Implementing a Reentry Framework at a Correctional Facility: Challenges to the Culture

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Implementing a Reentry Framework at a Correctional Facility: Challenges to the Culture

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Implementation research is emerging in the field of corrections, but few studies have examined the complexities associated with implementing change among frontline workers embedded in specific organizational cultures. Using a mixed methods approach, the authors examine the challenges faced by correctional workers in a work release correctional facility during their transformation into a reentry center. Findings reveal that staff report a low readiness for change while observational and interview data confirm that staff attitudes and accompanying behaviors undermine efforts to provide a humane environment for reentry. This study illustrates the value of using quantitative and qualitative methods to understand and measure key organizational issues that affect the ability to alter the milieu for delivering services. The authors examine how inertia regarding reforms is not due to the nature of the reform but rather to the culture of the organization and how important it is to address organizational culture. They also highlight the importance of integrating interactional and routine practices among frontline workers as part of a strategy to reform correctional facilities.

KEYWORDS corrections, implementation, organizational change, organizational culture, prison, street-level workers, workplace communication
Organizational culture is an important facilitator of, or barrier to, the adoption of change within correctional settings (Gendreau, Goggin, & Smith, 1999; Haney, 2008; Skolnick, 2008). Defined as a mixture of an organization’s structure, actors, and external contingencies, organizational culture encompasses existing values, practices, norms, and influences (Garland, 2001; King, Steiner, & Breach, 2008; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Typically, organizational culture means “the way things get done” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 90), and the culture may work to facilitate or stall progress. In correctional agencies, organizational culture is one factor affecting the degree to which the tension between punishment and rehabilitation ideologies interferes with policy and practice changes (typically referred to as “reform”). If reform efforts are as subjective and highly contextualized as prior research suggests (Proctor et al., 2007; Gendreau et al., 1999), then one key to explaining implementation processes resides in understanding how staff—frontline workers—perceive, understand, negotiate, (at times) resist, and often reinvent particular policies or practices associated with organizational reform. The emphasis on staff, as compared to recipients of the services or punishment, is an evolving field (Taxman & Belenko, 2011).

Understanding implementation at the frontline (with workers who have direct interactions with clients and/or community members; Lipsky, 1980) compels an understanding of organizational culture as “the missing concept in organization studies” (Schein, 1996, p. 229) and illuminates ways of advancing implementation while adhering to the core concepts of the desired reform. At present, implementation research is a “hot” topic in major professional fields such as education (Odden, 1991; Odom, 2009), medicine (Institute of Healthcare Improvement, 2009; Sobo, Bowman, & Gifford, 2008), psychology (Baker, McFall, & Shoham, 2008), and substance abuse treatment (McCarty et al., 2007; Simpson, 2002), to name a few. While correctional organizations regularly face implementation challenges (Taxman, Henderson, & Belenko, 2009) most correctional research has largely ignored implementation (Gendreau et al., 1999). To this end, the present research examines how culture affects reform efforts during new policy and practice implementation in a correctional setting during initial and early stages of change.1

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CORRECTIONAL REFORM

Prior studies of organizational culture in correctional settings suggest that culture can be facilitative of reform implementation (Friedmann, Taxman, & Henderson, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Oser, Knudson, Staton-Tindall, & Leukefeld, 2009). In particular, evidence-based practice reforms are more likely to occur in performance-oriented correctional agencies that host open learning environments. Administrators with less punitive beliefs and human service backgrounds are generally more supportive of reforms. This combination of
factors creates opportunities for leadership when the organizational environment is more open to adopting and implementing evidence-based practices (Friedmann et al., 2007). Likewise, organizations whose members emphasize treatment quality and display organizational commitment and equity (defined here as fairness) are more likely to use evidence-based, effective treatment practices (Henderson et al., 2007). Moreover, from prior work we know that the amount of resources, such as wraparound services (augmented direct treatment services), provided by organizations is often determined by “organizational structure and culture” (Oser et al., 2009, p. 888). While these prior studies of organizational change highlight organizational culture as a key contingency for change, this scholarship does not adequately address the complex contextual nature of organizational culture within correctional agencies. To gain understanding of organizational culture, scholars need to account for the importance of individual staff perceptions of existing correctional cultures while noting how those perceptions affect reform efforts.

STAFF CHARACTERISTICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

As the maintainers of organizational culture on the front lines of any organization, staff plays a key role in reform implementation (Barley, 1986; Kunda, 1992; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). That is, the way staff understand reforms influences implementation (for more on staff perceptions of policy and practice see Weick [1990] on sensemaking.) Rooted in prior experiences and personal characteristics, previous research in correctional agencies suggests that staff members with advanced degrees are more likely to implement innovations (Grella et al., 2007). Likewise, in drug treatment agencies, recent studies have found that educated staff are increasingly more likely to view evidence-based therapies in a positive light (McCarty et al., 2007). Staff with additional formal training have more favorable attitudes toward using complex medically assisted treatments such as methadone or buprenorphine with counseling services (Forman, Bovasso, & Woody, 2001; Roman & Johnson, 2002). Notably, experienced counselors are “more flexible, eclectic, or integrative in their conceptualization and treatment of addiction” (Ball et al., 2002, p. 315) and more open to employing evidence-based practices. Although conducted in substance abuse treatment agencies, these studies illustrate how highly educated staff are more open to new ideas. Studies do not address how staff think about or perceive reform in environments where staff are not as well-educated with graduate degrees.

STAFF PERCEPTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Staff and management characteristics and organizational culture are important prerequisites for understanding organizational reform; while staff perceptions of the potential impacts the reforms will have are also vital (Lin,
2000; Weber & Weber, 2001). Often, staff resist or ignore change when they have difficulty reconciling prior organizational goals with new, reform-based goals (Lin, 2000; Ohlin, Coates, & Miller, 1974). In correctional settings, this process is further complicated because of the well-documented and consistent tension between two organization goals—treatment (rehabilitation) and security (incapacitation)—in correctional settings like prisons (Grusky, 1959; Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980; Thomas & Poole, 1975), parole (Caplan, 2006; Lynch, 1998) and probation (Ellsworth, 1990; Taxman, 2002). As opposing ends of a correctional ideology pendulum that swings between these goals, correctional staff often relate more closely to one of the two goals despite current policy change efforts (Bazemore, Dicker, & Al-Gadheeb, 1994). This tension between treatment and security goals may retard or even halt reform efforts if staff members perceive an emphasis shift from the current goal to a new goal on the opposing side (Farabee et al., 1999; Zald, 1962). As such, perceived organizational justice (what staff consider right or wrong in their workplace environment), as a piece of the broader organizational culture, becomes intimately intertwined with how staff implement reform (or not).

Taxman and Gordon (2009) defined organizational justice as a concept examining the “emphasis on equity within the work environment that affects the day-to-day routine within the prison” (p. 697). For staff, organizational justice is the perceived level of fairness within the workplace. In this vein, Lambert, Hogan, and Griffin (2007) suggested a relationship between job satisfaction and organizational justice where satisfied correctional employees are more likely to view processes and procedures as equitable. Similar studies demonstrate that greater perception of justice in an organization predicts lower cynicism, improved willingness for risk-taking (regarding trying new procedures and practices to improve operations), and improved sharing of information about individual progress and clarity of performance expectations (Taxman & Gordon, 2009). These are all critical components of organizational cultures signifying readiness for change.

**SUMMARY**

Organizational culture is as a key factor affecting the complexity of implementation, particularly when staff considers the compatibility of the new idea with existing practice or the value added (Rogers, 2003). While the substance abuse literature establishes that staff education level and prior experience affect willingness of staff to accept reform efforts, we know little about how staff perceive (understand and negotiate) change in their workplace. Frontline staff are a key part of the change process as they are often largely responsible for implementation of policy and practice reforms (Lipsky, 1980). To date, our limited knowledge of reform does not include
staff perceptions as part of the overall organizational culture. Additionally, we know even less about the impact of those perceptions on reform success.

In the following study the authors explore staff perception and actions within a particular organizational culture as correctional staff undergo substantial organizational change. The reform we examine challenges both the existing goals and practices within a correctional setting. In the following pages, we first document the study sites’ background and context. Next, we provide information about the methods of data collection and analysis for the primary research question: How do correctional staff perceive, understand, negotiate, (at times) resist, and often reinvent particular policies or practices associated with organizational reform? More specifically, we focus on staff perceptions of two main areas organizational culture and readiness for change. Then, we present key findings from a mixed method study that combines organizational surveys with observations and interviews. Finally, we offer some theoretical and practical implications of this work.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Study Setting

The organization for this study is a work release facility that is part of a state correctional agency on the East Coast of the United States. The facility houses male, prerelease offenders who typically have less than 18 months left on their sentences and are “able to work in the community.” The work release facility is located in an urban environment where, at the time of data collection, about 25% of the population lived below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) and unemployment was nearly 8% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). The median annual income in the city was approximately $30,000 and less than 20% of the population had a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

At the start of our project, the Department of Corrections desired converting work release facilities from minimum-security environments to reentry centers. A work release center focuses on employment and security but a reentry center has different goals of assisting inmates with addressing reintegration issues with a treatment focus including housing, treatment, education, and employment. The redesign emphasizes using correctional staff members as prosocial role models for inmates and requiring staff to use humanistic approaches instead of confrontational, authoritarian interactions. The organizational change model replicates one used for adapting evidence-based practices in probation settings (see Taxman, 2008; Taxman, Shepardson, & Byrne, 2004) but adapts to the unique features of secured environments (see Serin, 2005).
Prior to the transformation to a reentry center, all facility staff received training in developing and using motivational communication strategies with offenders (Taxman, Shephardson, & Byrne, 2004). An external consultant (coach) worked with correctional officers (COs; custodial staff) and case managers (noncustodial staff) facilitating the integration of role modeling and humanistic communication into operational practice. The coach also facilitated team meetings to refine policies and procedures as the implementation process progressed. This training consisted of classroom training sessions with skilled trainers where all staff members received a total of 12 hours of skill-based training focused on improving interpersonal skills. Session topics included role modeling, using open communication strategies to help offenders identify their own needs or issues. Following the training, all staff received on-going coaching from trained internal change agents (staff specially trained to provide continuous interpersonal and communication guidance to staff post-training). The external coach provided booster sessions at the worksite by providing feedback to staff as part of their routine job responsibilities. In tandem, case managers (as part of the facility staff) transitioned from a paper-driven process of developing a case plan to having the case manager and incarcerated individual jointly develop a reentry plan outlining the steps required for the offender to become (and remain) crime and drug-free in the community.

Methods

This study uses a mixed methods design to collect surveys, observational, and interview data, providing a triangulated approach to understanding the organizational culture during implementation of organizational policy and practice reform. Triangulation involves using multiple methods, data sources, or researchers to substantiate evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990). It improves trustworthiness of collected data, thus improving reliability and confidence in interpretations made during analysis (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). With George Mason University’s Human Subjects Review Board approval, we first administered an organizational survey focusing on organizational culture and readiness for change. Then we conducted a qualitative study involving on-site observations and semistructured, informal interviews over a 7-month period. This work investigated how organizational actors responded to the implementation of new ideas within the facility over time.

Organizational Surveys

In the fall of 2008, prior to formal training on the change process and the role of staff within it, we administered surveys to each staff member in the facility.
Before survey administration, the facility administrator provided written pre
notice of the survey to all staff members. We marked surveys with unique
identifiers prior to administering them to maintain confidentiality. One mem-
ber of our research team attended roll calls at the facility on all three shifts to
inform staff of the purpose of the survey and answer questions. Respondents
received the survey in an envelope with the option of completing the survey
immediately or returning the survey to the researcher later. The facility
administrator provided space where staff could go immediately fill out the
survey. The researcher remained at the facility for at least 30 minutes after
disseminating the survey. Researchers provided snacks for staff during survey
administration and informed all staff that they were not required to complete
the survey. We repeated these methods over several visits to ensure all staff
had been reached. There was a 100\% response rate. Several methods used in
survey administration explain the high response rate. These include: (a)
pre-notice of the survey (Frohlich, 2002; Fox, Crask, & Kim, 1988); (b) the
survey’s short length (only seven pages of pretested and existing scales)
(Frohlich, 2002); (c) follow-up visits to the facility to hand collect surveys
(Frohlich, 2002; Fox et al., 1988); (d) university sponsorship (Fox et el.,
1988); and (e) available snack incentives with work time to complete sur-
veys. To prevent supervisor and peer pressure to take the survey, researchers
did not inform anyone who had completed or not completed the survey at
any time and minimized supervisors and peers asking for surveys by
conducting on-site collection.

Organizational readiness. The organizational readiness concept emerges
from measurements of organizational commitment, organizational needs,
organizational climate, cynicism for change, and case planning. Organiza-
tional Commitment measures the extent to which employees feel connected
and attached to their employer. This scale originated from Caldwell, Chat-
man, and O’Reilly (1990) with a reliability of .63 for seven items. Organiza-
tional Needs measures the staff’s perception of the level of staffing and
funding needs of the facility. These six items, adapted from Lehman,
Greener, and Simpson (2002), had a reliability of .66. Organizational Climate
measures the degree to which individuals view their organization as open to
change and supportive of new ideas. This scale included 18 items (adapted
from Orthner, Cook, Sabah, Rosenfeld, 2004; Scott & Bruce, 1994; Taxman
et al., 2007) and had a reliability of .96. The Cynicism for Change scale mea-
sures the extent to which employees are pessimistic about the organizations
ability to change procedures or improve. This scale had five items with
reliability of .88 (Tesluk, Farr, Mathieu, & Vance, 1995). The Case Planning
scale measures perception that management places priority on quality of case
management and empowers staff to conduct case management (Young,
2009). This scale had an alpha of .86.
**Organizational culture.** Examining the subscale measurements of organizational culture (detailed previously) provides a more in-depth picture of the culture. The Performance subscale measures staff perception of the extent to which management or supervisors focus on staff performance and outcomes. It had three items with reliability of .87 (adapted from Orthner et al., 2004). The Future Goals/Vision subscale assesses the respondents’ awareness about the future direction of the organization. This had two items and a reliability of .78 (adapted from Orthner et al., 2004). The Staff Training Development subscale measures the extent that staff felt supervisors/managers were supportive of staff development. This scale had three items and a reliability of .83 (adapted from Orthner et al., 2004). The Openness/Innovation subscale measures the perception of the organization as supportive of innovation and openness to such things as promoting and trying new ideas. This subscale had three items and a reliability of .83 (adapted from Orthner et al., 2004; Scott & Bruce, 1994; Taxman et al., 2007). The Intra-Communication subscale measures the flow of information among staff. There were five items in this scale with an alpha of .90 (adapted from Orthner et al., 2004). The Risk-Taking subscale examines the willingness of staff to take risks in performing their job duties. Two items measured this with a reliability of .83 (adapted from Orthner et al., 2004).

**Qualitative Fieldwork of Data Collection and Analysis**

Fieldwork for this project began in February 2009 just after intensive training began. The on-site observations coincided with booster sessions. After several initial meetings with the facility supervisor, we began ethnographic observations and semistructured interviews with all staff. However, this paper only uses data collected with COs and case managers. Facility visits lasted six to eight hours each session occurring February and August 2009 totaling just over 150 fieldwork hours. Qualitative data presented in this article includes: (a) direct observation of interactions between COs, inmates, supervisors, and case managers and (b) informal, semistructured interviews with COs, case managers and correctional supervisors. We arranged our fieldwork schedule to spend an equal time on all work shifts (7 a.m.–3 p.m., 3 p.m.–11 p.m., and 11 p.m.–7 a.m.). At times, the research hours overlapped two shifts (e.g., arriving at 11 a.m. and staying until 7 p.m.) to view different aspects of the working day including shift-change. During fieldwork, the qualitative team spent time with COs and case managers doing their natural tasks on each shift. Over the course of the study, we accompanied COs in all of the daily job assignments they regularly worked, focusing most heavily on the two post (stationary surveillance locations within the facility) positions. Following human subjects’ approval by the
university’s Institutional Review Board, we received verbal informed consent from every staff member we observed and/or interviewed and made each individual aware that their participation in the study was voluntary. No staff chose to opt out of the observation/interview portion of the study. Several staff members thanked us for our presence noting, “It is nice to have someone to talk to.”

Throughout our conversations with correctional staff, we asked questions regarding staff perception and understanding of and willingness to adopt the policy and practice changes that accompanied the facility’s transition. Often this line of questioning took the form of narrative (e.g., stories) where the researcher encouraged staff to share their experiences and feelings about key areas of their work, including: (a) supervisors; (b) inmates; (c) reentry and work release; (d) punishment versus rehabilitation ideologies, and (e) co-workers.

Qualitative field workers generally did not record interviews or write field notes while at the facility. Instead, both field workers typed detailed field notes upon leaving the field each day. To obtain direct quotes from subjects and record minimal notes, qualitative fieldworkers kept a small folded piece of paper in their pocket with a small pen at all times (for more on “jottings” see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Lofland et al., 2006). When an informant used a particularly interesting quote or phrase that we wanted to remember we repeated the quote in our head until we were alone (usually in a non-inmate bathroom) where were able to write the quote on the paper. This is standard practice in fieldwork where researchers build report and trust with subjects by not taking notes in the field (Emerson, 2001). When we use direct quotes in the writing of this article, we do so by correcting some broken English and altering awkward language (e.g., curse words) without altering the meaning of the quote within its organization context. After recording a substantial portion of the field notes, we linked field note files using Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program used for data organization, coding, and analysis. Data analysis began with detailed, descriptive coding using a line-by-line approach, whereby each line of field notes was linked to a specific code from the code list we created. We followed this intensive coding with more specific, thematic coding (often combining initial codes into more thematic codes as data melded together; Charmaz, 1995). Generally, we coded field notes and narratives for data involving verbiage, emotion, explanations/justifications, behavior, connections to others, and awareness and adherence to formal and informal organizational policy (including the reform ideology). As themes began to develop, we began writing analytic memos to flesh out key ideas and to understand staff behavioral patterns. The insights developed in these memos became much of what we have written in this paper.
FINDINGS

Organizational Survey Findings

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STAFF

The surveyed staff includes 35 custodial and 15 noncustodial\(^2\) (\(n = 50\)) staff. Custodial staff includes COs and persons with immediate supervisory duties over inmates where noncustodial staff includes all other facility staff, such as case managers, kitchen staff, and medical staff. At this facility, custodial staff is primarily African American (91\%) and female (71\%) an average age of 35, and have worked in corrections for an average of 8 years. Noncustodial staff is also primarily African American (93\%) and female (80\%), an average age of 46, and have worked in corrections for an average of 11 years. These groups vary on educational levels, with 9\% of the custodial staff and 47\% of the noncustodial staff having completed a higher education degree. Table 1 provides an overview of staff characteristics within this correctional facility.\(^3\)

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Overall, staff view the agency as having insufficient funding and staffing, \(M = 2.54; SD = .72\), and perceive the agency as not open to change and unsupportive of new ideas, \(M = 2.74; SD = .85\). Staff report an average amount of cynicism regarding their organization undergoing change, \(M = 3.17; SD = .94\), their commitment to the organization, \(M = 3.02; SD = .60\), and their perceived level of managerial support for case planning, \(M = 3.00; SD = .72\).

Figure 1 presents the differences between custodial and noncustodial staff’s mean responses to the measures of organizational readiness. While none of the measurements demonstrate a high level of readiness to change, custodial staff show consistently lower levels of organizational readiness to

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<th>TABLE 1 Descriptions of the Staff Characteristics</th>
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change as compared to noncustodial staff. Custodial staff report a lower commitment to the organization, custodial $M = 2.92$, noncustodial $M = 3.38$, $F(1, 48) = 6.88$, $p = .012$, and increased levels of cynicism about the organization’s ability to change, custodial $M = 3.39$, noncustodial $M = 2.63$, $F(1, 48) = 7.50$, $p = .009$. The difference in organizational readiness approaches significance, custodial $M = 2.59$, noncustodial $M = 3.04$, $F(1, 48) = 3.27$, $p = .077$, indicating that custodial staff have a lower perception that the facility is open to change and supportive of new ideas.

**Organizational Culture**

A review of the culture (climate) measures offers more insight into the culture of this correctional facility. These subscale measurements include: (a) performance, $M = 2.92; SD = .94$; (b) future $M = 2.79; SD = .95$; (c) training, $M = 3.06; SD = 1.00$; (d) openness, $M = 2.72; SD = .98$; (e) intra-communication, $M = 3.06; SD = .66$; and (f) risk-taking, $M = 2.57; SD = 1.13$. Overall, the ratings show low support for the organization and a wide variance in staff perceptions. Within the correctional facility, culture measures show that staff perceive: (a) supervisors as unfocused on specific performance and outcomes; (b) supervisors as unaware of the organization’s future direction; (c) the organization as closed to innovation and ideas; and (d) themselves as unwilling to take risks in their job. The staff report average support for intra-communication and management support for staff training.

Figure 2 depicts the mean difference between custodial and noncustodial staff for organizational culture measures. These findings illustrate the differences between the custodial and non-custodial staff, particularly with the custodial staff demonstrating lower levels of readiness for change. The custodial staff perceive less managerial focus on performance and outcomes,
custodial $M = 2.67$, noncustodial $M = 3.51$, $F(1, 48) = 9.87$, $p = .003$, less support for innovations and openness to such things as promoting and trying new ideas, custodial $M = 2.57$, noncustodial $M = 3.16$, $F(1, 48) = 4.24$, $p = .045$, poorer communications within the facility, custodial $M = 2.91$, noncustodial $M = 3.40$, $F(1, 48) = 6.23$, $p = .016$, and lower awareness of the future direction of the organization, custodial $M = 2.60$, noncustodial $M = 3.19$, $F(1, 48) = 4.06$, $p = .05$, than noncustodial staff. Custodial staff were also less likely to take risks and to perceive that supervisors/managers support staff development, but these differences are approaching statistical significance, custodial $M = 2.40$, noncustodial $M = 3.04$, $F(1, 48) = 3.88$, $p = .055$, and custodial $M = 2.88$, noncustodial $M = 3.42$, $F(1, 48) = 3.31$, $p = .075$, respectively.

**Observational and Qualitative Findings**

Aligned with survey data the following paragraphs provide examples from interview and observational fieldwork that provide needed depth and description regarding the organizational readiness and culture as revealed by both COs (custodial) and case managers (noncustodial). Similar to the organizational surveys, staff cynicism and lack of readiness for change was visible in the observational data. Staff display attitudes and behaviors that suggest they are unready to transition to using a more humanistic approach.
with inmates. Two key finding suggest that: (a) staff consistently break institutional rules and protocols in ways that seem detached from both organizational safety and inmate treatment (reentry) goals and (b) staff regularly engage with inmates, both verbally and nonverbally, in ways that suggest they are neither supportive nor understanding of efforts to facilitate community reintegration.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Within the culture at this facility, COs (COs) were generally unready to change from a work release to a reentry facility. This transition requires staff embrace humanistic approaches with inmates that facilitate more than just employment, but rather also consider addressing inmates criminogenic needs as an avenue toward successful community reentry/reintegration. The following representative field note excerpt highlights one COs disinterest and lack of care or concern for reentry policy and practice reforms underway in this work release facility.

Officer Hawks says she attended communications training with the outside consultant on the project [transitioning from work-release to reentry center] but she tells me, “*That, was total bullshit.*” She says, “*They think they can talk to us like we’re children all the while telling us not to treat the inmates badly.*” She ponders the paradox that she calls “*unfair.*” She follows this up with a strong statement, “*I don’t care; they don’t care about me and I don’t care back.*”

Though seemingly unrelated to the current reform, understanding and measuring current organizational participation, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions are ways researchers predict readiness to change (Coch & French, 1948). That is, deficient organizational commitment for change is often visible through rule-breaking behaviors staff exhibit when they feel powerless or voiceless within the current organizational culture (Dalton, 1950). Another example comes from a group of COs (although we also witnessed this rule-breaking behavior among case managers staff as well) who repeatedly and openly broke the facilities’ “no eating” policy themselves while inconsistently enforcing it among inmates.

An inmate prepares for detail while eating a Pop Tart next to the officers on Post One. After a few moments, Officer Andre decides to remind the inmate of the ‘no food allowed’ policy at Post One. Andre tells this inmate he needs to leave the area or throw out his food. The inmate shakes his head “no” and walks away. Several minutes later Officer Cincade enters Post One eating a bag of Doritos. No staff comments about this obvious policy violation though all were present when the CO told the inmate to trash his food. In fact, throughout the entire shift all seven officers in and
around Post One were observed eating. The most egregious violation of this policy occurred when I observed Officer Santee conduct a one-handed pat down of a medical worker as he entered the facility. She quickly patted down the man with her right hand while holding her food (a slice of banana bread) in the other hand. Again, no staff commented on the duel policy violation that broke both the no food policy and the proper pat-down procedure.

In similar instances, we observed officers deliberately breaking other facility rules designed for safety and security. We found all but three of the COs we spoke with watched television during their shift on a post or admitted to watching it in the past even though on-duty officers are not supposed to be distracted from surveillance during their shift and television viewing is in direct violation of facility rules. To do this, two COs avoided detection by sitting with a remote control for the TV underneath their leg while watching the steps in front of them for any superior officers who may be coming downstairs. As soon as they saw a supervisor, they turned off the television set. In a similar rule-breaking behavior, COs slept during their shift or admitted doing so in the past (two did so in our presence) while others let offenders make food or meander around the common area during count time (the time when the institution is verifying the population). COs also routinely disregarded yard safety procedures by letting offenders come in and out of the yard as they please and by not watching the offenders closest to the fence or on the opposite side of a concrete wall that is not visible from where most officers stand near the door. All of these routine practices impede the security of the facility and the personal safety of the COs and suggest an organizational culture that is unready for frontline organizational reform.

In another example, one CO disregarded institutional safety protocol (i.e., turned her back on group of inmates) while watching offenders workout in the facility's exercise yard by plugging in the electric heater and standing in a small wooden booth everyone refers to as “the shack.” When probed about her decision to break safety regulations, she explains, “I am cold and they aren’t going do nothing anyway. I don’t care to watch their nasty asses all the while we out here.” This officer’s attitude toward inmates (i.e., “their nasty asses”) signals her feelings about offenders in general. Further, it may also indicate that she does not care about reentry issues or even personal or team safety while at work in the facility. Reform and change appear difficult in this facility where staff do not regularly embrace the reform-minded philosophy of change.

Case managers displayed similar patterns of behavior regarding readiness for change. For example, during observations, one case manager repeatedly yelled loudly at an inmate whose recent job applications proved unsuccessful noting, “I don’t know why I help you at all.” These attitudinal
and behavioral patterns were prominent, but not exclusive, among case managers. In another instance, we spoke with two case managers seated together in an office and asked about the pending reform. Case Manager Lutz stated the organization is always changing and that the present reform is just one in a string of changes they had seen. Case Manager Bonner added, “Whatever the change is, I am sure it will look differently after they bring it here.” In this dialogue, Lutz seems unconcerned about a pending reform, as change is a normative part of working in a correctional environment. Bonner’s comments note a distinct lack of knowledge about the pending change and add to Lutz’s sentiment noting that change seldom or never yields intended results. Both case managers express a sort of “wait-and-see” attitude that signals that they have not yet been convinced that the change is real or that it has value.

**Organizational Culture**

Qualitative data also aligns with survey data regarding organizational culture revealing that this reentry facility presents a mixture of staff members who are either unaware or uninterested in the broader organizational mission, philosophy, goals, and ideology. COs uphold or follow policies and institutional practice guidelines inconsistently, while regularly expressing profound disconnect to anything related to their work in the facility including the offenders, other staff members, and their supervisors.

As an inmate [Max] enters the traffic area [where inmates go before entering and exiting the institution] he checks on his approval for work release and asks about clothing that he needs for his new job. As he talks with two officers (Officers Dano and Johans), it is apparent that he did not do something correctly. The officers question the inmate loudly insisting that his paperwork was not done correctly. Officer Dano notes, “It’s too bad that you didn’t follow the proper procedures for getting what you need to work.” Max pleads with the officers that he did fill out the paperwork and that he did it the way COs instructed him to do it. Sitting with their arms crossed across their chests, Officers Dano and Johans both tell Max that no one told him to do the paperwork that way and no one would tell him that because it is the wrong way to do it. Max is aggravated and keeps shaking his head. After several minutes of arguing back and forth, a male case manager approaches and pulls Max aside to talk. Immediately after the case manager and Max finish talking, Max leaves the area. The case manager then approaches the officers and explains that he approved the form and Max’s request. Officers Dano and Johans’ attitude changes with Dano telling the case manager, “As long as you are approving this, it is up to you and not on us. We aren’t supposed to do that sir, but it’s alright if that’s what you want to do.”
In general, officers act differently in the presence of supervisors as they vie to impress them with a hyper-approach to rule following. In the previous example, one officer displays a sense of flexibility regarding organizational rules when confronted by a similarly positioned organizational actor within his workplace, a case manager. This may indicate that the culture supporting noncompliance with the reentry reform is malleable—if only in theory—under certain organizational conditions.

Case managers displayed similar disconnectedness with proposed policy and practice changes, though reform was more difficult for them to ignore as they were also changing from a paper-based to electronic recording system. Several case managers indicated that under the work-release model they already helped inmates find jobs. Thus, they thought the change focus on reentry was, as one case manager described, “Not about us.”

Holistically, custodial staff generally perceive organizational culture in this correctional facility as something they must endure. When we asked several staff members how they enjoy working at this facility, the responses varied from, “It could be worse at another institution,” to “It’s a job,” to “I’m just trying to get through it.” Throughout fieldwork, no COs admitted to enjoying the work and none said they wanted to be a correctional officer for any other reason than the job security afforded via a civil service job. Only one officer we spoke with believed the facility was helping offenders prepare for their reentry into the community.

Finally, staff disconnectedness with offenders was regularly observable in their interactions with offenders during release procedures. On several occasions during fieldwork, offenders were either exiting the facility at the end of their sentence or nearing the completion of their custody. While some COs were supportive of inmates’ community reentry, some even shared words of encouragement like “keep your nose clean,” and “doesn’t it feel great to be free,” the more vocal message came from officers who did not believe inmates’ success would be long-lived.

On one particular day, an offender (Stapelton) approached Post One with his take-home bag (full of books, CDs, pictures, and some personal hygiene items). The COs took Stapelton to a separate room just off the Post to search his things. Officer Reyes examined the content of the bag and gave Stapelton a form to complete prior to his prison exit. Officers Campbell and Dwyer were at Post One and Dwyer began a cross-room conversation with Stapelton loud enough for folks down the hall and in the mess hall to clearly hear.

**Officer Dwyer:** You think you all man now that you goin’ home, Stapleton?

**Inmate Stapelton:** [Looks at Dwyer but does not verbally respond.]

**Dwyer:** Yeah, you all man because you gonna make me a boatload of money when you come back.
Stapelton: What do you mean?

Dwyer: I bet several COs on the 11 [p.m.] to 7 [a.m.] shift that your ass will be back in here by the end of the month and I know you Stapelton...you gonna help me get paid.

Stapelton: Nah, I ain’t coming back this time.

Dwyer: Oh, yes you is...ain’t no way you gonna make it out dare, boy. I’ll see you next week.

Stapelton: [Puts his head down and says nothing as the facility door opens and he exits the building.]

As a reiterative example, the prior excerpt contextualizes the organizational culture present in this institution several months after the reform efforts are underway. Ironically, as an inmate is leaving this transitioning reentry facility, an officer jibes and hassles him about how quickly he will return to custody.

DISCUSSION

Gendreau and colleagues (1999) suggest that the adoption of evidence-based practices in correctional settings needs attention in the areas of general organizational issues, programs, change agent activities and staffing. These scholars identify several factors that organizations should consider when assessing the success of reforms, similar to the concepts of diffusion outlined by Rogers (2003). These include: (a) how the organizational structure allows staff handling of issues; (b) the timeframe and manner in which the organization deals with issues; (c) the minimization of conflict within the organization; (d) staff involvement in program design, and (e) the level of belief in staff skills and ability to implement and effectively run a new program. These benchmarks are useful for assessing implementation processes and targeting areas for future work.

The value of this study lies in understanding organizational culture in the process of change. In the current study, the reentry facility is in an early phase of a change process (the parts Rogers [2003] and Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente [1994] dubbed “pre-contemplative, contemplative, and preparation”) but it is apparent that the change efforts will require more attention to issues of organizational culture and organizational support for skill development in staff’s ability to assume a prosocial role with inmates. Gendreau and colleagues (1999) remind us that factors influencing staff (i.e., culture) may facilitate or constrain innovation. This is a critical part of change processes, even when the change mission seems clear. While management may have made a decision to convert this facility to a humanistic reentry facility, even with training and on-going coaching it appears that staff are in early stages of change and are perhaps precontemplative. They have
yet to decide that the change in orientation will improve the facility or improve their own jobs. One explanation suggested by the data in this article contends that they cannot settle on how the reform will improve because their culture is not ready for change and is in many ways resistant to it. As opposed to traditional studies that note whether or not a reform is implemented, this study provides an understanding of the barriers to reform from the lens of staff working in a facility that is targeted to be changed.

This unready cultural context may also stem from the tension correctional staff face from perceptions of a low sense of equity within correctional facilities. Again, by equity, we are referring to perceived equality and fairness among staff and management rather than regarding race, class or gender issues. Recent research on correctional staff in prisons finds that a moderate to high sense of equity among employees facilitates a more positive work environment (Lambert et al., 2007; Taxman & Gordon, 2009). In environments where employees feel management support combined with peer solidarity and connectedness with the organizational mission, employees are more likely to accept change, have a stronger commitment to the organization, and concur with organizational goals (Taxman & Gordon, 2009). The question is how to achieve this sense of equity. In the present case, correctional employees did not identify with new organizational goals. Instead they often perceived themselves as being treated in a manner that did not warrant loyalty to the organization. Their continued (posttraining) involvement in rule-breaking activities illustrates the degree to which the new reentry reform efforts are unable to affect continued negative treatment of inmates. Correctional employees at this facility did not align with organizational goals, making the workplace an environment where punching in and out took value over making a difference in the lives of reentering offenders. These factors help create or perpetuate a workplace culture where employees are unready and unwilling to change.

This is part of a longitudinal study on the conversion from a work release to a reentry facility. This article represents data collected in the first phase of the project (during and posttraining) where the goals are to measure and understand how the staff perceive the change process. Given the longitudinal design, it is premature to identify tangible suggestions for improving staff adoption of organizational changes at this phase of our research. However, we can note two key contributions from this work. First, methodologically, a notable strength of the present study is the use of a mixed methods approach that combines surveys with observations and interviews. The survey findings reveal various perspectives and challenges in the facility’s conversion, while the qualitative data provide nuanced depth and new information about organizational culture, including change readiness and culture. By feeding back the scenarios identified in this research, it is helpful for management and staff to view the barriers. Using change management practices, the scenarios presented in this paper can help management
contextualize where the change process needs to go. Knowing that survey data cannot tell the whole story illustrates that challenges are not solely a front-end process as Rogers’ diffusion model (2003) suggests. Instead, organizational transformation efforts require prolonged and in-depth focus on communication channels (places for employees to voice opinion) to support innovation, with an emphasis on using existing social networks to reinforce desired behaviors. The mixed methods in our study uncover these issues and illuminate findings that a strictly quantitative design may have overlooked.

Second, our study’s main substantive contribution notes the contextual nature of organizational culture (how a context of readiness and perception influences staff attitudes of and behaviors around reform efforts. By paying heed to the influence of organizational culture on change, we focus attention on staff interactions, where perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge wield tremendous power amidst intense organizational pressures and tensions noting the limitations of even multiple doses of pretested training. We expand upon Gendreau and colleagues’ (1999) suggestion that correctional culture can undermine new initiatives by pointing out which aspects matter most in particular organizational environments (i.e., staff attitudes, understandings, and perceptions).

Further, findings from the present study also suggest a need for additional research in three areas: (a) role change and conflict, (b) employee resistance, and (c) organizational culture. First, as defined by Turner (1990), role change occurs after a new role emerges or a former role dissolves. Turner suggests that role changes occur quantitatively via addition or subtraction of rights, duties, power, prestige, salience, substitution, and/or reinterpretation of meaning. Likewise, role conflict consists of the “concurrent appearance of two or more incompatible expectations for the behavior of a person” (Biddle, 1986, p. 82). Role change and conflict are natural outgrowths of organizational environments where mission/goal change occurs. In penal institutions, role change is common whenever the organization adopts a diversified or changed philosophy, such as the switch from a punishment to a rehabilitation ideology. Studying and addressing role changes and conflicts in these environments may provide a glimpse of some of the nuances of change processes that are not generally visible. These insights may illuminate some of the black-box issues regarding organizational change and implementation processes, such as how change occurs or is stifled among street-level workers—sometimes before it ever really gets started.

Second, prior scholarship on occupational resistance by employees details change-averse behaviors and actions that can retard or impede organizational change processes (Collinson, 1994; Rosigno & Hodson, 2004). Existing on a continuum from total compliance to complete, overt non-compliance, occupational resistance involves a variety of employee-spurred
tactics, including monkey-wrenching, foot-dragging, tacit noninvolvement, and sabotage. Qualitative or mixed method approaches are useful for garnering information regarding employee resistance strategies in general, and are particularly useful when studying organizational change processes during periods of reform. Understanding resistance may provide organizations leverage when facing it, allowing changes to occur despite resistance or by dealing with resistance first and then implementing reform.

Finally, the elephant in the room in studies of workplace change is organizational culture. This study demonstrates how quantitative, survey-based mechanisms of assessing readiness for change and organizational culture only represent a surface-level grab at deeply embedded cultural processes and ideologies at work within organizational environments. Schein (1992) defined group culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (pp. 373–374).

Schein alluded to the broad-based stronghold organizational culture often has on group relations and behavioral processes in workplace environments. This study’s comparison between non-custodial and custodial staff provides insight into issues related to the change process. This comparison demonstrates that in many instances, noncustodial staff possess more reform-minded responses than custodial staff. This may be reflecting the different responsibilities these actors have within the organization or the different levels and types of trainings they have completed. One key to understanding change is recognizing routines, pre-existing norms, and values among work groups within organizations. This knowledge—best gathered via a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods—produces a powerful map for future organizational directions. That is, if you know where the points of interest and the potholes (challenges) are before you take off, it is logical (and easier) to drive to the interesting places while navigating around the troubled areas, yielding a much more successful and productive journey.

This study is not without its limitations. The first wave of survey data and the qualitative data do not depict the entire change process. Rather it only provides a glimpse of the first 12 months of the effort. Second, the methods do not examine how leadership addressed and responded to the change process (see Lerch, James-Andrews, Eley, & Taxman, 2009). Finally, the observations were limited in timeframe and did not involve a sustained ethnographic design. As a result, we need more research before additional conclusions can be accurately drawn.
CONCLUSION

The field is bursting with emphasis on adopting evidence-based practices in an attempt to reduce recidivism and churning through the system. More importantly, the political arena perceives evidence-based practices for prisoner reentry as the Holy Grail for reducing the costs of corrections. This study pinpoints seldom-addressed issues regarding the adoption of evidence-based practices. Namely, it suggests challenging organizational culture is necessary in order to adopt new techniques. Mere programs like cognitive-behavioral therapy, therapeutic community, reentry, and so on may be undermined by failing to create a organizational milieu where changing offenders and improving the likelihood of postrelease success is possible. Stated more simply, a program can operate independently, but individuals within organizations most often change based on reinforcements from their environment. The major reinforcers within a correctional facility are the behaviors of the staff, case managers, and other routine actors. Quick fixes to implement evidence-based practices are likely to result in faulty implementation unless more attention focuses on the contextual factors that allow routinization of innovation.

NOTES

1. For more on the stages of change, including the initial three we consider in this article (precontemplative, contemplative, preparation), see Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente (1994).
2. Although we note some differences in the quantitative data between custodial and noncustodial staff, these changes are difficult to flesh out because there are so few noncustodial staff in this facility. Thus, we refer to “staff” more generally in other sections of the article. We include survey and observational/interview results to show how comparable the two categories of workers are.
3. Note that unlike many U.S. correctional facilities inmates in this facility are nearly 90% Black, making issues of racial power dynamics less obvious than in most American prisons where the percentage of Black and White inmates are generally more equal, with inmates from other racial groups also present.
4. We use pseudonyms in place of all subjects’ names in this article to ensure the confidentiality of study participants.
5. Findings and conclusions presented in this article represent the first wave of survey data (two additional waves have been completed at this writing) and the first wave of qualitative fieldwork (follow-up fieldwork—two-years postreform-implementation—is currently underway.) As such, we present important methodological lessons learned in this article but save suggestions for organizational reform for subsequent article when additional data is included in our analysis.

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