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CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A Desert Waters Publication

FEBRUARY 2023

From The Director's Desk

Research Bench: Job Design And
Intrinsic Motivation

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Changing Prison Mindsets

In Memoriam



Volume:20
Issue:2



A non-profit for the health of correctional agencies, staff and families

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

It's already February! Just about one month ago, some among us may have made resolutions to institute changes in our lives, often for health reasons or to help improve our lot in other ways, such as relationally or financially.

Looking back on these resolutions, the red-hot enthusiasm may have started to fade by now, as old habits claim squatters' rights, and fight vehemently against the threat of eviction.

My experience taught me that the way to succeed in making some of these changes in ways that "stick" and endure over time, is to re-focus on my target whenever I realize that I reverted to the old behavior. Whether I made changes rapidly, like throwing a switch, or taken the "slow and steady, one small step at a time" approach, the key for me is to zero in on getting back on track when I find myself veering off. Dusting myself off and getting back on track. And the increased number of repetitions of the new habit over time eventually starts solidifying new behaviors for me.

If you relate to any of this, I encourage you to continue persevering in your practicing your new and healthier behaviors, while also being kind with and patient towards yourself. Reprogramming our minds and brains for the better usually is time-consuming work, but it also is so very much worth it!

And I leave you with timeless advice on the subject offered by Mark Twain:

"You can't break a bad habit by throwing it out the window. You've got to walk it slowly down the stairs."

Caterina Spinaris



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RESEARCH BENCH: JOB DESIGN AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION, PART 1

BY GREG MORTON, MS

This article series will look at corrections work with a wide-angle lens. Sometimes correctional officers say their job is “90% boredom and 10% panic,” signifying the unpredictable bounce between the daily routine and life-threatening events that results in Corrections Fatigue. We train to respond to the 10%, but we ignore the remaining 90% as not worth the effort to address. This article series will do the opposite – address that 90% for the purpose of filling this portion of the job with work that is intrinsically motivating, so that the inherent challenges of corrections work, if not entirely eliminated, are at least reduced. Supervisors, take notice!

(“Intrinsic motivation is when you are motivated by personal satisfaction or enjoyment instead of external factors like reward or punishment.” healthline.com)

Is it possible to design a job so that the motivation to successfully complete it on a daily basis is built into the very makeup of the occupation?

Forty years ago, two social scientists said “Yes,” and demonstrated how it could be done. In 1980, J. Richard Hackman and Greg R. Oldham of Yale and the University of Illinois, respectively, published their thoughts on their Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) in their book, “Work Redesign.”¹

Their work transformed the assembly line practice of trying to maximize employee productivity with repetitive and simple tasks, since it had become clear that excessively simplified routines actually led to dissatisfaction and sloppy productivity. Instead, they examined the duties of a job from the worker’s point of view based on a belief that commitment and motivation rather than simplicity and routine lead to greater outcomes. The commitment we give to our off-duty hobbies is proof of their fundamental idea.

According to this model, there are five governing characteristics that should be intentionally designed into an occupation in order to increase the motivational content of the work itself. These five characteristics are intended to be objectively measurable and distinct, and able to be customized within the work people are assigned to do.

As we go through those five characteristics, take two steps back and look at your job, scoring the work you do in each area.

1. **Skill Variety:** Whether a job requires the worker to develop a variety of skills and talents. This is the opposite of the routine and simplified job design. Meaningfulness in jobs requires some degree of challenge to the worker, not too much to be stressful, but not too little either.
2. **Task Identity:** Whether the job allows you to identify and complete a task or function with a visible outcome. Having a piece of work that has an obvious beginning and end so that you can see your hands-on contribution to the outcome enhances the meaning we assign to it.
3. **Task Significance:** Whether the job affects and improves the lives of other people. These may be in the external environment or in the immediate work environment, including your colleagues.
4. **Autonomy:** Whether the job offers you significant judgment and discretion to plan the work and determine your procedures, or whether the job is standardized so that decision-making is outside your control. This is true for both small decisions and large ones, and for both your successes and your failures.
5. **Feedback:** Whether the job itself gives clear, specific information about the effectiveness of your performance. When you receive well-defined information about your work performance, you can judge your own effectiveness and what you need to do to improve. The obvious analogies are physical ones: the basketball players want to make the shot and know immediately if they did or not. Their team knows whether they won or lost. The carpenter knows if they have measured and cut correctly. The outcome feedback is built into the effort itself.

These five dimensions relate to three separate psychological states: Meaningfulness, Responsibility, and Awareness of Effectiveness. Enhancing these three psychological states also enhances the inherent motivational potency of the work itself. Absence of any of the three can cause an employee's internal motivation to wither, dry up.

SO WHAT: There is a lot of talk these days about the inherently challenging and unhealthy characteristics of corrections work and the fatiguing consequences that arise out of doing that work day after day (and night after night). And so far, many of the proposed answers to those problems fall on the shoulders of the individual employee – create a positive social support network, look for personal growth in the challenges you have overcome, reduce your chemical intake, have a life outside of work, get sufficient rest, do your breathing exercises, practice mindfulness. And while those are all necessary and important, what if there are “bigger picture forces” that should be addressed as well? What if there are “top-down,” systemic work conditions that could be modified so that the work itself was more inherently motivating, and the inherent job challenges, if not eliminated, are at least reduced?

Years ago, a veteran correctional employee and I were talking about the purpose and meaning of corrections work. He told me, “At its best, corrections work is sacred work. Very few other places in life give workers the opportunity to change the lives of the people they work with as much as correctional employees have that opportunity.” He was an institutional Alcohol and Drug administrator, and of course he was talking about the changed lives of the incarcerated individuals who successfully completed their programs and created

improved futures for themselves. If this degree of meaningfulness and significance was true for him and the work he did, I have wondered if it could be true for more of us.

And if it could, what would make it so? The JCT job design model provides some answers to that question. Research conducted by Michigan State University reported that perceived Task Significance (the extent to which the job affects other people's lives) of international airport security personnel was the single strongest predictor of job motivation for that profession.² This matches the public safety aspiration that many correctional employees feel when they put on their uniforms and go to work. Emphasizing that characteristic on a regular basis during the workday could have the effect of changing the "90% boring" perspective to "90% effective" and "90% valuable," since the absence of unusual incidents is actually a sign of correctional success, not the opposite.

And not surprisingly, the JCT model also offers us some substantial challenges. How do we increase employee autonomy when facilities work best when their schedules are fixed, policies are to be followed, and procedures are set? And how do we improve our feedback measures when successfully released offenders just blend into society?

In the present environment, our professional feedback is often based on visible reminders of human disappointment through recidivism or program failure. Human success is overlooked.

Part 2 in the next issue of the Correctional Oasis will address those questions.

Hint: It may be difficult, but it can be done. It just requires a different view and different organization of the actual tasks of the job.³

References

¹ Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1980). *Work Redesign*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

² Demirkol, I. C., & Nalla, M. K. (2018). Predicting job satisfaction and motivation of aviation security personnel: a test of job characteristics theory. *Security Journal*, 31, 901-923. DOI:10.1057/s41284-018-0137-2

³ Sonnentag, S. (2017). A task-level perspective on work engagement: a new approach that helps to differentiate the concepts of engagement and burnout. *Burnout Research*, 5, 12-20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2017.04.001>



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WHY DWCO IS BUILDING SAFETY NET

BY DAVID TAYLOR, MS, CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, & GREGORY MORTON, MS



Safety Net is a research-based and corrections-specific
wholistic staff wellness program.



What's In It for My Corrections Agency?

Potential Benefits of Safety Net Implementation

Desert Waters is in the process of building Safety Net, a research-based and corrections-specific wholistic staff wellness program.

Rigorous implementation of such a program can be beneficial through possible reductions of the likelihood of negative/undesirable organizational outcomes, and possible increases of the likelihood of positive/desirable outcomes.

Here are some potential benefits to agencies of the implementation of a wholistic staff wellness accreditation program such as Safety Net:

- Provision of evidence to staff that administrators truly care, leading to increases in morale boosting and staff retention
- Improvement of the workplace culture, leading to increases in morale boosting and staff retention
- Reduction of costs for sick-leave stemming from the effects of work-related stressors
- Reduction of medical costs related to ailments associated with the effects of work-related stressors

- Reduction of staff misconduct or error due to staff malfunctioning on the job
- Reduction of litigation risks related to staff misconduct
- Protection of staff's mental health
- Reduction of staff suicides
- Protection of staff's physical health
- Protection of staff's family health
- Increased likelihood of staff's healthy functioning in their personal lives
- Reduction of the likelihood of emotional and financial stressors that accompany family breakups – stressors which can drastically affect staff health and functioning on and off the job

What Is Wellness?

Since 9/11 and its aftermath, with often tragic outcomes regarding first responders' physical and psychological health, there has been a growing area of research on the subject of first responder wellness. And since about a decade ago, there has been an increase in research on correctional staff wellness (e.g., Carleton, 2020; Ferdik & Smith, 2017; Spinaris & Brocato, 2019).



Outside of first responder/criminal justice occupational domains, health insurance companies provide preventive education and other wellness resources, and corporations provide incentives for employees who enroll in wellness-promoting programs and activities.

However, even though the term “wellness” is currently highly popular as a goal and as a subject of study (one recent online library search pulled up 200,000 articles on workplace wellness programs alone), it has proven elusive to define and identify exactly how to achieve it.

To illustrate complexities that surround the definition of the term, a recent article on wellness (Weziak-Bialowolska, et al., 2021) lists 12 different wellness papers, each with a slightly different definition or conceptualization.

Given the conceptual complexities of the term wellness in the research literature, it is no surprise that “... there is no clear agreement on the definition of well-being within a corrections environment.” (Evers et al., 2021, p. 5)

In fact, at this point there is no “gold standard” by which to measure correctional staff’s wellness in ways that account for the multiple facets of wellness. Desert Waters’ Corrections Fatigue Assessment is one measure that begins to tap into and quantify complexities of the concept of correctional staff wellness occupationally, health-wise and regarding home/family life. Nevertheless, unified agreement on the definition of wellness remains elusive.

Related to the lack of a gold standard for correctional staff wellness is the lack of a profession-wide accepted model that explains the impact of occupational stressors on correctional staff over time. Desert Waters’ Corrections Fatigue Process

Model is the most widely data-supported theoretical model to date that explains these phenomena.

As has been noted by researchers, “This lack of specificity regarding occupational wellness in the corrections domain has been recognized in the relevant literature, and was juxtaposed with the acknowledgment that, despite this lack of clarity, the importance of employee well-being is undiminished, both for the employer and the employee (MacKian, 2009).” (Evers et al., 2021, pp. 5-6.)

It is in recognition of the undeniable importance of correctional employee and correctional organizational wellness, that Desert Waters has embarked on the journey to offer a staff wellness accreditation program for correctional agencies.

Given the conceptual complexities of the term wellness, it is a welcome fact that the federal agency named the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) operationalized the definition of wellness as being healthy or “well enough” along eight dimensions that affect our overall wellness.

These dimensions are identified by SAMHSA to be the Emotional, Physical, Occupational, Intellectual, Financial, Social, Environmental, and Spiritual dimensions. According to this framework, wellness is pursued by pursuing all of them holistically – in a whole person way, and, by doing, so improving our quality of life.

An examination of the existing literature leads us to conclude that SAMHSA's framework of eight dimensions is currently the best established and most widely recognized wellness model to most comprehensively address areas of life that impact wellness. SAMHSA's framework seems to be the closest we have to best practice, and this provides

the rational basis for its adoption and use in Desert Waters' accreditation program.

Why Correctional Staff Wellness?

Research during the last decades or so indicates that correctional staff in general, and custody/security staff in particular, suffer from symptoms related to mental disorders, such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, suicidal thinking and suicide rates, at rates multiple times those of the general population, and even higher than those of other first responders (Lehrman, 2017; Spinaris & Brocato, 2019; Spinaris et al., 2012). They also suffer physical ill-health, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol (Morse et al., 2011) at rates significantly higher than those of the general population.

Naturally, those levels of lack of wellness negatively impact corrections staff's functioning both in their personal and in their professional lives (Spinaris et al., 2012).

In response to these findings, many correctional agencies have started to implement wellness-oriented programming, and offer wellness-related resources to their employees and perhaps also to their families.

Why An Accreditation Program For Correctional Staff Wellness?

Review of wellness efforts provided by correctional agencies may show that these programs might have been selected after careful deliberation and consultation with other agencies, with various stakeholders, and/or with subject matter experts.

However, since staff wellness is a relatively new field in corrections, and given the plethora of perspectives on what wellness is and how it can be attained, sometimes staff wellness efforts may be

implemented for reasons other than the optimal ones. For example, administrators may approve wellness-related activities simply because another criminal justice or other first responder agency is using such activities; because they are "low-hanging fruit" – easy or affordable to implement regardless of established relevance to the agency or proven effectiveness; because they are the "flavor of the month" – popular at this point in time; because they are someone's "pet project," or in order to "check the box" for the latest agency or legislative requirement.

When this happens, such programs might have several strikes against them from the start. They may not be data-driven/science-based; may not be backed by agency policy; may not address key wellness areas; may not include input from all stakeholders, including front line staff, their families, and labor unions, and thus may not address currently identified staff needs; may not involve sufficient resources to address identified staff needs; may not evaluate the effectiveness of wellness programming; and may not be sustainable due to funding termination or administrative changes.

Why Safety Net?

Desert Waters recognizes the complexities inherent in the pursuit of wellness in correctional workplaces. These complexities are at least three-fold: (a) complexity of the construct of wellness, (b) complexities related to correctional occupational stressors and their interactions, and (c) complexities regarding how to practically address staff's wellness needs in effective ways.

These complexities require approaches to the pursuit of correctional staff wellness that are strategically multi-faceted, chosen based on research data and implemented according to research data and best practices, culture-specific and/or otherwise customized, and periodically evaluated for effectiveness.

Desert Waters also recognizes that correctional organizational wellness programming requires interventions into the multiple areas that may contribute to employee stress and that promote employee resilience and organizational health from three angles: (a) **bottom up** (what individual employees can do to help themselves), (b) **horizontally** (how employees interact with coworkers and with the justice-involved persons they manage), and (c) **top down** (what policies and administrative procedures are in place to support staff wellness).

These complexities show us that wellness is more than just a program, a policy, or a resource. Taking a “wholistic” (derived from the word whole, encompassing all) approach to correctional staff wellness, as guided by SAMHSA, means that we consider “traditional” areas related to wellness, such as burnout and responses to trauma. We also consider agency values (formal and informal), agency policies, the work environment, leadership styles and practices, nutrition, physical activity, staff’s safety – physically as well as psychologically, work-home balance, spiritual health, and financial health. And we also address changing wellness needs of staff across various stages of their career.

Similarly, as was stated earlier, there are many dimensions of life that contribute to wellness, and not all will be relevant to every person, team or agency to the same degree or at all times. Focusing on only a few areas or dimensions of wellness cannot accomplish the intended goals of promoting staff wellbeing.

That is why Desert Waters has chosen to build its staff wellness accreditation standards “wholistically” (for the whole person) on the foundation of SAMHSA’s eight dimensions of wellness, and to build its wellness standards within this framework based on the most recent research data, and aimed to

address bottom-up, horizontal, and top-down wellness-related issues.

And that is why Desert Waters calls its program, Safety Net, a Wholistic Staff Wellness Accreditation Program.

Safety Net aims to address these problematic areas by aspiring to provide a data-driven, methodical, system-wide, and comprehensive approach to corrections staff wellness programming.

Reaching into all areas of an agency and its personnel that affect employee wellbeing, Safety Net presents a set of guidelines – a type of road map and a blueprint – for the construction, evaluation, and gradual expansion of corrections wellness programs. This blueprint is based on data-driven, state-of-the-art practices, on input from stakeholders, and on periodic assessment of program effectiveness, and with the intent to provide regular future updates as warranted by new research.

The overarching goal of Safety Net is to provide correctional agencies with comprehensive guidelines, through standards based on SAMHSA’s 8 Dimensions of Wellness, to structure wellness programs that provide staff with social support systems and resources based on currently existing best practices and the most recent research evidence.

Doing so as prescribed can be expected to help improve not only employee wellbeing, but also the agencies’ operations, helping them get closer to fulfilling their mission.

David Taylor retired in 2014 after a 31-year career in law enforcement and corrections. Since then, he has worked as a consultant, helping agencies with training, policy development, and accreditation preparation. David came out of retirement for most of 2020, just in time to add “pandemic management”

to his resume. His retirement mantra is “out of the line of fire, but helping those who are still in it.”

Gregory Morton started his career at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) as an academic counselor in the mid-1970s, and then served as OSP’s Staff Training Coordinator for eleven years. He was the department’s Staff Training/Professional

Development Administrator, and Labor Relations Administrator until retirement. He has been a Master Instructor in Desert Waters courses since 2013. He holds a Master’s degree in Industrial/ Organizational Psychology. Concern for the health and skills of the corrections workforce has been his motivation throughout.

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Why We Use The Term “Justice-Involved Person”

By David Taylor, MSc

At Desert Waters, we choose to use the term “justice-involved person” when referring to people in the criminal justice system because it is the most comprehensive term to date.

Currently, there is no other single term in corrections that covers everyone involved in this system.

In my old department, we had some offenders (the term that we used there at the time) who were convicted, and others who had findings of guilt held in abeyance pending supervision. In pre-trial settings, everyone is accused but not adjudicated. Using the term “justice-involved person” covers all settings, as opposed to using a multitude of terms like Inmate / Prisoner / Detainee / Offender / Client / Probationer / Parolee / Arrested person still presumed innocent.



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CHANGING PRISON MINDSETS

BY JEANNA MOSCHENROSE, PHD

No cell phones or personal calls. More security checks. Remove your coat and possibly our shoes when entering the workplace. No jewelry. No open toe shoes. No reading material, not even for lunchtime, unless directly related to your job, and determined by the one checking for security. Stay at your desk even when you have finished your work or when appointments are postponed due to an incarcerated person's meal schedule. Do not use computers for anything personal. Do not check in even one minute early in the time clock. Check out on time even if you have work that needs to be finished. Christmas decorations are limited and must meet requirements. Even coffee cups must meet requirements.

Certainly, there must be rules for security reasons, but are we allowing the prison culture to affect our minds and our lives more than we realize?

I frequently hear staff say things like, "One day closer to Friday." "I've only got two more years (or six more years, or eight more years) until retirement." Who is really in prison here? Is it only the offenders? Are many staff experiencing life like doing prison time too? Are we just getting through the day without realizing that this day will never come again? This week will have another 168 hours of life that will never be repeated.

So what do we do? How do we change this passive, negative attitude in the workplace? Why are we so exhausted at the end of the day that we have little energy left for doing something else?

There has to be more to life than just going to work, going home, doing routine tasks, getting on social media, paying the bills. Does it not seem like the time goes fast? It's Monday. Then suddenly, it's Friday, and the next month on the calendar.

Could it be that there are prison mindsets that limit us, that keep us from reaching out and doing more, from having a more interesting, happier, more meaningful life?

What are prison mindsets? It could be thinking that this is the way it is, and will always be that way – and I can't change it. It could be hopelessness or helplessness, feelings of insecurity, fear or rejection or failure, or thinking it is too late, or you're just too old, settling for life as it is instead of reaching out to create the life you really want.

Can life be more enjoyable? It will take a changed attitude and mindset. Maybe some risk-taking and trying new things or picking up some hobbies or interests that you have been neglecting for a while.

One way to break free of a prison mindset is by asking yourself some questions. When was the last time you thought about your life, your schedule, your values – what you REALLY want to do? How long has it been since you finished a creative project or read a good book or listened to a different type of music or learned about something that truly interested you? Are there things you would like to do that you haven't made time to do? Is there someone you need to contact to reconnect with and revive a friendship?

Gratitude is another way to break free of a prison mindset. Be thankful for simple things like gardens and beautiful flowers in the summer, and sparkling snow in the winter. A good morning greeting from a colleague, a positive conversation with a friend, a great new flavor of coffee, good health, fresh air, being able to walk, a good lunch, a safe drive to and from work, a beautiful sunrise or sunset, trees in different seasons, a steady paycheck.

Life is passing us by – fast. There’s a whole world beyond our prison job sites, a world of people, places to go, things to learn about, new experiences to enjoy.

Now is the time. Today is your opportunity, and this day will never come again. Break free of prison mindsets, and go for the life you really want.

Jeanna Moschenrose, PhD, has worked in mental health at a Department of Corrections for 11 years, and also works with several transitional centers. Jeanna give thanks and credit to God for inspiration.



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IN MEMORIAM

Lawrence Prather,
Corrections Officer,
New Hampshire Department of Corrections

Caleb Michael Sandidge,
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Colorado Department of Corrections



Quote of the Month

““You must unlearn what
you have learned.”

Yoda

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DWCO Mission

Advancing the well-being of correctional staff and their families, and the health of correctional agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training

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