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CAN'T SCALE THIS? THE ETHICAL PARAMETERS OF CORRECTIONAL WORK

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As most correctional institutions have retained their paramilitary structure, the power differentials and communication lines continue to favor concentration in the top echelons of the organizations. Yet, power and communication are regulated and delimited informally by the actions of middle-level managers and lower level workers, and by subcultural influences within the organization. Because of these attributes, correctional work is characterized by discretionary decision making, particularly when the matter is minor, hidden from view, and sanctioned by the subculture. Acting in an ethical manner (i.e., doing the right thing) in such a closed, structured, but informally functional environment requires a recognition and appreciation of the complexity of the milieu along with a willingness to forge ahead. This article explores the ethical parameters of corrections work in a typical medium-security prison. In an effort to determine what the correctional staff regarded as ethical behavior, the authors administered a questionnaire to them using a newly developed ethics instrument. The authors endeavor to identify the major attributes of ethical work in prison and to establish the heuristic value of the instrument for future research.

Determining what the appropriate behavior, or the right thing, is in any given circumstance is not always clear in corrections work, and ensuring that doing the right thing is the modus operandi for the staff may be more difficult

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still. This is the reality of corrections work because of the nature of the tasks, the composition of the clientele, and the structure of the organization. Correctional staff are charged with ensuring the safety and well-being of people who often have problems, personal peccadilloes and propensities that challenge the management skills of even the most adept of caregivers (Johnson, 1996; Lombardo, 1989). Consequently, the staff must develop a healthy sense of distrust if they are to ensure that the core function of the correctional institution is achieved—essentially, that the safety and security of the facility is not compromised for staff, visitors, or inmates.

As most correctional institutions have retained their paramilitary structure, the power differentials and communication lines continue to favor concentration in the top echelons of the organizations. Yet, power and communication are regulated and delimited informally by the actions of middle-level managers and lower level workers, by efforts to professionalize the workforce, and by subcultural influences within the organization (Champion, 1998; Houston, 1995; Johnson, 1996; Lombardo, 1989; Marquart, 1986; Marquart & Roebuck, 1995; Stohr, Lovrich, Menke, & Zupan, 1994).

Because of these attributes, correctional work is characterized by discretionary decision making, particularly when the matter is minor, hidden from view, and sanctioned by the subculture. Acting in an ethical manner (i.e., doing the right thing) in such a closed, structured, but informally functional environment requires a recognition and appreciation of the complexity of the milieu along with a willingness to forge ahead. In this research, we explore the ethical parameters of corrections work in a typical medium-security prison. In an effort to determine what correctional staff regarded as ethical behavior, we administered a questionnaire to them using a newly developed ethics instrument. We endeavor to identify the major attributes of ethical work in prison and to establish the heuristic value of the instrument for future research.

RESEARCH ON ETHICS IN CORRECTIONS

There is a recognition among current researchers in criminal justice and public administration that ethics training and a strong ethics code is central to the maintenance of democratic principles in the public workplace (Bowman & Williams, 1997; Braswell, McCarthy, & McCarthy, 1991; Cederblom & Spohn, 1991; Menzel, 1997; Pollock, 1993, 1994; Van Wart, 1996; Zajac, 1997). This need is never more apparent than when there is the perception of a failure in ethics, as there was after Watergate, Vietnam, and the more recent scandals that bedevil high-level politicians and institutions (Bowman & Williams, 1997; Menzel, 1997). In fact, Zajac (1997) argues that

the reinventing-government movement is so popular in part because of the public perception of a crisis in ethics in government.

A not insignificant portion of the general literature in criminal justice has focused on the need for more attention to ethics. Writers in this discipline often begin the ethics discourse by describing the genesis of conceptions of right and wrong and how those might be applied to the workplace (Braswell et al., 1991; Pollock, 1994; Rohr, 1978; Solomon, 1996). In fact, a philosophical basis as a preface to any discussion of ethics is regarded as a requisite backdrop to reduce the relativity that blurs conceptions of right and wrong (Pollock & Becker, 1995, p. 15). For instance, Pollock (1994), in her discussion of ethics in corrections, reviews ethical systems (such as ones created by religions), conceptions of natural law, ethical formalism, utilitarianism, the ethics of virtue, the ethics of care, and ethical relativism as references for the discussion of commonly encountered dilemmas in criminal justice.

These philosophical touchstones are then used by a number of authors as they argue that the need to teach ethics to criminal justice actors and students is of critical importance (Kleinig, 1990; Massey, 1993; Norris & Norris, 1993; Pollock, 1994; Pollock & Becker, 1995; Schmidt & Victor, 1990; Souryal, 1992; Souryal & Potts, 1993). This need to impart an ethical sense to the police is regarded as necessary by Kleinig (1990) because of the authority that the police possess, the moral nature of police work, the crisis situations that they confront, the legal and moral imperative that they involve themselves in when in such situations, the temptations that they face, and the subcultural pressures that they confront to "conform to group norms" (p. 4). In recognition of the nature of the work as creating moral challenges, Pollock and Becker (1995) have employed dilemmas commonly confronted by police officers as a means of conveying the essence of ethics and of establishing a common understanding of ethical behavior.

Most of the research and writing on ethics in criminal justice has focused on the activities of the police (Rhoades, 1991; Skolnick & Bayley, 1986; Walker, 1992) and court personnel (Bonnie, Poythress, Hoge, Monahan, & Eisenberg, 1996; Eisenstein & Jacob, 1977; Flemming, 1986). Although not as much attention is paid to the ethical issues presented by corrections, Pollock (1994) devotes a portion of her book to the topic. Much as Kleinig (1990) described the police workplace as a natural environment for ethical abuse, Pollock (1994) notes that the attributes of the correctional work world are similar. The existence of a strong subculture and its associated norms, such as the prohibition against reporting wrongdoing; the protection of members; the extensive discretion, power, and authority invested in officers; and the ability to use force in relations with inmates, all create an environment in

which the development of ethical codes, training, and reinforcement are issues of paramount importance.

Although Pollock and others (Johnson, 1996; Marquart, 1986) have written about what constitutes ethical behavior and described common ethical dilemmas, their research has been limited to participant observation and the occasional interview. The development of an instrument that measures perceptions of what is ethical behavior in corrections by those who do the work would conceivably provide researchers and practitioners with the means to assess ethics knowledge in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

OPERATIONALIZING THE NEBULOUS: CREATION OF THE ETHICS INSTRUMENT

The ethics instrument was developed by Stohr and Hemmens—with critical input from the other researchers—as a means of determining workplace perceptions and attitudes. We recognized the difficulty in devising a survey instrument that accurately reflects attitudes and subsequent behavior (Babbie, 1983). We did believe, however, that differentiation in responses would indicate that such an instrument could be calibrated to distinguish between a variety of perspectives about corrections work. Whether those perspectives translate into actual ethical or unethical behavior on the job cannot be determined by this research.

We considered adopting an existing ethics instrument, either from the public administration research or from the police research, but determined that it would be worthwhile to develop an ethics instrument solely for corrections. Six dimensions of ethics were identified by the researchers as key, including subcultural influences, professional relations with inmates, appropriate use of force, general conduct and the good officer, democratic participation in the workplace, and professional coworker relations.

These dimensions were deemed important after a review of the salient literature (e.g., see Pollock, 1994; Souryal, 1992), an examination of the ethics codes of the American Jail Association and the American Correctional Association, personal work experience in a prison setting by two of the researchers, outcomes and comments from two ethics-training sessions of field and community corrections managers conducted in 1995 and 1996 by three of the researchers in the same state as this study, and input from the facility warden and management staff. A role instrument was also developed and tested; the development of this instrument is discussed elsewhere (Stohr & Hemmens, 2000).

Thirty-one items were created to fit under these dimensions, with each category having from three to nine items (see Table 1). For each item, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement. Responses could range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Respondents also had the option of answering "don't know" or not answering that item.

The two dimensions with only three items—appropriate use of force and general conduct and the good officer—were distinct enough to merit their own category but difficult at times to distinguish from the others because of an overlap in concept. For instance, we believe that the appropriate-use-of-force dimension is also implicitly measured by items in the professional-relations-with-inmates dimension; in essence, both dimensions are gauging power relations in a correctional setting. Moreover, we believe that it is possible that the general-conduct-and-the-good-officer dimension is, to some extent, implied in all of the other dimensions. If one is a good officer or staff person, then one is somewhat independent of the subculture, has professional relations with inmates, uses force appropriately, is involved in the decision making of the workplace, and has professional coworker relations.

As indicated in Table 1, we reverse coded 16 of the 31 items. This was done to ensure that the staff completing the questionnaire were truly reading the questions and responding with some degree of consistency (Dillman, 1978; Maxfield & Babbie, 1995). As recoded, for all items, the higher the mean, the greater the agreement with conformance to ethical behavior.

Our general intent in this portion of the analysis was twofold. First, we wanted to determine if the dimensions of ethical behavior in the corrections workplace were distinguishable and reliably related to each other. Second, we were interested in investigating if particular questions elicited more or less agreement and why that might be. Thus, we tested the ethics instrument to determine its heuristic value, if any, for future research.

DATA COLLECTION

This study was conducted in September 1997 in a medium-security prison located in a rural, mountain state. The data were collected by the researchers following half-day training sessions on ethics, conducted over the course of a week. Attendance at one half-day session was mandatory for each employee of the institution, but the completion of the surveys was entirely voluntary, although the trainers encouraged it.

The training sessions were taught by two of the researchers. One instructor conducted each session, which included the discussion of a number of topics related to the nature of corrections, the correctional role, and ethics in

TABLE 1: Ethics Instrument Dimensions and Items

		Alpha	
	Item	*All*	*Correctional Officers*
Subcultural influences		.44	.54
Correctional staff have an obligation to report thefts by other staff	Thefts		
When staff witness other staff abusing inmates, they should report that abuse	Abusing		
An officer who reports the harassment of inmates by other staff is doing the right thing	Reports		
Corrections workers are usually the only people who can understand correctional work	Understand[a]		
Correctional staff owe their first loyalty to the public	Public		
If most of your coworkers choose to disregard policies and procedures, then it is okay for you to do so as well	Disregard[a]		
Professional relations with inmates		.19	.50
Special favors for inmates by staff need not be taken seriously by the administration	Favors[a]		
Inmates who have committed sex offenses deserve poor treatment in prison	Sex offenses[a]		
Abusive or offensive language is sometimes appropriate when addressing inmates	Offensive[a]		
Reasoning with inmates is usually the best way to gain their cooperation	Reasoning		
Use of stronger inmates by correctional staff to control other inmates presents the potential for corruption	Stronger		
Sexual relations between staff and inmates are sometimes acceptable	Sexual[a]		
Staff who treat inmates with respect rarely get respect in return	Respect[a]		
When a correctional staff member is consistent and fair in their relations with inmates, they are more likely to be respected by inmates	Fair		
Addressing inmates in a respectful manner may give them the idea that they can manipulate staff	Manipulate[a]		
Appropriate use of force		.41	.51
The only thing that inmates respect is a show of force	Force[a]		
Most inmates in most instances will respond to an order with no force needed	Respond		
Hitting a disruptive inmate a few more times than is strictly necessary is understandable	Hitting[a]		
General conduct and the good officer		.26	.22
Staff who bring in contraband should be disciplined	Contraband		

(continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

		Alpha	
	Item	*All*	*Correctional Officers*
When on graveyard shift, it is expected that officers will fall asleep from time to time	Asleep[a]		
Correctional staff members have a duty to protect inmates	Protect		
Democratic participation in the workplace		.58	.28
Correctional administrators should provide a means for other correctional staff to have input into the operation of the institution	Input		
A correctional staff member should simply listen to orders and rarely offer input	Listen[a]		
Correctional staff at all levels have much knowledge to contribute to the operation of the institution	Knowledge		
Correctional staff have the skills and abilities necessary to solve problems in the workplace	Skills		
Professional coworker relations		.27	.32
Making sexual comments in the workplace about other staff is not necessarily harassment	Harassment[a]		
Coworkers provide a major source of emotional and physical support on the job	Support		
The first loyalty of correctional staff is to their coworkers	Loyalty[a]		
Put-downs of people of the opposite gender in the workplace are usually meant to be funny	Put-downs[a]		
Staff should avoid making personal comments about other staff in front of inmates	Personal		
Minority staff members should not be so sensitive about racial or ethnic slurs made by others in the workplace	Minority[a]		

a. These items were reverse coded.

particular. A prescreening instrument (not reviewed here) was administered at the beginning of the training. Participants were then engaged in a discussion of the nature of corrections, including its closed and total attributes, its power distributions, its bureaucratic structure, the amount of discretion that permeates it, subcultural values that influence actor behavior, and what it means to be a public servant. The nature of public work was then briefly reviewed with a focus on Lipsky's (1980) description of street-level bureaucratic work as characterized by the high numbers of clientele, whose needs cannot all be met, with much discretion and a professional standing. Also discussed in this vein were the multiple and sometimes conflicting role demands that correctional officers face.

Next, the instructors defined ethics[1] and discretion for the participants, and the typical characteristics (e.g., prescriptive, authoritative, impartial and universal, and not self-serving) and types of ethical systems were reviewed (Pollock, 1994). The participants were then asked to consider, both individually and in small groups, ethical scenarios that they were likely to confront on the job. These scenarios were created by one of the researchers, with input from the prison administrators, and were based on her experience and knowledge of corrections work. One scenario was also presented in the form of a video from an outside source.

The scenarios included such topic areas as the willingness to report wrongdoing and/or sloppy work by the staff, sexual and gender harassment by the staff, inappropriate relations between staff and inmates, and management reluctance to listen and respond to input offered by lower level staff. The participants were specifically asked to respond as individuals to one of the scenarios and as a group to one or two others, using the following questions as a guide:

1. What are the alternate actions possible?
2. What are the likely consequences of each action/inaction? For yourself? For other staff? For inmates? For the department?
3. What do professional ethics/departmental rules require?
4. Why would someone violate those rules?
5. How will this action or decision guide the decisions/actions of others?
6. What kind of department do you want?
7. How does this action or decision contribute to the achievement of that kind of department?
8. Your response to this situation would be?

After a somewhat lengthy discussion of these scenarios, the group was then asked to determine what was considered ethical behavior for correctional staff. These items were written down by the trainer and discussed by the group. This listing of ethical behavior was then compared with departmental policies and procedures and the American Correctional Association Code of Ethics.

The participants were then asked to complete the postscreening instrument, which included questions related to the demographics of the respondent, the ethics instrument, and a short training evaluation. A total of 243 staff members were scheduled to take the training, 224 staff attended the sessions, and 185 usable questionnaires were returned and coded, for a return rate of 82%. This is a very high rate of return, but of course, it must be noted that the 18% who chose not to participate (participation in the training was

mandatory, but participation in the survey was completely voluntary) may be in some way different from those who chose to participate.

It should be clearly noted that the sample was given the ethics instrument after the ethics training. This may affect the responses but in a manner that does not unduly affect the utility of the instrument. As the staff completed the ethics instrument after a half-day exposure to and discussion of ethics topics, we expect that our finding of differences between groups will be muted. That is, we expect that there would be fewer differences in ethical perceptions after such a training session than before it. To the extent that this is true, any differences discovered in these data should be viewed with that fact in mind—thus, any differences that are revealed by the survey are likely to be real differences and not artifacts of the timing of the survey administration.

We recognize that because these staff members had just completed ethics training before responding to the instrument, their responses may not be reflective of the responses of other similarly situated staff in this or other departments. If the training had any value at all, then these responses should reflect more of an ethical perspective of corrections work than would responses given by staff not exposed to the training.

One might wonder why we chose to administer the questionnaire at the end of the training session given the built-in bias that it created. We chose to administer it at this time because we believed that we would be slightly leveling the playing field in terms of the ethical framework that each respondent had, and we did so to determine if the training attendees had learned anything from the training. As we intentionally homogenized the responses by providing the training first, we argue that any differences discovered would take on greater significance.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

DEMOGRAPHICS

As indicated in Table 2, the typical staff respondent is male, White, approaching middle age, married, and has some college background. Although most of our respondents were correctional officers (54.8%), the other positions in the institution were also represented. An analysis of the years-of-service variable indicates that although the mean term of years is 6.37, the relatively high standard deviation is indicative of a high degree of variance. We find that responses on this variable are bimodal. The mode for years of service is 1 year or less (29% of the respondents), whereas another 27% have 10 years of service or more. Religious affiliation is dispersed among the major groupings that are common for those living near this institution.

TABLE 2: Correctional Staff Demographics (*N* = 203)

	Percentage	M	SD
Gender			
Male	75.9		
Female	24.1		
Race/ethnicity			
White	89.2		
Hispanic	6.5		
African American	1.6		
Asian	0.5		
Other	2.2		
Age		40.21	10.6
Position			
CO	54.8		
CPL, SGT, LT, CPT	15.1		
Counselor	5.4		
Administrator	11.3		
Medical, food, or other	13.5		
Years of service		6.37	5.60
Military service			
Yes	50.3		
No	49.2		
Marital status			
Married	65.5		
Single	15.5		
Divorced or separated	19.1		
Religious affiliation			
Christian	31.5		
Catholic	21.2		
LDS	10.3		
Protestant	10.3		
Baptist	7.5		
Other or none	2.1		
Education			
GED or high school	21.8		
Some college	59.9		
BA or BS	13.7		
Master's plus	4.6		

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma. BA = bachelor of arts. BS = bachelor of science.

ETHICS INSTRUMENT RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

The items and dimensions outlined in Table 1 were subjected to a reliability analysis to determine if all respondents, and then correctional officers as a group, responded similarly to the dimensions or scales. As should be evident from the findings presented in this table and using a standard alpha of .70 to discriminate between items, we found that none of the dimensions achieved an acceptable level of consistency in responses. This makes it impossible to

derive any meaningful conclusions from a reliability analysis, but it does not necessarily mean that individual items are without merit.

It is difficult to improve the alphas for the dimensions with the most promise (e.g., subcultural influences and democratic participation in the workplace), as elimination of some of their items may compromise the ability of that dimension to measure the nuances of a given area of ethics. In other words, items in a given dimension or subscale need to be somewhat correlated but not to the point where they are merely reverse codings of each other (Babbie, 1983).

FACTOR ANALYSIS

In an effort to determine if any particular set of items was capable of explaining the variance in responses, we conducted a factor analysis of the instrument (findings not reported here). This procedure confirmed the findings from the reliability analysis. Eleven factors were created, with the first explaining 16% of the variance, and all the factors explaining 43% of the variance. Once rotated, the explanatory power of the factors or components improved slightly to 18% of the variance for the first and 63% for all 11 factors.

When we separated correctional officers from the support, administrative, and supervisory staff (hereafter referred to as *support*), we found that 11 factors explained 67% of the variance in responses for the correctional officers and 74% of the variance for the support staff. Of the items that correlated at the .50 level or higher with the principal component factor, we find that the following items are evident for the support staff and correctional officers: hitting, knowledge, protect, fair, reports, and sex offenses (see Table 3). Interestingly enough, these particular items are spread across five of the six scales, with only one scale (Professional Relations With Inmates) containing two items and one scale (Professional Coworker Relations) containing none of these highly correlated items.

We conclude from these findings that we failed to create an ethics instrument that measured distinct dimensions, or to paraphrase the pop singer Hammer, “We can’t scale this.” Possibly, we failed in this endeavor because there are no distinct scales when one is discussing doing the right thing. These data would provide some support for this supposition as the items that were most highly correlated came from several dimensions. It is also possible, and perhaps likely in some instances, that the items are so poorly configured that we were unable to capture the nuances that distinguish the dimensions of ethics.

TABLE 3: Rank Order Factor Analysis Principal Component Correlations for Support, Administration, and Supervisory Staff and Correctional Officers (.50-plus correlation with the principal component factor)

Support Staff (n = 83)		*Correctional Officers (n = 102)*		*Average Ranking*	
Item	*Correlation*	*Item*	*Correlation*	*Item*	*Correlation*
Knowledge	.838	Disregard	.742	Hitting	.727
Protect	.815	Hitting	.704	Knowledge	.699
Respect	.804	Abusing	.629	Protect	.692
Hitting	.751	Fair	.615	Fair	.665
Fair	.715	Respond	.572	Reports	.600
Sexual	.645	Protect	.569	Sex offenses	.529
Reports	.634	Reports	.566		
Skills	.535	Knowledge	.561		
Offensive	–.561	Sex offenses	.555		
Put-downs	.515				
Sex offenses	.503				
Asleep	.503				

We conclude from these factor analysis findings that those items that are common across the support and correctional officer groupings reflect some of the absolutes about professional correctional work: You do not hit, you have a duty to protect, and you should be fair even when you may have a strong distaste for the offense (e.g., sex offense) committed by the inmate. What was a bit unexpected was how strongly the knowledge and reports items showed up for both sets of workers. This finding indicates that those who believed that all staff members have much knowledge to contribute to the workplace also believed in other ethical behaviors. In addition, having the reports item correlate so strongly indicates that a break with the subculture in terms of ratting is associated with other ethical behaviors. These findings would indicate that although we did not create a set of scales for ethical behavior in corrections, we may have created valid item measures of doing the right thing. We thus conducted an analysis of individual items.

ITEM MEAN COMPARISONS

Although the reliability and factor analysis both suggest that there are no natural groupings among the items, we thought that some discrimination between low and high levels of agreement on items would give us a sense of their relative validity for these staff members. We thus examined each individual item mean for both support staff and correctional officers. As Table 4

reveals, we find that although there were many similarities in the perception of ethics by the support and correctional staff, there were also some notable differences. We divided responses into "high agreement" (mean of 6.0 or greater), "some agreement" (mean between 5.0 and 6.0), and "low agreement" (mean of 5.0 or less).

Four of the six top loading items from the factor analysis also had high agreement means for the correctional officers; all six of those items achieved a high mean for the support staff. In fact, support staff were more likely to agree that more behaviors represented ethical behaviors or not (in the case of reverse scored items) than were the correctional officers. There were nine statistically significant differences at the .10 or .05 levels between the support and correctional officer personnel. The biggest differences were that support staff were in high agreement that offensive language was not appropriate (offensive), whereas the correctional officers were in low agreement on this item. Support staff were in greater agreement that sex offenders should be treated fairly (sex offenses) and that the wrongdoing of coworkers should be reported (reports) than were the correctional officers. The correctional officers were in more agreement that the administration should take special favors for inmates by the staff seriously (the favors item was reverse coded— although these differences were only between some and high agreement). The correctional officers were also less likely to see their coworkers as a major source of emotional and physical support on the job (support) than were the support staff.

Although there is some significant disagreement between the support staff and correctional officers, the level of agreement between the support staff and correctional officers is the most dramatic finding from this table. There is basic and relatively high agreement on 11 of the 31 items (abusing, knowledge, hitting, fair, disregard, thefts, protect, contraband, input, personal, sexual). The high level of agreement on these items would indicate that there are some behaviors and issues (such as legal behavior, following the rules and procedures, maintaining social distance from inmates, and the duty to protect inmates) that are so ingrained in the bureaucratic and professional role that there is no discussion necessary. Furthermore, the addition of the input variable among these items with which there is high agreement may be reflective of the changing nature of correctional organizations and the understanding of the correctional role. Whereas much of the public sector has moved to some extent to democratize its workplaces (Golembiewski, 1985), corrections organizations have been loathe to follow suit (DiIulio, 1987; Fuqua, 1991; Klofas, Stojkovic, & Kalinich, 1990; Stohr et al., 1994). However, this finding would indicate that correctional staff members have high expectations that correctional administrators should seek their input.

TABLE 4: Ethics Instrument Items by Low to High Ranking of Mean Scores for Support Staff and for Correctional Officers

Support Staff (n = 83)			*Correctional Officers (n = 102)*		
Item	M	SD	*Item*	M	SD
Low agreement					
Loyalty	3.62	2.00	Loyalty	3.06**	1.72
Understand	4.01	1.87	Understand	3.96	1.84
Public	4.39	1.74	Public	4.48	1.78
			Offensive	4.78*	1.63
			Manipulate	4.94**	1.47
Some agreement					
Reasoning	5.12	1.49	Reasoning	5.21	1.35
Manipulate	5.54	1.50	Put-downs	5.35	1.36
Put-downs	5.42	1.67	Harassment	5.49	1.52
Skills	5.49	1.00	Asleep	5.58	1.60
Harassment	5.57	1.59	Minority	5.58	1.47
Stronger	5.65	1.78	Sex offenses	5.63**	1.26
Asleep	5.75	1.49	Skills	5.65**	1.00
Minority	5.70	1.51	Stronger	5.68	1.55
Listen	5.89	1.13	Reports	5.74**	1.78
Favors	5.82	1.64	Support	5.75**	1.26
Respect	5.96	1.30	Listen	5.78	1.16
			Respect	5.91	0.98
			Force	5.93	0.95
			Respond	5.99	0.81
High agreement					
Force	6.07	1.09	Abusing	6.07	0.93
Respond	6.07	0.74	Favors	6.11**	1.26
Sex offenses	6.07	1.08	Knowledge	6.16	0.75
Offensive	6.07	6.98	Hitting	6.20	0.96
Reports	6.10	1.01	Fair	6.22	0.95
Abusing	6.11	1.33	Disregard	6.22	0.96
Support	6.14	0.98	Thefts	6.28	1.07
Hitting	6.21	1.16	Protect	6.33	0.66
Fair	6.21	1.16	Contraband	6.36	1.18
Knowledge	6.22	0.97	Input	6.39	0.95
Contraband	6.22	1.55	Personal	6.50	0.87
Protect	6.39	0.82	Sexual	6.80**	0.60
Input	6.42	0.70			
Disregard	6.44	0.87			
Thefts	6.45	0.75			
Personal	6.47	0.94			
Sexual	6.63	1.10			

NOTE: Mean scores range from 1 to 7.
* = statistically significant difference at the .10 level. ** = statistically significant difference at the .05 level.

We believe that it is likely that there was high agreement on the contraband item because this prison had gone smokeless for the staff and inmates in

the past year. Because of the new policy, there has been much time devoted to ensuring that the staff know and follow the policy.

The items listed in the high-agreement category come from all areas of the dimensions illustrated in Table 2. Among the remaining items with which there is high agreement or a higher level of some agreement, a few discernible patterns exist. These correctional staff members are in relatively high agreement about the appropriate use of force (force, respond, hitting). They agree that inmates should be treated fairly, with respect, and without abuse or reference to their commitment offense (fair, respect, abusing, reports, sex offenses). They tend to agree that they should be listened to as they have much knowledge to contribute to the operation of the institution (listen and knowledge), and they understand and appreciate the value of the support that their coworkers provide (support).

We note that the items with which there is low agreement are those that have to do with subcultural values such as the ability of outsiders to understand correctional work and loyalty to other staff versus the public. These findings might be due to the pull of the subculture being so strong for some of these respondents that they may be confused about their ultimate responsibility. It is also possible that there is really no right response to loyalty items (loyalty and public). After all, one can simultaneously feel a loyalty to the public and to one's coworkers and/or to some other grouping not identified here (e.g., supervisors, inmates, etc.) (Souryal & McKay, 1996) or feel a conflict in loyalty between professional requirements and one's own beliefs (de Borst, 1992). Thus, it is possible that the low agreement on these items is reflective of the poor composition of the items themselves or of the draw of the subculture and the isolated nature of the correctional work world.

Of course, the areas in which there is some agreement provide the most fertile ground for speculation as to the reasoning of the respondents. Although obviously some of the natural breaking points in the means may make it appear that these distinctions are too arbitrary, the fact that there is not a clearer consensus on some of these items that affect the civility of the workplace is cause for reflection. Why, for instance, would it not be clear that staff relations are marred by put-downs, sexual comments, and racial or ethnic slurs (e.g., put-downs, harassment, minority)? Why is it not clearer that sleeping on the job, even on the graveyard shift, seriously compromises the safety of the institution (e.g., asleep)? Offhand, we are not sure of the answers to these questions but believe that in these gray areas for the staff, we may find that the explanation for these responses derives from the individual and group frameworks that divide us all.

CORRELATION MATRIX ANALYSIS

We next analyzed the correlation level between the various items to determine if there were individual item relations that might be more predictive of validity (see Tables 5 and 6). Upon the extraction of those items with the highest correlations (.25, .30, .40, and .50+) with other items, we discovered several notable relationships. An examination of Tables 5 and 6 in tandem reveals that the support staff scores reflected a greater correlation between more items than was true for correctional officers. The support staff had a high (.50 or greater) level of correlation on 12 items, including individual items such as protect, respect, fair, knowledge, and respect. These were highly correlated with four other items. Conversely, for correctional officers, there were seven items that were highly correlated, and only one of these (hitting) was correlated with more than one item.

In Table 6, we find that the support staff were much more negative in their agreement on the offensive item than were the correctional officers. In fact, this item is negatively correlated with many other items in Table 6. This indicates, of course, that the support staff tended toward strong disagreement with the statement that abusive or offensive language is sometimes appropriate when addressing inmates. When this item was reverse coded, it became negatively correlated with other more ethical behavior items.

As indicated in Table 7, there were 22 items that achieved at least a .40 level of correlation with one other item. The items knowledge, hitting, protect, respect, sex offenses, sexual, and fair (generally the same items achieving high levels of correlation in the factor analysis) were predictably correlated with most other items. The addition of 16 more items to this list, however, would indicate that correctional staff members are making conceptual links in terms of ethical perceptions of behavior. This list of 22 items then might form the framework for another attempt at creating a scalable ethics instrument for corrections work.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the factor and reliability analysis indicate that we were unable to develop scales that achieved an acceptable level of reliability for an ethics instrument. We found that some items (e.g., loyalty and public) may need to be rewritten and/or dropped because they may be misleading, confusing, or useless. However, the correlation matrix and examination of individual items suggest that the instrument, taken as a whole, has some real utility.

There are some biases inherent in the administration of this instrument. First, the ethics instrument was delivered at the end of a half-day training on

(text continues on p. 75)

TABLE 5: Grouping of Correlated Items for Correctional Officers (*n* = 102)

Correlation			
.50+	*.40*	*.30*	*.25*
Contraband and personal	Thefts and sex offenses	Thefts and protect	Thefts and abusing
Personal and sexual	Force and respond	Force and sex offense	Force and loyalty
Hitting and disregard	Sex offenses and respond	Force and protect	Harassment and sex offense
Hitting and fair	Sex offenses and abusing	Harassment and abusing	Harassment and input
	Sex offenses and protect	Harassment and put-down	Harassment and reports
	Respond and input	Support and respond	Harassment and disregard
	Respond and respect	Support and input	Support and sex offenses
	Input and disregard	Support and disregard	Sex offenses and under
	Abusing and protect	Sex offenses and reports	Sex offenses and fair
	Knowledge and sexual	Sex offenses and hitting	Sex offenses and disregard
	Sexual and manipulate	Respond and abusing	Respond and hitting
	Sexual and disregard	Respond and protect	Input and stronger
	Knowledge and hitting	Respond and disregard	Input and knowledge
	Knowledge and fair	Input and abusing	Loyalty and abusing
	Knowledge and disregard	Abusing and reports	Abusing and understand
	Reports and hitting	Abusing and public	Abusing and knowledge
	Sexual and fair	Abusing and disregard	Abusing and minority
	Sexual and knowledge	Stronger and protect	Reason and manipulate
		Personal and fair	Stronger and fair
		Personal and disregard	Personal and know
		Protect and hitting	Personal and hitting
		Protect and fair	Protect and understand
		Protect disregard	Protect and respect
		Sexual and minority	Contraband and public
		Sexual and hitting	Fair and disregard
		Minority and disregard	Manipulate and public
		Abusing and hitting	
		Reports and fair	
		Sexual and minority	
		Sexual and hitting	
		Reports and disregard	

TABLE 6: Grouping of Correlated Items for Support, Administrative, and Supervisory Staff (n = 83)

Correlation			
.50+	*.40*	*.30*	*.25*
Sex offenses and respect	Theft and force	Theft and asleep	Theft and sex offenses
Offensive and protect[a, c]	Force and sex offenses	Theft and respect	Force and support
Abusing and reports[b]	Support and hitting	Theft and hitting	Force and reports
Listen and skills	Sex offenses and sexual	Theft and disregard	Force and asleep
Protect and sexual	Sex offenses and knowledge	Force and respect	Force and disregard
Protect and respect[a]	Input and disregard	Force and minority	Favors and reasoning
Protect and hitting	Offensive and listen[c]	Force and manipulate	Harassment and manipulate
Protect and fair	Offensive and reports[c]	Favors and support	Support and asleep
Sexual and respect	Offensive and knowledge[c]	Favors and put-downs	Support and put-downs
Sexual and knowledge[a]	Offensive and hitting[c]	Support and skills	Sex offenses and personal
Respect and knowledge[a]	Abusing and protect	Sex offenses and protect	Sex offenses and skills
Respect and hitting	Listen and protect	Sex offenses and minority	Respond and understand[c]
Respect and fair	Reports and hitting	Sex offenses and fair	Loyalty and personal[c]
Knowledge and hitting	Reports and respect	Sex offenses and disregard	Abusing and asleep
Knowledge and fair[a]	Protect and skills	Offensive and abuse[c]	Abusing and respect
Hitting and fair[b]	Knowledge and skills	Offensive and sexual[c]	Abusing and fair
	Hitting and skills	Offensive and respect[c]	Listen and reports
		Offensive and fair[c]	Reports and put-downs
		Offensive and skills[c]	Asleep and knowledge
		Abusing and personal	Put-down and hitting
		Abusing and hitting	Stronger and disregard
		Listen and knowledge	Personal and respect
		Listen and hitting	Sexual and minority
		Reports and asleep	Respect and manipulate
		Reports and sexual	

(continued)

TABLE 6 Continued

Correlation			
.50+	*.40*	*.30*	*.25*
		Reports and knowledge	
		Reports and fair	
		Asleep and put-downs	
		Asleep and protect	
		Asleep and respect	
		Put-downs and stronger[c]	
		Put-downs and protect	
		Put-downs and respect	
		Put-downs and knowledge	
		Personal and sexual	
		Personal and knowledge	
		Sexual and hitting	
		Sexual and fair	
		Respect and skills	
		Minority and disregard	
		Fair and skills	

a. These items had a correlation of .60+.
b. These items had a correlation of .70+.
c. These items had a negative correlation.

TABLE 7: Ranked Incidence of Items Achieving the Highest Level of Intercorrelation for Support Staff and for Correctional Officers (.40+ correlation with other items)

	Support Staff	*Correctional Officers*
Knowledge	7	5
Hitting	7	2
Protect	6	2
Respect	6	1
Sex offenses	4	4
Sexual	4	4
Fair	4	3
Reports	4	1
Offensive (negative)	5	0
Skills	4	0
Respond	0	4
Abusing	2	2
Force	2	1
Input	1	2
Disregard	0	3
Theft	1	1
Listen	2	0
Personal	0	2
Support	1	0
Disregard	1	0
Contraband	0	1
Manipulate	0	1

ethics. Many, if not most, of the items included in the instrument were touched on topically at some point during that training. Therefore, it is likely that those persons answering the questions were influenced in part by the training and thus (we would hope) would be more likely to respond in an ethical manner than if they had not completed the training. This would reduce the differences between and among items.

Second, because this training was mandatory, some staff members were resentful and suspicious of the training schema. Such persons may have transferred these negative sentiments to the training evaluation and the ethics instrument and so refused to participate, either by not responding to the questionnaire and/or by responding in a manner inconsistent with their true perceptions. As we achieved an 82% return rate, it is unlikely that there were many staff who simply refused to respond, but it is possible that there were some who did not answer as honestly as they might have if they had been volunteers.

The individual item mean agreement levels and interitem correlation comparisons between the correctional officers and support staff would indicate that some of these items are potentially measuring some real ethical

issues for correctional workers. In other words, we may not have devised distinguishable dimensions, but there may be more than just face validity for a number of these items. A higher level of validity for these items might be indicated because there is such agreement on them. Certainly, that is more likely to be true for those six items that loaded most highly on the factor analysis (see Table 3) and for those 22 items that had the highest levels of intercorrelation with other items (inclusive of those six—see Table 7). We think that these 22 items might form the core of an improved and scalable ethics instrument.

The fact that some of these items appearing on the list of 22 might not normally be considered as ethical behaviors per se may be a matter for dispute. For instance, there might be some who disagree with the inclusion of the democratic-participation-in-the-workplace items. We would argue that we were trying to devise an ethics instrument for all correctional staff, one that would fit the correctional role for 1990s and beyond. The workplace of the 1990s includes recognition of the worth and empowerment of the workers by both those workers and by those who supervise them (Peters, 1987, 1992). Thus, we thought that ethical work for administrators and other correctional staff in corrections would have to include some recognition of the knowledge and skills that those staff members have (knowledge, skills) and some mechanisms for using it (input, listen). We think that all of these items being present on the list of 22 would support the belief that doing the right thing in the corrections workplace of 1990s and beyond means that everybody has a voice. We would note, however, that support staff members (including the administrators) were more likely to recognize the need for all to have a voice than were the correctional officers. Of course, this means that correctional managers may need to work to retrain their staffs and to involve them so that they fully recognize the contributions that they can and do make to their work.

Correctional managers might also take note of the differences and lack of agreement on some important civility items between and among the support staff and correctional officers. The fact that the officers are not as likely to regard offensive language with inmates as a problem is a bit disturbing, as is the lack of high agreement that other staff may serve as support for them (support). In addition, the lack of greater agreement between either the support staff or the correctional officers that harassment based on gender or minority status is unacceptable should give correctional managers pause. It would seem that an esprit de corps may be difficult to achieve in a correctional environment when there is a lack of understanding of the worth of coworkers and when a degree of insensitivity and disrespect toward coworkers and inmates is not regarded as unacceptable. Thus, this initial examina-

tion would indicate that there are some commonalties in ethical perceptions that bind these staff and define their work. However, it has yet to be determined whether any of the background characteristics of these respondents, beyond their positions, are particularly predictive of agreement or disagreement on these items. If it is true that these background characteristics do distinguish between responses, then the relative value of ethics training itself must be put in question and/or geared to address the particular propensities of some staff.

Our findings suggest that although many might feel that some ethics questions are no-brainers that everyone would agree on, there is actually some variation in perceptions on some of these items, and the lack of correlation between no-brainers would indicate that the appropriate response, or doing the right thing in corrections work, is not as clear as some might assume.

NOTE

1. A slightly revised *Merriam-Webster* (1976) definition of *ethics* was provided: "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligations. A set of moral principles or values governing the conduct of an individual or a group" (p. 392). *Discretion* was defined as "the ability to make choices and to act or not act on those choices" (Stohr).

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