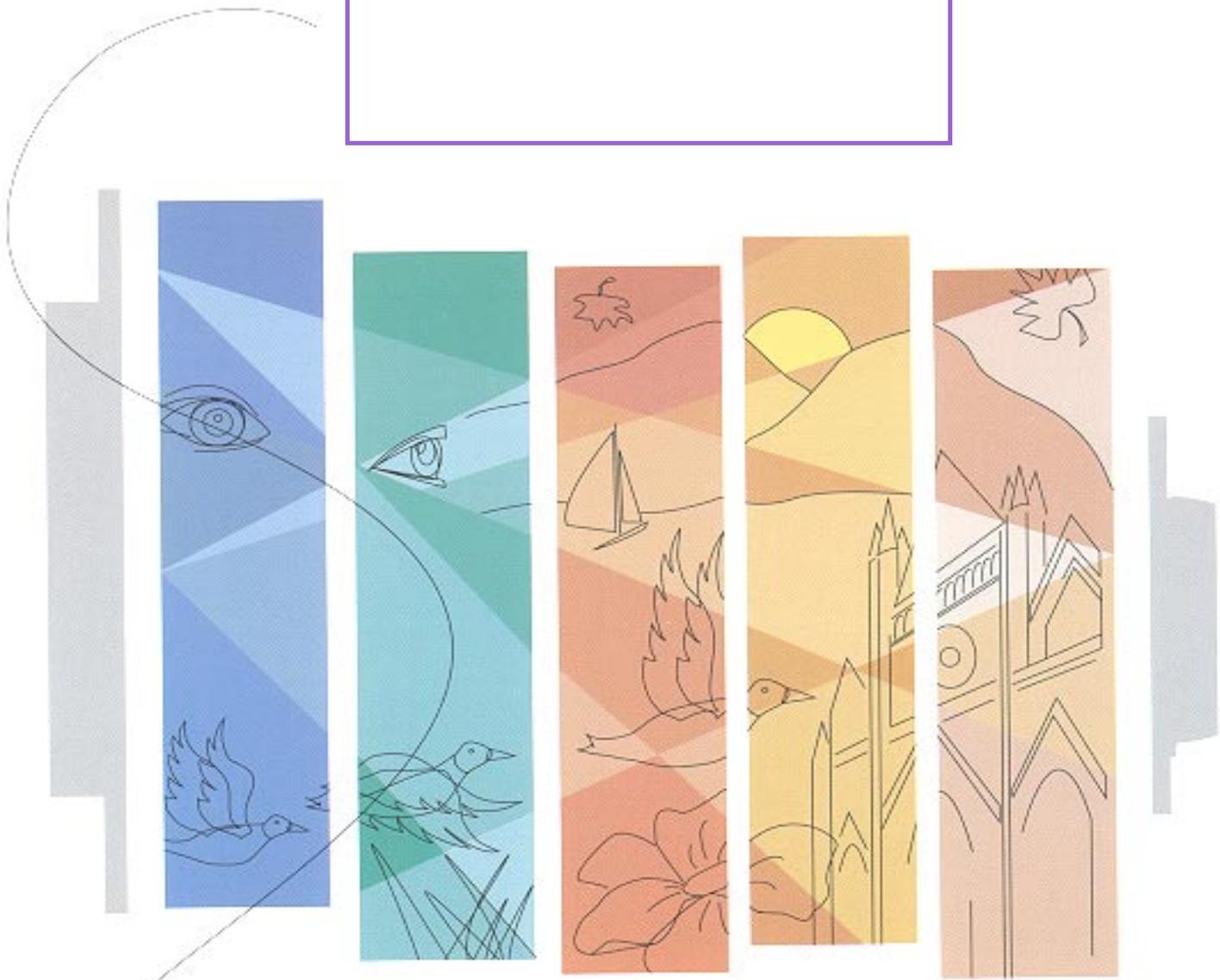




Research Branch  
Direction de la recherche

Corporate Development  
Développement organisationnel

**Background to the Staff Commitment  
Research Project**



# **Background to the Staff Commitment Research Project**

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This report is also available in French. Ce rapport est également disponible en Français. It is available from the Communications Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.

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## Introduction

This report outlines the rationale for the Staff Commitment Study and describes the basic research instruments which were used to collect data. The findings from this study are reported in Robinson, Porporino, and Simourd (1992)..

Research activity in corrections has primarily revolved around offender-based issues. Correctional researchers have invested much of their efforts in attempts to identify characteristics of offenders that impact on a variety of correctional outcomes (e.g., readmission, reconviction, institutional adjustment). However, we are beginning to recognize the need to examine other subjects within correctional settings that may be relevant to our organizational goals. Specifically, research on staff issues has been relatively neglected in the Correctional Service of Canada and in the field of corrections more generally. While there is a large research literature on correctional officers in the United States (Philliber, 1987), and some recent inroads have been made on correctional staff research in Canada (Hughes, 1989, Whaler and Gendreau, 1985), it is clear that our knowledge about the motivations, values, and commitments of correctional staff at all levels of the Correctional Service of Canada can be broadened.

The quality of our human resources is a highly relevant subject of inquiry at this juncture in the evolution of the Correctional Service of Canada. This is especially true given that the Service has recently embraced such an ambitious correctional agenda in its Mission. An important condition of our success is the commitment of our staff to the goals and objectives that have been articulated. The Mission is unequivocal with regard to the importance of staff in achieving our organizational objectives. The priority assigned to staff is clearly reflected in the statement of Core Value 3 that "our strength and our major resource in achieving our objectives is our staff and that human relationships are the cornerstone of our endeavour".

Implicit in the Mission is the notion that in order to pursue the challenging correctional objectives regarding the reintegration of offenders as law-abiding citizens, we must have a highly committed and motivated staff. The belief that staff can be mobilized to meet our demanding correctional agenda raises a number of research questions about the current levels of energy and enthusiasm among staff, and the particular target groups that should become the focus of staff development interventions.

At the broadest level, the purpose of the proposed study is to measure the overall commitment of our staff to the Correctional Service of Canada and to the type of work demanded in corrections. The research will also include an investigation of a number of attitude, personality, and organizational variables which may be associated with variation in levels of staff commitment.

Knowledge gained from research on staff commitment will inform two primary areas of staff development: recruitment and training. In terms of recruitment procedures, the study should provide some direction on how we can increase the fit between person and work environment in the selection of staff. In this way we will be in a better position to recruit individuals who are well-suited to correctional work. This knowledge will enhance our efforts at building and sustaining a committed and well-motivated staff. The findings should also help us tailor staff training programs to our current human resource needs. This applies to the design of pre-service employment training programs as well as our on-going in-service training endeavours. In addition, a greater understanding of the dynamics of staff commitment will provide information that may positively influence the procedures we employ to supervise the large complement of staff who work directly with offenders.

We have much to learn from research that has already been conducted on staff in a variety of occupational groups. In particular, there is a wealth of measurement instruments available to operationalize a variety of staff variables that have been found to be related to organizational outcomes.

Although we can learn a great deal from the existing body of research knowledge in the field of industrial/organizational psychology, it is also important that we conduct new research within our own setting. Past research has shown that there are differences in personality types across different career settings (Schneider, 1985), and that findings about one career group may not necessarily generalize to another group. Since it is likely that certain types of people are attracted to correctional settings, it is important that we generate research knowledge that is specific to correctional settings along various organizational variables such as social climate, organizational structure and job stress.

## Research on Staff Commitment.

Staff commitment, particularly organizational commitment, has emerged as a promising area of research within the study of industrial/organizational psychology. To a large extent, interest in the study of commitment has replaced an earlier emphasis on job satisfaction (Schneider, 1985). The latter construct was perceived as a logical correlate to job performance, with a popular hypothesis being that job performance would increase as workers became more satisfied with their work (Schwab and Cummings, 1970). However, reviews of the literature have consistently concluded that the relationship between job performance and job satisfaction is not strong. Despite the large number of studies that have attempted to address the question, researchers have described the relationship between performance and satisfaction as "illusory" (Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985).

Although there has been some ambiguity surrounding the broad construct of work commitment (Salancik, 1977), there appears to be some theoretical consensus and convergence of empirical findings about "organizational commitment" (Tett and Meyer, 1989, Morrow, 1983, Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979). Organizational commitment has been used to refer to three aspects of staff attitudes (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979):

- the extent to which an employee demonstrates a strong desire to remain a member of the organization;
- the degree of willingness to exert high levels of effort for the organization;
- belief in and acceptance of the major values and goals of the organization.

While the above definitions stress the attitudinal components of commitment suggesting a bond or allegiance between the individual and the organization, behavioural aspects of commitment have also been identified. Salancik (1977) has argued that commitment must be manifested not only in attitudes but also in actions. Organ and his colleagues (Bateman and Organ, 1983) refer to these behaviours as "employee citizenship" behaviours. In particular, they point to indicators of performance which go beyond the normal requirements of the job, such as helping co-workers with job-related problems, tolerating temporary impositions without complaint, and cooperating in times of crisis.

Research on staff commitment has been very promising. With regard to organizational commitment, Tett and Meyer (1989) have reviewed a large number of studies that focused on the relationship between staff commitment and a number of organizational outcomes. They discovered strong relationships between staff commitment and both job satisfaction and job turnover. Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) also found a relationship between organizational commitment and rates of absenteeism. Hence, the available research suggests that employees who exhibit organizational commitment are:

- happier at their work;
- spend less time away from their jobs;
- are less likely to leave the organization.

There have also been studies linking organizational commitment to job performance. Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) summarized positive findings from studies of two different occupational groups (hospital and retail employees). More recently, in a Canadian sample of managers in the food service industry, Meyer et al., (1989) found organizational commitment to be related to supervisor ratings of job performance and promotability.

An important finding is that organizational commitment is not an enduring trait or stable characteristic over the life course of an individual (Morrow, 1983). Given that commitment is associated with a number of important organizational concerns, it is valuable to note its determinants. After reviewing the literature on organizational commitment, Morrow (1983) concluded that commitment is a function of personal characteristics and situational factors related to the job setting. Personal characteristics include factors such as age, tenure, and education, whereas situational factors involve areas such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and organizational climate. Reportedly, it is the situational factors not the personal factors that explain most of the variation in commitment (Morrow, 1983). An important implication of this finding is that commitment is amenable to influence by the organization.

Morrow has also examined the types of interventions that could be employed to increase the level of commitment among employees. The available research suggests that pre and early job socialization procedures, job enrichment strategies including task identity and feedback, the establishment of norms of reciprocity between staff and organizations, and the maintenance of rewards expectancies are among the interventions found to be effective in increasing

commitment. The research literature on motivation and organizational productivity also suggests that interventions of this type are highly effective when used to increase the level of output of organizationally relevant behaviours (Katzell and Thompson, 1990; Guzzo, 1988).

## Predictors of Staff Commitment

There may be a number of organizational and personal characteristics that have an impact on staff commitment in correctional settings. In terms of organizational variables, job categories (e.g., administrative, security, case management, educational programs) may be relevant to the levels of commitment demonstrated in our organization. For example, the degree of contact between staff and offenders inherent in particular jobs in both institutional and community settings may effect the level of enthusiasm and motivation staff bring to their correctional roles. Additional factors might include role status, salary levels, degree of autonomy over work, whether or not supervisory duties are involved in work roles, and the level of exposure to on-going training and staff development opportunities. Other pertinent organizational factors might include the institutional security classification and levels of stress in the work environment.

A number of personal characteristics recognized as important in the theoretical and empirical literature on organizational behaviour are also likely to influence staff commitment. There may be additional factors which are very specific to the prediction of commitment in corrections. Staff demographic characteristics, work values and attitudes toward the job, job and organizational climate perceptions, and personality variables may be among the factors that are relevant. A variety of instruments for measuring these possible correlates of staff commitment are available.

Demographic variables that should be taken into consideration include age, gender, and educational achievement. job history and career history within the Correctional Service of Canada (e.g., seniority, diversity of roles occupied) may also be important.

Numerous facets of work values and job attitudes have been investigated by previous researchers. Included among the constructs that have gained attention is the centrality of work within the individual's overall value system. The latter construct emphasizes the extent to which an individual's self esteem is dependent upon their contribution to the work world. An important construct in the industrial/organizational psychology literature relates to "need for growth". This construct is concerned with the relative importance an individual places on career growth and mobility. job satisfaction has also been examined from a number of different points of view. There are also a variety of indicators referring to job and organizational perceptions which are likely to be

associated with staff commitment. Perceptions regarding the level of promotability inherent in a position, degree of support from supervisory staff, meaningfulness of tasks, clarity of performance expectations, and degree of challenge are examples.

Another attitudinal measure which is particularly relevant to corrections, and may impact on work commitment is "correctional orientation". The latter factor focuses on the extent to which a correctional employee emphasizes a custodial versus rehabilitative attitude toward offenders. More global career orientation factors tapping the individual's endorsement of a human service orientation or preference for a helping career are also potential predictors. Finally, resistance or degree of openness to organizational change is another factor which might have an impact on levels of organization commitment. In particular, the extent to which an employee demonstrates receptivity to innovative ways of doing things, or exhibits open-mindedness to alternative methods of approaching problems are included in this construct.

Finally, there may be specific personality variables that predict organizational commitment among correctional workers. Empathy, anxiety, taste for risk, coping styles, and general well-being may have a bearing on the capacity to become immersed in and committed to correctional work.

## **The Staff Commitment Research Project**

In order to increase our knowledge of the levels and determinants of staff commitment in the Correctional Service of Canada, the research project was designed to survey all staff employed in institutional, community and headquarters operations. The research strategy we adopted relied on the use of an initial pilot study conducted in 3 regions. Based on the outcome of the pilot study, the research design was refined and a national study followed. The pilot approach ensured field input at the research design stage and provided a method of generating staff support for the project. The pilot study was conducted by the Research and Statistics Branch in October 1990.

## **Measures**

In addition to the major criterion of interest, organizational commitment, the study examines three additional organizational outcome measures: job satisfaction, perceptions about job characteristics, and job performance. A number of predictor measures were also incorporated including demographic variables, job/career attitudes and personality variables. Each of the measures are described below in more detail. For the most part, the measures have been validated in previous research. However, for some constructs that are particularly relevant to corrections, new measures were devised for this project by the Research and Statistics Branch. The measures were collected using a questionnaire and an interview.

### **Organizational Commitment**

According to the literature, the instrument of choice for assessing organizational commitment is the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979). Accordingly, this instrument was selected to measure staff commitment in the study. This 15 item questionnaire requires the respondent to answer each item on a 7 point rating scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The OCQ has been validated using data collected in a variety of different organizations and job classifications. A copy of the instrument is appended (Appendix A).

### **Job Satisfaction**

The Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) (Hackman and Oldham, 1975), which yields information on how satisfied and self-motivated an individual is in his/her particular job, was employed. The measure assesses 5 core dimensions of a job including: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Three psychological states that are thought to mediate the relationship between these core dimensions and work outcomes are also assessed. Finally, this measure taps individual need for advancement in the work place (need for growth). The JDS consists of approximately 80 items and involves the use of a 7 point rating scale for each item. During its development, the JDS was administered to individuals in 15 organizations and 100 different jobs.

## **Commitment Behaviours**

Although the OCQ measures organizational commitment primarily at the affective level, we were also interested in assessing behavioural manifestations. Unfortunately, no global measures currently exist for this purpose. Since the notion of "commitment behaviours" is an important concept within the context of this study, a special instrument was designed for this study. The instrument borrows heavily from the work on "organizational citizenship behaviours" by Bateman and Organ (1983).

## **Performance**

There are surprisingly few measures of job performance which have gained acceptance in the industrial/organizational psychology literature. We devised a supervisor rating tool which was similar to the global performance ratings in yearly performance ratings in the Public Service of Canada. The performance ratings address work effort, quality, efficiency, and devotion to tasks. In addition, a parallel version of the "commitment behaviours" measure was also used with supervisors. Supervisors were asked to complete the instruments only for staff participants who consented to the procedure.

## **Attitudes Towards Corrections**

To assess this area two measures were used. First, the 17 item Klofas and Toch Professional Orientation Scale (Whitehead and Lindquist, 1989) was employed. Second, Cullen et al., developed a measure which examines attitudes supporting custodial versus rehabilitative goals (Cullen, Lutze, Link and Wolfe, 1989). As some of the items from these measures are directed specifically at correctional officers, they were adapted for other job categories.

## **Human Service Orientation**

This measure was devised to provide a general indicator of the extent to which staff prefer work that requires a helping or service component. Since we were unaware of any measure currently in use, a brief scale was devised for this project.

## **Resistance To Organizational Change**

As one of the goals of the current research was to contribute to the development of in-service training programs, it was important to measure the extent to which employees are open to change. This measurement tool was devised especially for this study.

## **Work Values**

This type of information refers to the importance of work and career in the employees' life. Condensed versions of two measures were incorporated into this study. Greenhaus and Sklarew's (1981) 6 item career salience scale and Lawler and Hall's (1970) 4 item job involvement scale appear to tap

the concept sufficiently while maintaining acceptable psychometric properties. In addition, Blood's (1969) Protestant Ethic Scale was also employed as a measure of work values.

### **Personality**

A number of aspects of personality was assessed using standard psychometric devices. Trait anxiety was measured using the trait component of the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene, 1970). The respondent indicates how he/she generally feels regarding 10 items using a 4 point scale. Secondly, the empathy items from Eysenck's Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck, Pearson, Easting, and Allsopp, 1985) was used. In addition, the CES-D depression scale (Radloff, 1977) was used to measure current levels of emotional well-being in our sample of staff. Finally, we employed a short form of the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Strahan and Gebraisi, 1972).

### **Stress and Coping**

Perceptions of job-related stress and the coping strategies employed by staff was measured using an interview method with extensive probes. The protocol for the stress-related items in the interview was based on the approach for collecting this type of information that was recently pioneered by Hughes (1989) in this study of correctional line-staff in the Ontario Region.

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## Appendix A

### THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (MOWDAY, STEERS, AND PORTER, 1979)

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.
3. I feel very little loyalty to this organization. (R)
4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.
5. I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.
6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar. (R)
8. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization. (R)
10. I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.
11. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely. (R)
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees. (R)
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.
14. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.
15. Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part. (R)

Note: Responses to each item was measured on a y-point scale with scale point anchors labelled: (1) strongly disagree: (2) moderately disagree: (3) slightly disagree: (4) neither disagree nor agree: (5) slightly agree: (6) moderately agree: (7) strongly agree. An "R" denotes a negatively phrased and reverse scored item.