

Correctional work supervisor leadership and credibility: Their influence on offender work motivation

Research has indicated that many offenders have little or no work experience.⁽²⁾ Further, two thirds of the offenders surveyed in a recent study⁽³⁾ stated that their needs arose from a lack of education and employment skills.

It has, therefore, been argued that steady employment during incarceration is instrumental to offender development of the work habits and values necessary for successful community employment.⁽⁴⁾

Offenders have echoed these sentiments.⁽⁵⁾

In addition to the skills promoted or imparted by a particular correctional employment program, the resulting positive attitudes and behaviours displayed by offenders may vary in accordance with the work supervisor's leadership style (such as the promotion of work skills or positive work attitudes).

Several studies have examined a number of such characteristics in therapeutic settings, but few have examined these characteristics among correctional work supervisors. One of the few corrections-focused studies found that offender work supervisors trained in "transformational" leadership were able to enhance offender productivity, skills development, work habits and personal growth.⁽⁶⁾

This article evaluates the impact of work supervisors' leadership behaviour, perceived credibility and performance, based on offender self-report measures of work motivation, job involvement, the extra effort they were willing to exert and their punctuality for work. Methodology In an attempt to examine a variety of correctional work supervisor leadership styles, supervisors and offenders were sampled from seven Correctional Service of Canada institutions. A multi-source assessment approach was used to assess the impact of supervisor attributes on offender work motivation, incorporating measures obtained from work supervisors, offenders and work supervisor managers. Thirty-five work supervisors, 143 offenders and seven managers completed self-report questionnaires.

Supervisor leadership styles were examined using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire,⁽⁷⁾ which assesses transactional, transformational and nonleadership behaviour.

Transactional leaders reward employees for attaining predetermined objectives and punish for failure to achieve such goals. Transformational leaders go beyond the transactional relationship by encouraging employees to strive for additional goals and interests - don't just meet goals, achieve your best. Transformational leaders tend, therefore, to inspire and motivate employees by promoting shifts in attitudes, beliefs, values and needs. Nonleadership behaviour refers to a laissez-faire, or more passive approach.

The questionnaire also examines organizational outcome measures, such as the extra effort made by employees.

Offenders must perceive correctional staff as credible for correctional intervention to be effective. Credibility (which involves trust, inspiration and competence) is also essential to effective leadership.⁽⁸⁾ Given the potential impact of work supervisor credibility on employee motivation, this study also

measured the perceived credibility of supervisors.

Supervisors and offenders completed the leadership questionnaire, while just the offenders assessed the perceived credibility of supervisors. In addition, offenders completed measures designed to assess their work motivation - including intrinsic job motivation, the meaningfulness of their work, responsibility for work outcomes and job involvement. Offender punctuality ratings compiled by supervisors provided a concrete, behavioural measure of motivation.

Finally, managers completed a short questionnaire that examined supervisor effectiveness in obtaining extra effort from the offenders in their shop and increasing shop productivity. This questionnaire was a modified version of the supervisor leadership questionnaire. Leadership style does have an impact. A series of analyses were used to explore the relationship between supervisor leadership behaviour and credibility and offender work attitudes. The results indicate that offenders who rated their work supervisors as transformational leaders had more positive work attitudes and greater work motivation.

More specifically, supervisors who displayed transformational exerted a positive influence on the amount of extra effort offenders were willing to make (see Figure 1), work motivation, job involvement, and offender punctuality ratings.

In contrast, offenders who rated their supervisors as displaying passive, nonleadership behaviour reported lower work motivation, job involvement and less willingness to exert extra effort.

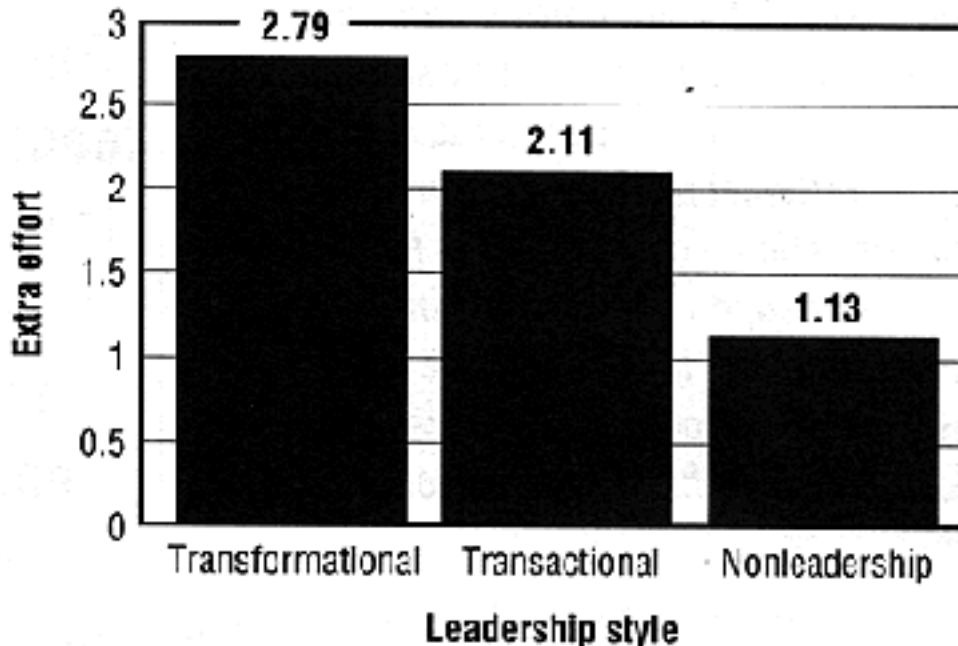
Nonleadership behaviour was, however, unrelated to punctuality ratings. Supervisors rated as transactional had no impact on offender motivational outcomes or punctuality ratings.

Similar to supervisors with transformational leadership, those perceived as credible were associated with higher work motivation, job involvement and extra effort. However, credible supervisors had no impact on offender punctuality ratings.

Manager ratings of supervisor effectiveness (with offenders) yielded perhaps the strongest findings, as they provided an objective measure of supervisor performance related to offender outcome. Specifically, supervisor effectiveness was found to be related to the extra effort offenders were willing to make, as well as to punctuality ratings (the behavioural indicator of offender motivation).

Figure 1

The Amount of Extra Effort Offenders Were Willing to Make and Supervisor Leadership Style



This study, therefore, indicates that leadership style differentially affects self-report and behavioural measures of offender work motivation. Further, the work supervisors perceived as transformational leaders by offenders were also supervisors that offenders saw as credible, demonstrating a potential link between transformational leadership, perceived credibility and offender motivation. Important links This study investigated an area that has, thus far, received little attention. Previous research on correctional staff focused primarily on staff perceptions of, and attitudes toward, working with offenders. The results of this study are meaningful because they indicate that correctional industry and correctional staff do have an impact on offenders.

Although correctional industrial shops are typically skills oriented, everyday interaction with supervisors influences offender attitudes and behaviours. This study suggests that important links exist between correctional staff characteristics and offender outcomes, which have definite practical implications for staff selection and training as correctional agencies look to provide effective correctional intervention.

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