



The association of affective and continuance commitment with correctional staff life satisfaction



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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that life satisfaction is a stronger predictor of job performance than job satisfaction, and life satisfaction is negatively associated with absenteeism and a desire to retire early. Despite the fact that employees with high life satisfaction are essential for organizations' optimal efficiency, little empirical research exists to determine the individual and workplace factors that shape and maintain high correctional staff life satisfaction levels. This study investigates the impact of two types of organizational commitment, continuance and affective, on correctional staff life satisfaction at two Midwestern prisons, one private and one public. Continuance commitment was negatively related and affective commitment was positively related with life satisfaction for staff in both prisons. Possible methods to increase affective commitment and life satisfaction for correctional staff are discussed.

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1. Introduction

A staff is essential for running a safe, secure, and humane correctional facility. Not only does staff affect correctional facility operations, the work environment also affects the staff. Because staff members are both a valuable and expensive resource, recent literature explores the relationship between different aspects of the work environment and various staff outcomes, such as job stress, job satisfaction, job burnout, absenteeism, turnover, and attitudes toward treatment/punishment. While this research provides valuable information, other areas still require scrutiny. One overlooked area is life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is the cognitive appraisal of the global degree of satisfaction

a person has with his or her overall life (Donovan and Halpern, 2002; Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012; Yilmaz, 2008).

Life satisfaction is likely to be an important outcome for employees, including correctional staff. Life satisfaction is associated with physical and mental health, as well as decreased mortality (Chida and Steptoe, 2008; Donovan and Halpern, 2002). Erdogan et al. (2012) contend that people who are satisfied with their lives tend to treat others better and, in turn, are treated better by other people. Life satisfaction not only impacts the employee, but also his or her family, friends, employer, and society. Donovan and Halpern (2002, p. 32) argue that "when people are happier, they tend to be more open-minded and creative in their thinking. In contrast, people who are unhappy, stressed or dissatisfied tend to exhibit 'tunnel vision' and rigid thinking." In research outside the field of criminal justice, life satisfaction has been positively linked with creativity, open-mindedness, retention and productivity (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman,

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2009; Erdogan et al., 2012; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In fact, Jones (2006) reports that life satisfaction is a stronger predictor of job performance than job satisfaction. Additionally, life satisfaction has been reported to be negatively related with absenteeism and a desire to retire early (Murphy, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006; Von Bonsdorff, Huuhtanen, Tuomi, & Seitsamo, 2010). Also, life satisfaction has been associated with increased organizational citizenship behaviors, which are going beyond what is expected at work, among both non-criminal justice employees (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2010) and criminal justice employees (Lambert, 2010). In corrections, life satisfaction has been linked with lower turnover intent and higher organizational citizenship (Lambert, 2010; Lambert, Hogan, Paoline, & Baker, 2005). In addition, there has been a movement in the past several decades to make workplaces more human-oriented, which includes being concerned about workers' life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012).

Life satisfaction is important for both the individual and the employing organization, including correctional facilities. Staff members who are unhappy with life may become demoralized and less productive and effective on the job. On the other hand, correctional agencies with staff that tend to be satisfied with their lives are more likely to maintain a safe and secure institution. As much of one's adult life is spent at work, workplace factors likely influence one's life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012). The relationship of the work environment with the life satisfaction of correctional staff, however, has received little attention in the literature, and should be explored for both theoretical and practical reasons. Organizational commitment, a bond between the employee and his/her employing organization, is a workplace factor that is likely to be related to life satisfaction. Organizational commitment is a multi-dimensional construct with different forms that fall on a continuum ranging from behavioral to attitudinal (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). At the behavioral end is continuance commitment characterized by job investments that bond the person to the organization, such as salary or pension (Meyer and Allen, 1997). At the continuum's attitudinal end is affective commitment, a psychological bond characterized by loyalty to and identification with the purposes and goals of the employing organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). This study examines how these two forms of organizational commitment are related to the life satisfaction of correctional staff at two correctional facilities, one private and one public.

2. Literature review

2.1. Correctional staff life satisfaction studies

While the industrial/organizational literature emphasizes the importance of life satisfaction, there is little research on this attribute in corrections. The studies to date support the position that workplace factors are important in helping shape correctional staff's life satisfaction. Work-on-family conflict occurs when problems at work cause conflict at home, and family-on-work conflict occurs when problems at home cause conflict at work. Both types

of work-family conflict and job burnout are significant predictors of lower life satisfaction (Lambert, Hogan, & Elechi, et al., 2009; Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, et al., 2010; Lambert et al., 2005). Organizational citizenship behaviors, distributive justice, and procedural justice are positively associated with life satisfaction (Lambert, 2010; Lambert and Hogan, 2011). Interestingly, job involvement, which is the job's psychological importance to an employee, has a negative relationship with life satisfaction (Lambert, Hogan, & Elechi, et al., 2009).

Moreover, the literature points to the importance of job stress and job satisfaction as two important workplace factors that influence correctional staff's life satisfaction (; Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, et al., 2010; Lambert et al., 2005). Both concepts are associated with correctional staff's affective commitment – job stress lowers this form of organizational commitment and job satisfaction increases it (Lambert, 2004); therefore, a relationship between organizational commitment and life satisfaction among correctional staff is expected. Whether affective and continuance commitment has similar or different associations with life satisfaction is unclear.

2.2. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is the bond between a person and an employing organization (Mowday et al., 1982). It is a bond to the entire organization and not a particular job or workgroup (Lambert and Paoline, 2008). There are two forms of organizational commitment, continuance and affective, depending on how the employee's bond with the organization is formed.

For continuance commitment, the employee's bond with the organization is based on investments the person makes while working for the organization over time (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Becker (1960) indicates these investments represent "sunken costs." Sunken costs include "anything of importance that an employee has invested, such as time, effort, or money, which would be lost or devalued at some cost to the employee if he or she left the organization" (Wallace, 1997, p. 728). Sunk costs include salary and benefits, skills, social relationships, lost opportunities, and so forth. These investments tend to tie employees to their organization and make it more difficult for them to leave (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, and Sincich (1993, p. 953) note that continuance commitment "reflects a sense of being locked in place because of the high costs of leaving... The employee feels compelled to commit to the organization because monetary, social, psychological, and other costs associated with leaving are high."

For affective commitment, the bond is more emotional or psychological in nature (Allen and Meyer, 1990). If employees feel their needs are met by the organization and perceive that they are valued and treated with respect and dignity, an emotional attachment is likely to form. This emotional attachment reflects the employee's sense of belonging, loyalty, pride, and identification with and internalization of the core values of the organization (Mowday et al., 1982). With affective commitment,

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