

# THE INTERNAL CRISIS OF CORRECTIONS: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Criminal justice policymakers and managers have viewed professionalization as a favored solution to the current crisis in correctional systems across the country. Utilizing case study data drawn from a state correctional system located in the western United States, we find that upgrading line correctional staff was a strategy used by top administrators to improve the image of their agency and maintain the autonomy of their prison system in the face of a threatened take-over by the federal court. However, in mandating the professionalization of their personnel, these managers failed to confront deeper organizational problems. Instead, they argued that an educated staff was the cure for acknowledged operational problems—including corruption and inhumane treatment. The failure to combine staff upgrading with more comprehensive organizational reforms merely heightened the frustrations within the workforce of the state's correctional institutions. In essence, these professionalization strategies represent a prime example of utilizing individual-level solutions to solve organizational-level problems.

The 1980s mark a new era of crisis for correctional systems in the United States. Like earlier crises, the instability of corrections today revolves around a reconsideration of system goals with a renewed emphasis on deterrence and incapacitation, and an exploding population of inmates unaccompanied by adequate fiscal support for correctional bureaucracies. These correctional dilemmas have been well documented, and federal and state correctional bureaucracies are trying a number of potential remedies (see Mullen 1985; Cavender and Musheno 1983; Clements 1979; Farrington and Nuttal 1980). They include construction of new prisons, alternatives to incarceration, privatization of corrections and professionalization of these bureaucracies.

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This study focuses on a more hidden dimension of this crisis—the strains and tensions in correctional institutions as work environments. We investigate the effects of a western state's attempt to professionalize its correctional work force in this critical time period. Specifically, we seek to answer three major questions about the professionalization movement in that state: 1) Why was professionalization adopted as a reform strategy? 2) How did the reform impact organizational performance? and 3) What commitments, conditions and resources (or lack thereof) affected the diffusion (implementation) of the reform within the organization?

Historically, criminal justice policymakers and managers have viewed "professionalization" as a favored solution to escalating organizational problems. For example, in the progressive era of the early 1900s, criminal justice professionalization was pursued as one solution to both police corruption and prison riots (see National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement 1931; Brown 1981:3-18). Paralleling the progressive era, professionalization efforts of the 1970s and 1980s have been directed toward grooming well-educated and well-paid men and women to fill front-line positions in criminal justice agencies.

Once again, it has been assumed that a "professional staff" will do what is necessary to ameliorate a criminal justice crisis and better serve the community. Until recently, there has been little focus on why professionalization is a favored response to criminal justice crises. Further, attempts by advocates to diffuse this reform in criminal justice organizations have rarely been analyzed.

The process of upgrading occupations within the criminal justice field differs from that described in research on other professional groups. Recent analyses of professionalization have focused on the deliberate and self-conscious attempts by members of occupational groups to enhance their autonomy and control through acquiring recognition as professions (Roth 1974; Begun, 1982; Kronus, 1976). However, front-line criminal justice staff have neither initiated nor been the primary beneficiaries of increased professionalism (e.g., Poole and Regoli 1980; Jacobs 1983; Piliavin and Vadum 1968). In fact, professionalization has been promoted and mandated by those at the top of criminal justice bureaucracies to protect their autonomy from external control and to enhance their power in the governmental process (Brown 1981; Musheno et al. 1976; Bardach 1976). Further, professionalization of the ranks, as it has been defined by correctional administrators, often has heightened worker frustrations, thereby contributing to a growing rift between management and line staff (see Aaronson, Dienes and Musheno 1984; Reuss-Ianni 1984).

Also departing from other professional groups (see Greenwood 1957; Pavalko 1970), the upgrading of criminal justice line personnel has not involved their systematic acquisition of attributes identified in the literature as essential elements of a professional occupation (e.g., increasing authority over clients, operational code of ethics). Instead, case studies of criminal justice occupations indicate that their "professionalization" has been limited to increasing the educational level of individual front-line workers as a quick route to establishing an improved public image for these agencies (Frank 1966; Wicks 1980; Swanson 1977).

To date, most of these claims about criminal justice professionalization have been based on studies of such efforts within the law enforcement area. Guided by the claims outlined above, our research extends the inquiry of criminal justice occupations by examining the adoption and diffusion of a professionalization movement within a department of corrections located in the western United States (hereafter referred to as Western D.O.C.).

We establish that in mandating the professionalization of front-line staff, top correctional officials of Western D.O.C. ignored deeper organizational problems. They failed to consider the compatibility of educational upgrading with the organizational realities of work in contemporary correctional institutions. Finally, they never developed adequate strategies for implementing their proposed reforms. This reform effort was successful in temporarily protecting the autonomy of Western D.O.C. managers who were in the midst of a correctional crisis and under threat of direct federal court intervention. However, their failure to combine correctional professionalization with broader organizational analysis and change—in particular, to provide support for reform oriented staff—wrecked havoc with the work environment of Western D.O.C., compounding rather than resolving the state's correctional crisis.

### RESEARCH STRATEGY

The data for this study were collected over five years (1981-1985) and drawn from a variety of sources, mostly within Western D.O.C. This intensive study of one locale is consistent with a growing body of research investigating the implementation of organizational reforms (e.g., Benson 1973:384; Miller 1984:251-266; Weiss 1981).

Rather than focusing on many settings and searching for central tendency, implementation research has generally focused on one or a few settings where the commitment to resist and/or support a reform idea is highly visible. Prior analyses have revealed

that commitment and follow-through, environmental conditions (e.g., external political climate), organizational resources (e.g., budgetary outlays) and informal organizational networks are important factors for understanding the diffusion of organizational reforms (see Lewis 1985; Palumbo, Musheno and Maynard-Moody 1985).

Western D.O.C. is an ideal setting for studying the implementation of professionalization as reform because this policy was explicitly proposed as a solution to a correctional crisis and undertaken simultaneous to an escalation of the crisis (e.g., expansion of the inmate population). Therefore, this case reveals a great deal about the constraints to and the potential for professionalization in corrections, as well as the importance of the above factors in the implementation process.

Qualitative and quantitative data were combined in our analysis of professionalization in the Western D.O.C. We utilized in-depth interview, survey and documentary data to investigate our major questions about the professionalization movement in Western D.O.C. Specifically, to investigate how the reform impacted line staff composition, training and work-related attitudes/performance we collected quantitative data in the form of self-administered surveys distributed to all correctional service officers (CSOs) employed in one medium-minimum security prison facility in the Western D.O.C. The facility was relatively new (two years old) and represented the "showcase" institution of the reform-oriented administration. To contextualize this attitudinal data and relate it to the process of reform implementation, we conducted three weeks of observation at the institution, including informal interviews with personnel from all levels of the facility's hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Additional qualitative data were collected to identify the sequence of major events that lead to the adoption of a professionalization movement in Western D.O.C. The investigators and three research assistants conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews over a four-year period with 32 Correctional Service Officers (CSOs), four administrators, six officer supervisors and six training coordinators located in the central office and throughout seven of the ten prison facilities under Western D.O.C. authority. In addition, the investigators and research assistants conducted approximately 90 hours of observation at three Western D.O.C. facilities other

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<sup>1</sup> This combination of qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis techniques is referred to as *triangulation*—a preferred strategy for investigating the implementation of organizational reforms (Jick 1979; Benson 1973:384).

than the surveyed facility described above. Finally, to provide additional historical information, these data were combined with a review of newspaper articles appearing in the largest newspaper in the state between 1975 and 1985, a review of departmental policy manuals and an analysis of two written histories of Western D.O.C.

### THE NATIONAL CONTEXT OF CORRECTIONAL REFORM AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

The professionalization process in the Western D.O.C. must be understood within the context of broader nationwide trends. During the past 15 years, a general instability in prisons across the country stimulated a variety of reactions outside the walls of these institutions. At the national level, several widely publicized prison riots forced federal and state officials to become more concerned with crowded and squalid living conditions in their prisons. Building on this media attention, an inmate rights movement emerged. Federal and state courts responded to these concerns, mandating due process requirements for inmate disciplinary action, requiring mandatory releases for inmates in overcrowded facilities, appointing receivers to manage prisons in several states and demanding the implementation of job skill and "resocialization" programs (see Irwin 1980; Fox 1982; Jacobs 1983:33-60). These court decisions were followed by more focused inmate protests and strikes which were in part coordinated by external reform groups working for the expansion of inmate rights (American Friends Service Committee, 1971).

With the growing politicization of corrections, the autonomy that correctional administrators had historically enjoyed was being threatened. In response to these pressures from media, courts, elected officials and reform advocates, prisons became increasingly centralized and bureaucratized (Jacobs 1983). It was expected that a more rational correctional system would result. Traditionally autonomous institutions were made components of state departments of corrections; rehabilitative ideologies were adopted; and a new breed of college-educated administrators were hired to fill top positions.

With the intention of ensuring that line officers exercise their responsibilities in a manner consistent with these reforms, new administrators concentrated on upgrading the educational qualifications of the individuals who filled these positions (Task Force on Corrections 1973; National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals 1973). Policy makers and administrators

believed that the professionalization of prison custodial staff supposedly would ensure diffusion of the humane treatment ethic and reduce staff-inmate tensions in modern, treatment-oriented departments of corrections (see Poole and Regoli 1980; Katsampes 1975; Piliavin and Vadum 1968).

### ADOPTING PROFESSIONALIZATION AS A REFORM IN WESTERN D.O.C.

Changes within the Western D.O.C. can be seen as a microcosm of the broader national trends in corrections discussed earlier. Amidst continued resistance, several precipitating factors combined to produce a prison reform movement within this western state.

Between 1975 and 1976, three inmate class action suits were filed against Western D.O.C. The suits contained allegations of overcrowded living conditions, beatings by correctional officers and gross violations of basic health standards. Combined with increasing reports of prison violence, these suits drew significant media attention. In response to the class action suits, a 1977 federal district court decision mandated that the Western D.O.C. inmate population be cut in half by the end of that year. As a result of this ruling and continued media attention, the state legislature appointed a series of panels to investigate "the prison problem." Despite panel recommendations and growing public concern about prison conditions, the state legislature resisted the allocation of the necessary funds for prison construction and reform.

These struggles continued until early 1978 when the state governor died and his successor took office. The new governor immediately issued a list of priorities for his administration which included the reform of the state prison system. He requested from the state legislature funding to build new prison facilities and to finance prison reform programs. Combined with continued pressure from the federal court, the governor's efforts mobilized the legislative support necessary to initiate a series of prison reforms. By 1979, the budget for the Western D.O.C. was expanded significantly and a new director was hired with the expressed mandate to supervise new prison construction and reform existing institutions.

The new director immediately initiated a major reorganization effort. His reform program was directed toward the centralization of administrative control of Western D.O.C. facilities, the rationalization of its policies and the incorporation of more humanistic concerns into the philosophy of inmate treatment. Initially, he attempted to centralize control by terminating or reassigning

many "entrenched" wardens and supervisory staff. He also mandated the evaluation and formalization of Western D.O.C. rules, regulations and operating procedures, which affected both inmates and staff (e.g., the establishment of equal opportunity hiring and promotional procedures and inmate grievance procedures). Then, he sought to incorporate inmate educational, recreational and resocialization programs into the prison system. Finally, he called for a new type of correctional officer who would ensure that these programs reached the inmate population.

Reflecting these reform efforts, the departmental philosophy was restated to incorporate a more humanistic orientation. It is important to note that the Western D.O.C. never adopted what would be described as a rehabilitative orientation. Instead, they defined their orientation as a service/resocialization approach. This label acknowledged the view that inmates were in prison first and foremost for punishment rather than for rehabilitation. However, while there, the Western D.O.C. was charged with providing inmates basic human services in a humane atmosphere. Additionally, whenever possible, Western D.O.C. would provide inmates with formal service and resocialization programs (e.g., job training and counseling). This reform-service orientation also emphasized that services and discipline were to be administered by staff according to established uniform and rational procedures. The following quote from a revised Western D.O.C. training document summarizes this official view of the new "reform" orientation:

The philosophy of the Western D.O.C. revolves around commitment to the belief that people are sent to prison *as* punishment, not *for* punishment. The function of retribution is achieved by incarcerating people and separating them from their community. They should not be punished further by the experiences they have while in correctional facilities. To achieve the goals of deterrence and rehabilitation, a safe and humane environment must be created within correctional institutions. Simply locking people up, denying them their rights, and refusing them educational and counseling opportunities will not prepare them for a crime-free lifestyle outside of prison (Western D.O.C. training document, 1981).

The professionalization of Western D.O.C. correctional officers was a core component of this reform effort. Line correctional officers were those with whom inmates had the most contact. CSOs had been the target of numerous allegations including favoritism, abuses of inmates and corruption (e.g., drug smuggling). Administrators recognized CSOs as the key link in service (or treatment) delivery to inmates. Because of their routine, close contact with

inmates, CSOs were also viewed as those most potentially corruptible or abusive. Consequently, reform of the CSO was identified as an essential step in the humanization of inmate treatment. Correctional administrators placed heavy emphasis on recruiting the "right type" of CSO—individuals who were not only security-minded, but also strongly interested in the human service aspects of the position. In fact, the official title of the position was actually changed from Correctional *Security* Officer to Correctional *Service* Officer to reflect this new emphasis.

Now, we're looking for someone who has a demonstrated ability to manage and supervise—someone who can relate well to people. The CSOs have increased their involvement with the inmates on a personal level. The staff is expected to be well trained and to provide inmates with services, not only to maintain security (administrator).

It is interesting to find that Western D.O.C. officials were attempting to recognize officially what correctional experts (e.g., Lombardo 1982a,b; Johnson 1979) learned long ago: Prison guards—even those in non-treatment oriented prisons—do far more in their work than perform custodial functions. One correctional officer reports to Lombardo (1982b):

Security doesn't mean keep them from going over the wall. It means you try to make the guy feel secure that he's not going to get killed or hurt. You make it so an inmate can sit next to another inmate in the mess hall or auditorium and feel comfortable (293).

Western D.O.C. officials were aware that service functions were performed by correctional officers. The "new service orientation" was a major strategy whereby these functions were publicly proclaimed, and arbitrary and inhumane officer actions against inmates were publicly denounced:

Our officers have always been service providers. Up until now that aspect of their job has not been officially recognized. Our old job description emphasized the security aspects without recognizing the service delivery and managerial components. And, of course, there were some abuses of guard power. Some guys thought they put on a uniform and they were in control. Some of the lieutenants and captains have supported that view; they challenged their men to be real macho and not to cater to inmates. Then, of course, there would be the inmates who were their favorites. We've got to recognize the officers as human service providers and as people managers. We want to deemphasize the image of officers as "tough guys", or guys who can play favorites. (Administrator)

Thus, the professional "service" ethic represented a formal recognition of the variety of duties performed by all correctional staff—



especially security staff. It also represented an effort to rationalize inmate treatment and curb—in a highly visible manner—the abusive behavior that had been past targets of inmate grievances, media coverage and law suits.

This professionalization effort directly affected CSOs in several ways. The salary for CSOs was increased by \$3,000 annually. The procedures for hiring, terminating and promoting officers were formalized. Women and minorities were explicitly encouraged to apply. To conform with American Correctional Association (ACA) accreditation standards, the official job description was changed to incorporate new service/program-related duties (e.g., para-professional counseling and supervision of inmate program participation), and the number of mandated in-service training hours was increased to 60 hours per year. However, the cornerstone of this effort was the upgrading of educational prerequisites. Educational requirements for the position were increased from a high school diploma to 15 hours of college with strong departmental encouragement to complete the Bachelor's degree. In addition, preference in hiring was granted to applicants who had already completed their four-year degree.

This emphasis on educational standards is at odds with some research findings regarding the impact of such upgrading on worker attitudes and behavior. For example, the literature on policing suggests that at best, education has little impact on job performance (see Talarico and Swanson 1982). At worst, some literature (e.g., Sterling 1974; Swanson 1977) suggests that more educated individuals make dissatisfied police officers. Similarly, research in correctional contexts has not demonstrated that a college education guarantees a human service orientation toward inmates (see Toch and Klofas 1982; Klofas 1983). Despite this discrepancy, however, Western D.O.C. strategy was quite in line with recommendations from several national advisory committees (e.g., American Friends Service Committee 1971; Task Force on Corrections 1967; National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals 1973), as well as the practices of many correctional departments across the country (see Jacobs, 1983).

Western D.O.C. administrators anticipated some staff resistance to these reform policies—including redefining and upgrading the CSO position. However, they hoped that opposition might be neutralized through in-service training programs and, further, that a high rate of turnover would ultimately allow new "service-oriented" staff to outnumber any veteran resisters:

We are slowly working at change here. With the continued addition of more programs for residents [inmates],

and more and better qualified professionals to supervise the residents and programs, we will see some tremendous changes. We still have some old-timers here who think that force and 'brow-beating' are the methods to deal with residents, but we are going to slowly replace and outnumber them with concerned staff who don't think that way (administrator).

This two-pronged approach (training and replacement) for institutionalizing the service ethic was only partially implemented. We will now examine several indicators of the impact of reform efforts on the composition and attitudes of Western D.O.C. correctional security staff.

### IMPACT OF PROFESSIONALIZATION ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Both qualitative data derived from interviews with CSO hiring board members and our survey data suggest that between 1978 and 1983 the number of college-educated CSOs employed by Western D.O.C. increased significantly. A comparison of the educational credentials of surveyed officers hired *before and after* the upgrading policy reveals that newer officers were significantly more likely to have bachelor degrees (Jurik et al. 1987). However, it is important to note that the 1982 recession and its corresponding high unemployment rates are likely to have boosted significantly the Western D.O.C.'s attempt to recruit more highly educated officers. In any case, 31 percent of the officers surveyed in 1982 reported that they had earned bachelor or master degrees, while another 23 percent stated that they had received associate degrees from community colleges. Also at the time of the survey, 24 percent of the respondents were enrolled in one or more college courses. Table 1 presents a more complete description of the background characteristics of the surveyed officers.

As noted, one motivation for upgrading the educational requirements for the CSO position was the hope of recruiting more "human service-oriented" officers. We incorporated two general indicators of officers' service orientation into our survey instrument. First, respondents were asked to check from a list the most important reason why they took their jobs as CSOs.<sup>2</sup> We constructed categorical (dummy) variables indicating the primary reason respondents took the CSO position. Officers who listed an

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<sup>2</sup> Three survey questions required the officers to check from a list their most important reason, second most important reason, and third most important reason for taking the job as a CSO. The results reported here focus on three dummy variables indicating the most important reason they checked for taking the job (interest in . . . i.e., human service work, inmate rehabilitation, security work, pay, security, benefits, promotional opportunities or no alternative work available). The last six

**TABLE 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Correctional Service Officers**  
**(N=179)**

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
<i>Age</i>		
18 - 25	38	22.2
26 - 35	68	39.8
36 - 45	36	21.1
46 plus	29	
<i>Race</i>		
Hispanic	14	7.8
Caucasian	141	78.8
Black	20	11.2
Other	4	2.2
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	139	77.6
Female	40	22.4
<i>Residence</i>		
Urban	159	88.6
Rural	20	11.2
<i>Military Service</i>		
Yes	83	46.4
No	96	53.6
<i>Highest Degree Completed</i>		
High School or GED	70	39.8
A.A.	41	23.3
Bachelors or Masters	55	31.2
Vocational or Other	10	5.7

interest in human service work or in inmate rehabilitation as their primary reason for taking the position received a value of "1" for service orientation. Officers who listed an interest in security work as their primary reason for taking the job received a "1" on the security orientation variable. A third dummy variable was constructed which assumed a value of "1" if officers took the job primarily for extrinsic reasons (job security, salary, etc.).

There is good indication that more highly educated officers were more likely to take the job because of an interest in "human

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categories were defined as "extrinsic reasons." The same analyses were run utilizing an index which weighted their rank ordering of service, security and extrinsic reasons in all of the three questions. The substantive results were the same regardless of whether the weighted index or dummy variables were utilized. In this paper, we discuss the results from the simpler (dummy) variable definition.

service" work than were their less-educated colleagues. The bivariate correlations between these variables and education reveal that education is *positively* associated with a preference for human service or inmate rehabilitation-type work. Years of education is *negatively* correlated with a security work preference. These bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2.

A second indicator of officer orientation was a measure of social distance from inmates. This indicator was a composite variable (index) that included four questions, addressing the degree to which inmates shared personal problems with the officer and the officer's sense as to the appropriateness of such interaction. According to this index, officers who took the job primarily for human service reasons were significantly less distanced from inmates. Conversely, officers who took the job because of a primary interest in security work were significantly *more* distanced from inmates. (Again, see Table 2). In addition, although the bivariate association between education and social distance was not significant, analysis of the effects of officer background characteristics on social distance in a multivariate framework revealed that educational attainment was significantly associated with decreasing amounts of social distance from inmates (see Table 3).

Thus, from our general measures of changing staff educational composition and service orientation, it does appear as though the Western D.O.C. was successful in achieving one of their major goals—recruiting more highly educated and more human service oriented individuals to their correctional security positions.

Despite this apparent success, our data suggest several problems surrounding the Western D.O.C.'s effort to implement a professional service ethic. Our survey data indicate that 33 percent of our CSO sample had never attended any entry-level training programs offered by the department. Twenty-one percent reported they had received less than 10 hours of in-service training during the year preceding the survey. In addition, we found that more highly educated officers were significantly less satisfied with their jobs as CSOs (again see Table 1 and also Jurik, et al. 1987).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, officers who had taken the job because of a primary interest in security-type work were significantly more satisfied with their jobs than were the more human-service oriented officers. However, despite their interest in human service work and decreased social distance from inmates, more educated officers did

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<sup>3</sup> The negative relationship between years of education and respondent job satisfaction emerged in multiple regression analysis of survey data which held other important determinants of job satisfaction constant. For more detailed discussion of this analysis, see Jurik et al. (1987).

TABLE 2  
Correlation Matrix of Officer Background and Orientation Variables

	<i>Months</i>	<i>Minority</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Security</i>	<i>Extrin.</i>	<i>Soc. Dist.</i>	<i>Inmate</i>	<i>Job Sat.</i>
Months Employed	1.00										
Minority (dummy var)	-.16*	1.00									
Female (dummy var)	-.18**	.05	1.00								
Education (years)	-.12	.06	.12*	1.00							
Age (years)	.14*	-.12	-.13*	.02	1.00						
Reasons for Taking Job—Primary Interest in . . . (dummy)											
a) Human Service Work	-.01	.11	.26***	.15**	-.01	1.00					
b) Security Work	.15**	-.08	-.00	-.20***	.13*	-.23***	1.00				
c) Extrinsic Aspects	.01	-.05	-.24***	-.03	-.07	-.81***	-.39***	1.00			
Social Distance From Inmates (index)	-.06	-.04	.03	-.10	-.05	-.14**	.21***	.01	1.00		
Attitudes Toward Inmates (index)	-.14*	.13*	.07	.04	-.14*	.16**	.10	-.21***	-.22***	1.00	
Job Satisfaction (index)	-.00	.02	.02	-.25***	.02	-.03	.35***	-.01	.06	.28	1.00

\*  $p < .10$ \*\*  $p < .05$ \*\*\*  $p < .01$

TABLE 3

Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis of Effects of  
Officer Background on Social Distance Dependent Variable:  
Social Distance (index)

Independent Variables	Standardized Regression Coefficients	T-Values
Years Education	-.17	-2.28*
Minority (dummy variable)	-.07	-0.83
Female (dummy variable)	-.02	-0.33
Age	-.04	-0.59
Months Employed	-.04	-0.53
Frequency of Contact With Inmates	-.37	-4.99*
$R^2 = .18$		
*p < .05		

not hold significantly more positive views of inmates and inmate rehabilitation prospects than did their less educated colleagues (again see Table 1 and also Jurik 1985b). These findings suggest that the service vs. security orientation distinction is a multi-dimensional rather than a dichotomous distinction (Lombardo 1982b). Thus, its implications for inmate treatment are, at best, not as clear cut as Western D.O.C. officials might have hoped.

Despite any short run improvements in inmate treatment that may have occurred, our survey data suggest that the CSO professionalization strategy adopted by correctional administrators negatively affected the correctional work environment as it was perceived by officers themselves. In the following section, we utilize our qualitative data to explore the reasons for these negative perceptions.

### BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROFESSIONALIZATION

Our interview and observational data suggest that the dissatisfaction and cynicism among "new officers" was associated with two major problem areas. First, there were organizational-level barriers to the implementation of the new reform-service ideology. Second, despite administrative rhetoric about professionalization and reform, there were no organizational-level plans within Western D.O.C. to counteract these barriers and support service-oriented CSOs. More specifically, there were no consistent efforts to train and integrate these newly recruited, college educated CSOs who may have lacked job specific experience. Moreover, there was no training of veteran staff to introduce or reinforce human service orientations. Furthermore, the CSO job was not modified to

accommodate the entry of more qualified, professionally-oriented workers. That is, despite the significant interest reported by CSOs in some type of job enrichment program, they were never systematically granted more autonomy or policy input, each essential characteristics of professional occupations. While at work in their units, CSOs were often sanctioned by colleagues and mid-management security personnel for emphasizing human services (e.g., demonstrating support for formal inmate grievance procedures). In fact, in the absence of systematic efforts to increase officer autonomy, many Western D.O.C. correctional officers believed that reform policies (e.g., inmate grievance procedures) actually reduced their authority and control in the workplace (see also Marquart and Crouch 1985).

Highly educated and career oriented CSOs were severely disappointed by what they perceived as the Western D.O.C.'s failure to follow through on promises of reform, service-related resources and professional work for qualified applicants. In addition, many veteran officers felt betrayed by what they perceived as an increasing emphasis on education to the exclusion of experience among correctional staff. Finally, many more security-oriented staff believed that the administrative emphasis on reform, education and inmate services was a serious threat to security and safety in the institutions. Thus, in the absence of effective implementation strategies, professionalization and reform policies severely heightened staff frustrations and ultimately failed to significantly ameliorate the crisis within their prison system.

### *Organizational Barriers to Reform-Service Ideology*

Specifically, the institutionalization of the service ideology in Western D.O.C. was disrupted by three organizational-level problems that are common barriers to implementation: 1) the volatility of the external environment (Yin 1979; Miller et al., 1982); 2) the erosion of the necessary resource base (Jacobs, 1983; Cavanaugh and Musheno 1982); and 3) resistance from the informal organization (Reuss-Ianni 1983; Lipskey 1980).

The external environment surrounding corrections, including federal courts, media, local reform groups and state elective officials, provided the impetus for the adoption of a service ideology and professionalization. However, it is important to recognize that support for this reform movement was by no means uniform. Many legislators and local citizen groups were adamantly opposed to allocating funds for prison reform. Such groups favored the utilization of prison as punishment and expressed concern that reform measures would result in the "coddling of inmates."

Although federal court pressure was significant in forcing this sizeable political faction to support reform and higher budgets for Western D.O.C., considerable legislative ambivalence continued to surround the funding of prison reforms.

Soon after the adoption of the service ideology, three external events—one economic and two political—posed significant obstacles to organizational diffusion of this element of the reform movement. Because of the 1982-83 recession, the western state was faced with a serious budgetary crisis. In addition, determinate sentencing laws passed by the state in 1975 were effecting massive increases in its prison population (Jacobs 1983; Fox 1982). Simultaneous with the implementation of determinate sentencing laws, was legislative pressure to severely limit the number of inmates eligible for prison parole and work furlough programs. As a result of these constraints, despite the addition of two new facilities, the Western D.O.C. institutional population again rose far above designated capacity levels by late 1982. Moreover, responding to a projected revenue shortfall for the 1982-83 fiscal year, the state legislature unexpectedly cut 5 percent of the Western D.O.C. budget. This fiscal crisis, coupled with the new explosion of the inmate population, reinforced legislative resistance to prison reform programs. In this context, the anti-reform opposition was quite successful in portraying new service programs as luxuries that the state could not afford.

These external events seriously diminished the resource base for implementing the Western D.O.C. reform movement. The recession and other legislative "get tough" policies resulted in the diversion of funds away from both inmate service (e.g., staff for inmate grievance procedure actions) and in-service training programs. These conditions greatly increased inmate staff ratios, reintroducing security as an exclusive concern. Accordingly, the organizational actors who provided the most support for the service ideology, the top administrators of Western D.O.C., were required to turn their attention away from reforms and toward this new crisis and the "get tough" rhetoric of powerful interests in the external environment.

A third barrier to implementing the reform-service ideology was posed by the informal organization of the Western D.O.C. Staff opinion regarding the extension of rights and formal services for inmates and the educational upgrading of CSOs was sharply divided. Many of the veteran staff—including line personnel, line supervisors and mid-management personnel—opposed the reform



effort. Although some veteran staff argued that correctional officers had always provided services to inmates, they asserted that this new emphasis on formal services would jeopardize security.

The informal organization of Western D.O.C. was quite powerful. In part, the source of its strength stemmed from the original structure of the state prison system. The department of corrections did not exist as an entity until the late 1960's. Prior to that, each prison was run separately by its own warden with relatively little accountability to the state. Over the years, each prison had developed its own method of operation. Many of these power networks continued to exist even under the more centralized Western D.O.C. authority structure. Those who were a part of this veteran staff occupational subculture (frequently referred to as "the old guard") resented the "interference" of the central Western D.O.C. administration in local prison matters. They viewed these administrative interventions as serious threats to their power and authority in the prison workplace:

I told you that I really think this change in job title from "correctional *security* officer" to "correctional *service* officer" is a step backward for the officer. It makes us sound like servants or wet nurses. It takes away our authority and respect (supervisor).

The administrative guidelines were developed by people who never worked in a cellblock. We're getting a lot of officers in here with degrees and no common sense. We need more *experienced* personnel, not necessarily more educated ones (supervisor).

The combination of extra-organizational pressures, erosion of the resource base and informal organizational resistance prevented adequate staff training, discouraged the institutionalization of many new service programs and reinforced the continued predominance of custodial functions within Western D.O.C. institutions.

### *Professionalization and Hierarchical Control: An Organizational Contradiction*

Another fundamental barrier to the professionalization of correctional officers was the hierarchical, organizational structure of the Western D.O.C. and the failure of department administrators to adjust this structure to accommodate the development of professional line staff. In his analysis of the limitations on police professionalization, Swanson (1977) discusses the limits to professional autonomy posed by hierarchical, para-military organizational structures. He argues that the hierarchical nature of police organization assumes that individuals must be closely controlled and often coerced to achieve agency objectives. At odds with this

structure is the recruitment by police agencies of college educated people who are quite capable of being self-controlling and creative.

In Western D.O.C., this same type of organizational arrangement limited officer autonomy and input into policy formation. Little consistent effort was directed toward incorporating new, more highly educated officers into the prison organization. The department failed at both consistently improving the quality of in-service training programs and significantly changing the CSOs' traditional work routines. Instead, Western D.O.C. administrators reinforced a reliance on the chain of command and written procedures to dictate the actions of line personnel.

Specifically, in-service training was viewed as an essential mechanism by which new (frequently less experienced) officers could obtain the skills necessary to perform their jobs as CSOs. However, the limited availability of in-service training meant that many new officers were unable to acquire the skills necessary to perform well on the unit and earn the respect of veteran colleagues and supervisors. In addition to the general lack of training hours, training coordinators and training sessions were frequently isolated from the prison work areas. This arrangement discouraged the integration of new procedures into the officers' daily work routine (see also Jurik 1985a).

Also, Western D.O.C. never promoted any basic changes in the day-to-day work routines of CSOs. Both CSOs and their training coordinators argued that little else about the position had changed except the qualifications of the people who filled it. More highly educated and trained CSOs were granted no greater autonomy or participation in institutional policy decisionmaking.

They say they want more education; they say they want our input. But on the job we aren't treated as professionals; we aren't listened to. Our role is not much different from before. Correctional Service Officers! We are just glorified guards! (CSO).

A lot of the lieutenants are threatened by your more educated CSO. These new folks come in with a degree and think they'll be able to act like professionals with expertise in the area. They get out in the yard the first day and realize they don't have much flexibility or freedom to do anything. They are gravely dissappointed (training coordinator).

Para-professional counseling? That's a joke. That was added into the CSO job description because of A.C.A. requirements. To be accredited, we had to have a certain number of counselors on duty in the prisons at all times. The department didn't have the resources to do that so they made, CSOs into para-professional counselors. But

very few CSOs are allowed to do any counseling (supervisor).

Furthermore, many officers reported that they were often penalized by unit supervisors when trying to adopt a service orientation toward inmates on their unit. For example, inmates frequently prevailed upon CSOs either to discuss inmate personal problems or to check on inmate family problems. Several officers expressed confusion regarding the manner in which they should respond to such requests.

Some of the sergeants tell you to always refer them to the program officers. That might take a couple of days. On the other hand, if I'm spending time talking with a guy and a fight breaks out, and I'm not there, my ass is on the line. Besides that, if my sergeant sees it, I can be written up for being too friendly. On the other hand, if I don't do anything and the guy goes "bonkers" that night and destroys his room or somebody . . . well maybe I could have avoided it by talking to him. It's a no-win situation (CSO).

In addition to inadequate training and a failure to change the work routine of CSOs, job advancement was increasingly limited. In the late 1970's, promises of expanding promotional opportunities had come forward from Western D.O.C. administrators. However, the 1982-83 recession, coupled with increasing diversion of funds to prison construction, kept these promises from being met. Frequently, the few available promotional opportunities were controlled by the old guard informal organization:

There are a limited number of advancement slots, and officers wind up competing hard and fast for those. Often, it is who you know. You can work your 'bippy' off and get passed up for someone who isn't worth table salt (CSO).

The perception that rare promotional opportunities were extended on the basis of informal favors and alliances simply fueled the resentment and frustration of qualified officers who felt that they were being overlooked.

### THE RESPONSE TO FRUSTRATION

In the past two years (1983-84), the organizational-level constraints described above have continued to frustrate the successful implementation of professionalization in the Western D.O.C. The promises of professional training, upward mobility and formal services for inmates have largely been pre-empted by more traditional—and sometimes arbitrary—custodial functions. Although some of the highly educated CSOs adjusted to daily work routines and learned how to informally provide services for inmates, many of the officers hired in the reform era either quit their jobs or

turned to union organizing to make their grievances known to the media and state's policymakers.

In the face of growing dissatisfaction among line staff, high-level administrators hoped to solve departmental morale problems through even more careful screening and training of line staff. In such analyses, broader organizational problems were still ignored:

We need to identify the personality characteristics of the "good" CSO. Perhaps by having captains identify the qualities of their best officers, we might be able to compile a personality profile and match it to our new applicants (supervisor).

As the turnover rate among Western D.O.C. CSOs grew to one of the highest in the country, some correctional administrators identified the "inflated expectations" of correctional officers as a major cause of the "CSO moral problem."

We have a lot of officers who have come in thinking they know it all and they can't accept policy. We have got to devise some means of training them to recognize the importance of their role, but yet to understand that they must follow the rules. We need to identify the right type of personality for the job . . . someone who is skilled, but will be able to see their place in the organization as the one who must carry out the established policies (administrator).

Frustrated by their plight in the organization, correctional officers responded by increasing union activity. In 1982, some coordinated efforts to unionize appeared in Western D.O.C. However, officers were forbidden to wear union buttons to work or to carry any union literature into the workplace. By 1983, there was enough coordinated union effort to eliminate such rules, and the participation in the officer union continued to increase in 1984. Union demands incorporated line officer interests in professionalization and included calls for increased training, certification and participation in professional corrections' associations. Thus, although the professionalization movement was originally initiated by top correctional administrators, it is now being promoted by CSOs who are frustrated with their work environment.

### CONCLUSIONS: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Although Western D.O.C. administrators were generally successful in recruiting the type of CSOs that they desired, their professionalization strategy was—at best—only partially successful. Their widely publicized reform effort and recruitment of "a new breed" of correctional officers temporarily reinforced agency

autonomy in a period of crisis. However, our data suggest that highly educated, human service-oriented officers—in the absence of adequate training and broader organizational support—may have done little to improve the delivery of quality services to the Western D.O.C. inmate client population. More specifically, our data suggest that relative to veteran staff, more highly educated officers held no more positive attitudes toward inmates and inmate rehabilitation prospects. Furthermore, more highly educated and service-oriented officers were significantly less satisfied with the prison work environment than were more traditional, less educated, security-oriented officers. Reflective of similar research on policing (Brown 1982; Reuss-Ianni 1983), our findings suggest that by ignoring fundamental organizational contradictions and restricting their attention to recruiting the “ideal” line officer, corrections’ professionalization efforts increased the frustration of the very line staff they aimed to recruit.

Further progress in this area requires a more consistent focus on organizational-level as well as on individual-level change. A growing body of literature (e.g., Kanter 1977; Miller 1980; Jurik 1985a,b) suggests that simply changing the attributes of individual workers, such as education or gender, will not significantly alter a given work organization. For serious reformers, the contradiction between para-military management structures and professionalization of the ranks, as well as the organizational barriers to diffusing prison reforms, must be confronted.

Professionalization requires a management style that promotes far greater participation of line personnel in decision-making, particularly decisions related to the fundamentals of client relations and services (Elmore, 1978). Moreover, professionalization of the ranks requires the recruitment and training of line personnel who are capable of and formally encouraged to use informed judgment or administrative discretion to implement prison reform strategies (Aaronson, Dienes and Musheno 1983:377-490). Of course, the delegation of authority to line personnel also assumes that the ends or goals of correctional work are clearly understood so as to provide appropriate guidance and support for these interactions. If, in fact, the recruitment of a new breed of professionals is no more than “window-dressing” on the same abusive and warehouse-oriented institutions that have characterized our correctional system for the past century, then the current crisis in corrections is likely to continue well into the future.

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