely due to the very small number of non-custodial staff in the sample across all three time points.



The use of mostly confrontational communication strategies was reported by 18.9 percent of custodial staff at baseline, 22.9 percent at first-year follow-up, and 8.6 percent at second-year follow-up. There is a decline in the primary use of positive communication strategies reported over time, with 10.8 percent at baseline, 8.6 percent at year-one follow-up, and 5.7 percent at year-two follow-up. The decrease in both positive and confrontational communication strategies by the second-year follow-up resulted in an increased percentage of those reporting equal use of positive and confrontational. For the custodial staff, 70.3 percent reported equal use of positive and confrontational communication strategies at baseline, 68.6 percent at year-one follow-up, and 85.7 percent at year-two follow-up (Figure 3). These changes were also statistically insignificant.

Over the three years, no significant changes were found for the commitment individuals felt toward the organization or for any of the needs assessment subscales (staff, retention, training, physical facilities, integration, and community). However, there were significant changes for organizational climate, cynicism, and case management measurements. Between baseline and the one-year follow-up, perceptions of the organizational climate declined, but then improved between year-one and year-two follow-up ($F(2, 54) = 6.614, P=.003$). The extent of cynicism expressed declined between the first and second-year follow-ups ($F(2, x) = 3.294, P=.045$). Similar to the climate measure, the perceptions of the priority that management and supervisors place on case planning (case management) declined between baseline and year-one follow-up; however, these perceptions improved between the first and second-year follow-ups ($F(2, 54) = 5.108, P=.009$).

FIGURE 4.
Organizational Readiness



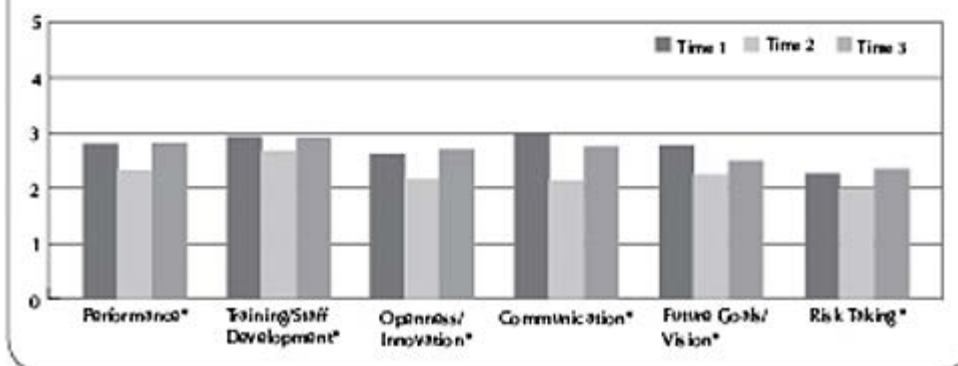
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organizational climate, each subscale contributes to the significant change of the overall climate (Figure 5). These subscale measurements include: the extent to which management focuses on performance and outcomes of staff (*performance*), awareness of the future direction of the organization (*future*), extent to which management supports staff development (*training*), degree of support for innovation and openness for new ideas (*openness*), flow of information within the organization (*intra-communication*), and willingness of staff to take risks in performing their job (*risk-taking*). Between baseline and the first-year follow-up, the perceptions of performance ($F(2, 54) = 3.201, P=.049$), intra-communication ($F(2, 54) = 11.042, P=.000$), and future ($F(2, 54) = 4.765, P=.012$) declined. However, the perceptions of staff on the measures of future ($F(2, 54) = 4.765, P=.012$), training ($F(1.45, 39.414) = 2.872, P=.084$), openness ($F(1.646, 44.429) = 5.007, P=.015$), intra-communication ($F(2, 54) = 11.042, P=.000$), and risk taking ($F(2, 54) = 3.484, P=.038$) improved between the first- and second-year follow-ups.

Conclusions

The change process in this facility relied on a continuous training approach aimed at the communication strategies used by staff. Implementation research identifies this form of training, which incorporates intensive training and on-site booster follow-up, as key to changing the behavior of staff (Fixsen, Blase, Naom, & Wallace, 2009; Sholomskas et al., 2005). This continuous training approach to change is designed to help staff use the tools in everyday practice. By using the tools within their actual work environment and receiving real-time feedback, staff members become more confident in integrating the tools into their job duties. Booster training in combination with the intensive training increases the likelihood that the trained skills will become part of the staff’s everyday arsenal of tools.

FIGURE 5.
Organizational Climate



The findings of this study reveal areas where the

continuous communications training has had the greatest impact as well as where further work is

needed. The shift by non-custodial staff to the use of positive communication strategies by the second-year follow-up demonstrates how staff can be impacted by change initiatives, but also indicates that the change process does not occur overnight. Efforts to shift organizations need to be persistent and consistent over time. One-time, brief training sessions are not effective in achieving lasting changes in culture (Baer et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Fixsen et al., 2002; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Miller and Mount, 2001; Miller et al., 2004). Given this finding and the importance of addressing culture in the implementation of new innovations, organizations need to expect and account for the time needed to change the practices of an organization. Formal policy changes only go so far in changing the actual behavior of the line staff within organizations, especially if those changes counter the traditional culture of the organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Feldman, 2003). A continuous training and modeling approach is necessary to actively create this type of change.

The minimal change in communication strategy found among custodial staff also suggests the difficulty in generating change and the time investment needed to change the more status quo use of confrontational communication in this environment. This could be due to the subculture among correctional officers, which differentiates them from the non-custodial staff within the organization. Research conducted by Duffee (1974) found that the subculture of correctional officers viewed change and the social climate much differently from not only the inmates they supervised, but from management as well. Correctional officers in Duffee's (1974) study opposed the implementation of the new innovation, therefore requiring change to occur within the subculture to effectively implement change. The findings presented here offer insight into how a continuous change model that impacts resistance among non-custodial staff can have relatively minor effects on custodial staff. More research is needed to explore how training models are implemented among mixed groups of staff members in a correctional environment.

The organizational readiness measures, especially organizational climate, provide a glimpse of what can be expected during a change process such as this. For most of the measures, there was a decline in perceptions at the first-year follow-up, some of which were significant. However, by the second year most of the measures improved nearly to baseline, with some going above. This may visually demonstrate the resistance to change experienced by the organization, with a better climate arising by the second-year follow-up. Unfortunately, missing from this is the answer to the question of how the implementation of the change process led to these results. The qualitative follow-up currently being conducted will provide some insight into this, but perhaps the continuous training model is what enabled resistance to be overcome, and not given into.

Further examination is needed to understand the connection of organizational commitment to the climate of the organization. Why did climate and cynicism improve, but organizational commitment did not experience a significant change? Organizational commitment has been found to have both direct and mediating effects on organizational change. Examining change processes in a hospital setting, Iverson (1996) found that organizational commitment mediated the impact of staff satisfaction and motivation as well as environmental factors on the change process. Perhaps more attention needs to be focused on improving organizational commitment to see a greater change in communication strategies within the organization.

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