

2023

## Qualitative Assessment of Psychological Safety and Ethics in Corrections Officers

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# Walden University

College of Allied Health

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Gary R. Breig

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Qualitative Assessment of Psychological Safety and Ethics in Corrections

Officers

by

Gary R. Breig

M.Ed., Boston University, 1994

B.A., Cardinal Glennon College, 1973

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

August 2023

## Abstract

In this qualitative study, I explored psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception among correctional officers that worked in the prison industry. Former officers provided data by participating in an open-ended question interviews. I used a phenomenological approach to gather information from former officers about their psychological safety experience and their ethical and moral perceptions. Participants gave insight into their training and their work as individuals and as teams exploring individual and team psychological safety and ethical and moral perception while interacting with each other in the prison workplace. Research questions were about officer preparation, officer collaboration quality, quality indications of their workplace relations, their experience in raising process and operational issues, and what resources they used to maintain ethical and moral behavior with officers in the workplace. Social exchange theory was used to understand officer progression while advancing benefits over costs. The thematic results (leadership, maturity, moral foundation, and preparedness) call for more research about individual officer and team training priorities within prison industry limitations. The positive social change impact of this study is corrections officer team learning supported by psychological safety and by advancing officer ethical and moral perception.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this research work to those normalizing the work of corrections, especially corrections professionals in the United States. Corrections focuses on safety and security while supporting individual growth and change. History demonstrates some progress in the field but recidivism statistics have not shown much positive change. Normalizing corrections requires ethical and moral behavior by everyone to model change in this industry workplace. The parochial influence that individual states and villages have on this field may delay organizational change in this field making it a challenge. Past habits may have avoided ethical and moral awareness and accountability. Personal and group accountability in corrections would demand a culture change. Culture change demands courage among those that presently serve in the industry.

I also dedicate this study to those intentional about building psychological safety within the corrections workplace. It is a challenge to develop this construct in the prison environment. Present-day law enforcement situations demonstrates how difficult it is to make ethical and moral decisions when psychological safety may not be present. Ethical leadership requires ethical and moral behavior; psychological safety allows for working through problem solving to help both corrections officers, clinical staff, and offenders. Psychological safety among correctional officers helps the organizational environment become positive. Psychological safety, ethical awareness, and accountability supports a creative work environment, supports a stronger work ethic within staff and security personnel, decreases adverse effects on the workplace environment, and supports the service vocations within the corrections industry.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In this study, I examined correctional officer professional and relational interactions with each other within correctional institutions. I focused on psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception in corrections officers as they interact with each other, staff members, and offenders in the prison workplace. This study is important because correctional officers may be interacting with each other and with others without the benefit of psychological safety and positive ethical and moral perception in the prison workplace (Ferdick & Smith, 2017; National Institute of Justice, 2017; Spinaris, 2018).

In this chapter, I will provide background about the correctional workplace, custody and security levels, the corrections officer involvement in the prison workplace, and the interaction of psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception among officers. In this chapter, I will address the necessity of this study about exploring correctional officer psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception based on background knowledge. I will provide the research questions and discuss the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. I will also discuss important definitions involved in the study, the assumptions, scope of study, the delimitations, and the significance of the study.

## **Background**

### **Overview**

In this section, I will discuss the correctional environment found in prisons at the state level. I will explain the rank system for corrections officers and how progression in the vocation proceeds. I will explain security classifications and offender custody classifications and how officers are part of this process. I will provide a definition of administrative segregation and how officers use it to protect and keep offenders and staff safe (Labrecque et al, 2021). I will enumerate corrections officer tasks and activities to help in visualizing what an officer is required and accountable to do during their duty shift (National Center for O\*Net Development, 2021). I will provide historical references about the role of the officer in earlier times including descriptions of disciplinary measures used for offender compliance cited by Peterman (2020) . I include a discussion about prison simulations and how difficulties in those simulations led to negative behaviors erupting in these experiments along with misunderstandings distinct from real prison situations.

This background section includes a discussion of health issues and symptom management that surfaced in officers while serving in corrections noted by Liu and Taylor (2019). I display the perspective of team learning and the psychological safety construct in the context of required training of officers and their shared responsibility from the viewpoint of Useche et al. (2019). This will expand awareness of the expectation that corrections executives and supervisors have about officers acting in the ethical leader role based on their ethical and moral awareness. I will present correctional

officer management progression from the perspective of workplace collaboration, officer responsibility, and prison psychology. Lastly, I will present the literature gap about corrections officers interacting with colleagues as team members.

## **Prison Industry as a Secure Workplace**

### ***Prison System Expanse***

The majority of correctional facilities (some segregated by gender) are operated by different government levels, and some are privatized facilities for men that are operated for profit. An example of facilities under a corrections department in a state government may involve as many as 20 or more prisons. Each facility follows established administrative regulations or policies including a location-specific regulation and policy supplements to support each prison based on facility needs and requirements. For example, the state of Colorado has an administrative regulation (AR) (Col Code AR § 100-01 [2021] LEXIS COAR 100-01) that covers establishment and regular review of ARs

### ***Corrections officer rank system***

Correctional officers have a five-tier rank system distinct from military order. The ranks begin with officer, progressing through sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and finally major. Candidates enter a basic training course of study that have a duration of 5 weeks up to 18 weeks (Ricciardelli & Adjoran, 2021) depending upon department requirements. The curriculum may include topics such as defensive tactics, report writing, communications, tool training, computer use, skills practice, and other areas for the profession (Burton et al., 2018). Upon completion, corrections officers stand and raise

their right hand to repeat the words of an oath of office similar to those elected, selected, or appointed in public office or military service. Following this swearing in, corrections officers receive a badge and begin working in and for the department as a sworn law enforcement officer in the corrections industry.

### ***Offender Custody Classification***

The corrections department in one state for example has an AR titled Offender Classification (Col Code AR § 600-1 [2019] LEXIS COAR 600-1). This corrections department classifies offenders in a system based on an entry assessment, separating offenders into four custody levels. Custody or classification levels are discerned by clinical staff by assessment. The assessment would be given when an offender enters the corrections system rendering points. The points defined in a regulation are compared against a custody rating scale within the regulation. The custody rating develops from assessing individual elements based on offender history. Those elements would include but are not limited to institutional violence history, current conviction severity, prior conviction severity, escape history, discipline report severity and frequency history, work evaluation, program participation, and current age (Col Code AR § 600-1 [2019] LEXIS COAR 600-1) . Using the point system from the assessment form in the regulation, case managers and staff assign a custody level based on points accumulated. The levels include minimum (4 or less), minimum-restricted (5 to 9), medium (10 to 13), and close (14 or more) (Col Code AR § 600-1 [2019] LEXIS COAR 600-1). The assigned points for classification sets offender custody level while in the corrections system and are reviewed periodically. Yet, classification does not always directly designate the assigned

facility for the offender. (Col Code AR § 600-1 [2019] LEXIS COAR 600-1). As per the AR, senior security level administration can change the security level of the offender while in the system based on behavior. For example, minimum level security offenders may be housed in Level I or II security facilities individually or with another offender or cellie to support prosocial activity and development. Minimum level offenders that have little or no violence history and serve sentences of 10 years or less. Minimum security has a low correctional officer-offender ratio due to lower conflict tendency in these facilities. Outside structures in these prisons have no single perimeter fencing and no static guard towers. Bathroom facilities in minimum level are not per cell but rather shared per housing unit. At this level, there are opportunities offered to be in work programs including learning trades and direct participation in the production industry including dairy farming and product manufacturing.

### ***Prison security levels***

Security classification serves the safety and security needs of corrections officers and staff by recognizing offender differences as to their potential to “commit misconduct” and to establish appropriate housing for them while in prison (Tahamont, 2019, p. 768). Corrections departments may use a system with five security levels (Col. Rev. Stat. § 17-1-104.3, LEXIS 2018) for offender placement. Level I security facilities have specified boundaries without perimeter fencing. Minimum custody offenders are incarcerated in this facility type without offenders of higher custody classification. Level II security facilities have single or double depth perimeter fencing designating the facility boundary that is periodically patrolled. Minimum and minimum restrictive custody

offenders are imprisoned in this level facility with no offenders with higher classification. Level III security facilities have guard observation towers with a wall and/or double perimeter fencing continuously patrolled and topped with razor wire and uses additional detection devices (Col. Rev. Stat. § 17-1-104.3, LEXIS 2018). These three security levels have formal and informal accountability counts to ensure the offender is present in the facility.

Level IV security facilities have towers, a double wall, perimeter fencing topped with razor wire, additional detection devices, and a continuously patrolled perimeter. Offenders are housed in cells with more opportunity to be outside of them than high security offenders. Formal and informal counts are also used for accountability with a higher ratio of officers to offenders than minimum or low security level. These offenders may serve sentences of up to 3 years. Close custody offenders and those with lower classifications may be held in Level IV facilities. Those with higher classifications based on their point totals may not be held in Level IV.

High or maximum security in federal prisons is similar to Level V in state prisons. Offenders housed in Level V facilities may have committed violent crimes or have a history of violence while in prison. A Level V facility can actually house offenders classified with any of the four custody levels. Offender threat to society, to other offenders, and to staff warrant this security level. Level V involves double perimeter fencing and walls with secure gate entries known as sally ports (double-gate entries) under strict observation, including fence checks (stun-lethal fencing tests, observe for fence breaks, documented and detail-focused transport operations, and logistics check

support), guard towers, and both mobile and walking guards (Col. Rev. Stat. § 17-1-104.3, LEXIS 2018). The design and architecture involved in jails and prisons would include:

- Half-to-full wall borders
- Triple fencing supported by triple layer razor-wire spools and razor wire on top of the fencing and walls
- Individual cells with heavy sliding or heavy hinged doors
- Doors operated by correctional officers that open, close, and secure on each individual cell electronically by computer
- Doors with a window and a food tray slot for offender support while keeping others safe
- Cell has own toilet, sink, and shower or shower placed in a separate area

(Kimme et al., 2011; St John et al., 2019)

Transport requirements for appointments i.e., physical health or court appearances, outside the cell may require transport in physical restraints while escorted by armed officers including an operating body camera to record offender and officer behavior. The tightly secured facility borders have traveling and static (tower and control center) officers for immediate response during incursion or escape events. Cell-housed offenders have mandatory accountability counts or bed checks (formal and informal counts). Corrections officers manage frequently adjusted schedules for offender activities to guard against predictability. Living under regulation is the small stability that both

officers and offenders may enjoy while constant change makes management practice and procedure challenges everyone in the facility.

### ***Administrative Segregation***

Administrative segregation (Ad-Seg) is one iteration of security that has been used by corrections officers in prison facilities. This has been expressed as disciplinary confinement, restrictive housing, or solitary confinement. With this type of offender security, officers isolate one offender from others for a specified time duration (Labrecque et al, 2021). Correctional officers are involved in the discernment about, assignment of, and offender management of this designation when Ad-Seg becomes part of the security condition of the inmate (Helmus et al., 2019). The intent of Ad-Seg is two-fold: to ensure safety and security among offenders in a prison facility when threats or conflict are anticipated or apparent, and to isolate an offender by interrupting present routine for another routine (Helmus et al., 2019). Specific offenders that may do physical harm to other offenders and staff members are prevented from doing so by implementing this practice.

In the past, offenders held in Ad-Seg would spend 22 to 24 hours in a cell and may have the privilege of 1 hour of outside recreation. However, Ad-Seg has been revisited as an incarceration method, thinking on it again and questioning its use based on how such treatment impacts sentenced offenders mentally and psychologically (Coppola, 2019; Morgan et al., 2016; O'Keefe, 2017). Recent research has shown that Ad-Seg as a behavioral control method has a negative effect on a person (Labrecque, Mears & Smith, 2020). With Ad-Seg eliminated in some departments, offenders have been afforded the

privilege of 4 to 6 hours outside their cell. When thinking about releasing an offender back into society after being in Ad-Seg without any transitional process, wardens and corrections administrators have asked the question about how safe the community is after such an offender release (Prendergast, 2015a; Prendergast, 2015b; Woodman, 2019). Prison wardens and executive level corrections administrators have been asking for and actively working to establish a transition process for offenders from Ad-Seg or any offender about to be released to the community (Labrecque et al., 2021). For example, a corrections department executive director actually spent 16 hours in an Ad-Seg cell to know the solitary confinement experience (Raemisch, 2019). This led him to advance his plan to establish formation processes to help offenders transition out of prison back into the community.

### **Officers Involvement in Corrections Industry**

Corrections officers carry out a daily duty agenda as public servants that is long and detailed (Col. Rev. Stat. §18-1-901, 2018) for the corrections department. Officer duties listed below reflect the wide flexibility required in the corrections profession:

- Maintain discipline and order among offenders aided by restraints, weapons, & use of force
- Provide counsel and words of instruction to offenders that have legitimate questions and requests
- Keep daily logs of offender activities and report any incidents
- Conduct searches of inmates and cells for contraband, such as drugs or weapons
- Ensure security and prevent escapes by routine condition inspection of locks, doors,

- gates, and window bars
- Mediate offender disputes
  - Supervise recreational activities and skill building workshops for offenders
  - Investigate crimes committed by offenders within the correctional facility or aid police investigators with information about crimes
  - Oversee the distribution of clothing, food, or tools to offenders
  - Escort offenders to and from the correctional facility for appearances in court or transport to other institutions
  - Screen visitors and keep all facility entrances secure

(National Center for O\*Net Development, 2021; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; St. John et al., 2019; Batton & Wright, 2019)

Officers may be working in one location but may be assigned in different locations from hour to hour, or day to day. With this working condition, officers getting to know their fellow officers as work mates may be an initial or continual challenge. This condition could quickly place officer self-efficacy and interdependence front and center in the workplace in learning about activities, schedules, and duties in the section, ward, or unit.

### ***Historical context***

Corrections officers are placed in a power position in deference to the warden (prison corporate executive officer) because of the authority bestowed by the legitimate authority of government. Haugaard (2012) identified that authority as power *over* (domination) others as distinct from power *with* or power *to* (empowerment). The officer has been in a predicament of adjustment and execution based on how power is actualized in the present moment present it to greater scrutiny as policy and regulation have a

stronger presence compared to its earlier history (Peterman et al., 2020). Calling corrections an industry would offer the possibility that individuals, specifically offenders, would learn a trade through the manufacturing process for saleable products or learning a marketable skill. Those products may include office furniture, medical items (splints, supports, and casts from three-dimensional printers), dairy products, and leather goods to name a few of them. Skills have included dairy farming, plumbing, barbering, or working as a cook. Along with administrative regulations, many prison agencies establish mission and vision statements to reflect support for inmate progress toward societal re-entry with mentors and corrections officers integral to that support (Appelbaum et al., 2001).

Corrections officers and other staff personnel commit by sworn oath to modeling moral and ethical practice to support and become a resource for change. Correctional philosophical statements vests correctional officers with the role to reflect and model change ability in their own lives to support offenders actualizing their own changes. Corrections officers have forces acting on them from different perspectives: state legislators, the judicial system, supervisors, fraternal organizations that provide codes of ethics, the public sector, their neighborhood, their fellow officers (Viotti, 2016). Being able to actualize these expectations along with living their own lives proves officer diligence in being a professional in the prison workplace. The interactions that corrections officers have with each other and with staff become the visible witness for change support.

Supervision among law enforcement has varied influence and leaves distinct impressions in different countries (Brunetto et al., 2020). Supervision and mentoring

become more important for officers when periodic and annual performance evaluations takes place. For example, Australian law enforcement subordinates have less satisfaction with their supervisors because they have been provided more discretionary power than supervisors in the United States (Brunetto et al., 2015). The greater discretionary power, the more subordinate officers have to be wary of their behavior and demeanor. For law enforcement in the United States, abusive supervision occurs when psychological safety is absent and past behavior in line officers is revisited as the method of choice in responding to misconduct and other non-compliant behaviors (Kim et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2019) showed that networking behavior, i.e., making known what negative behaviors are taking place that would tend to be hidden or suppressed within supervisory staff of the organization, would help reveal negative supervisory behavior and challenge supervisors to use different methods than would be drawn from past abuse.

### ***Disciplinary practice***

In the 1830's, the behavior of prison inmates required that their large numbers had to be ruled with a whip as researched by Worley et al. (2021). Later, the Supreme Court in Virginia declared prisoners as slaves of the state as their criminal behavior warranted them as losing all rights and privileges except those granted by corrections administration (Worley et al., 2021). The policy of non-interference with officers and offenders continues to influence present corrections industry operations. An example of this non-interference policy is seen in the Iowa State Legal Code under the chapter titled Obstructing Justice. As specified in the chapter (Iowa Legal Code § 719.1 (Interference with official acts), LEXIS 2023), such interference is considered a misdemeanor as

officers are protected by law; interference of a more significant nature can be deemed a serious misdemeanor. From these decisions, officers with this authority could be more abusive and contentious with each other and with offenders (Worley et al., 2021).

Presently, more accountability is afforded in corrections by using body and area video cameras. The policy and procedures presently used are stated in ARs that are developed and have regularly scheduled reviews by executive staff as found in Colorado AR 100-1 (Col. Code §AR 100-1 [2021] LEXIS COAR 100-01). Historically, officers were called prison guards accomplishing command and control through various methods. Gross (2008) identified punishment methods from the Stanford prison experiment such as extended physical exercises, offenders counting off by their number identity, and mattress removal for offenders to sleep on the floor as discerned by the simulated officers. Some of these methods and coerced behaviors were also used in the Abu Ghraib holding facility during the Desert Storm (Eichert, 2019; Knox, 2019). Wright (2000) noted a prison museum where tools and implements of methods are described and displayed: chains and shackles, a 2-inch-wide belt used on the so-called Old Mare (tall sawhorse for the offender to lean over while the prison guard whipped the offender for punishment), Ad-Seg, and lock-down conditions. Physical and psychological treatments like these were considered dangerous and abusive when compared to regulated ethical and moral practice (Werth, 2019). When an agency such as the American Correctional Association (ACA) provided certifying visits to prison facilities, departments of correction and correctional officers authored and reviewed ARs for prison facilities. Administrations and departments were accountable as regulations were to be in line with

standards set by the ACA. These standards are referenced on the head page of each AR for root demonstration of each regulation and to support their scheduled review. Each employee, corrections officers included, is required to learn, know, and actualize regulations, an expectation noted in training and per AR (Col. Code §AR 100-1 [2021] LEXIS COAR 100-01). This is modeling compliance in a positive way which, in turn, becomes a positive influence on offenders in the facility. However, actualizing these parameters does not guarantee that abuse, injury, or criminal behavior is not taking place inside the facility. Daily, these sworn officers are to make the conscious or unconscious decision to serve in the penal environment. In some ways, that environment is a closed human work system unseen by accounting authority. What officers give in time and effort demands their attention and ready operating knowledge.

### ***Heavy toll of work demands***

Research observation and analysis of corrections officers has shown the toll of the work on personal and professional life (Ferdik & Smith, 2017; Useche et al., 2019). Benefits like pay, progression, and experience may be much less than what the officer may be called upon to give. The National Institute of Justice noted 35% of corrections officers experienced high stress levels (Ferdik & Smith, 2017; Ferdik et al., 2014). Another marker for corrections officers having difficulty is perceived workplace adversity as they see the prison environment as a place of suffering that is connected with incidents of loss, trauma, or tragedy (Trounson et al., 2019). The adverse perception of officers has led to increased stress and other negative health outcomes, both physical and psychological (Trounson et al., 2017; Trounson et al., 2016). The health outcomes

showed negative impact on organizations with correctional work showing the least job satisfaction among the twenty-six occupational categories (Trounson et al., 2019).

Corrections officers in their negative health state responded by being absent or being present while unfit for duty or while enmeshed in burn out, behavioral disengagement, and venting (Gould et al., 2013; Trounson et al., 2019). Officers coming to the prison workplace while having these difficulties would suggest that each is experiencing deficits with regard to being positive about their job and profession and not being psychologically well while attending their work assignments.(Trounson et al., 2019).

### **Prison Distinct from Simulations**

#### ***Stanford, BBC, and other prison simulations***

Real world corrections environments are much different from simulations as actual corrections officers and supervisors have real power vested by the institution they represent (Bartels, 2019; Griggs & Bartels, 2019; Zimbardo & Haney, 2020). Review of the Stanford prison project reveals an example of how an experiment can become difficult to manage when ethical and moral considerations are sidelined. The research results and the behavioral outcomes of the project became the impetus for federal legislation including the National Research Act (U. S. House of Representatives, 1974), and the resulting *Belmont Report* composed by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

Simulations require volunteer participants. The volunteer players (guards and prisoners) for the simulations in review were similar to those found in real world prisons

but the influences and conditions involved varied in each simulation from the real thing. In the Stanford project, no standard training, protocol, or indoctrination was established by outside authority or ratified instruments like legislation, justice personnel, and sworn officers to protect both officers and prisoners (Zimbardo & Haney, 2020). Whatever preparation or readiness for this role that might have come from standardized curriculum training and experience was absent while those operating the experiment provided their own guidance. The student that chose to participate discovered much more about the experimental project later after its closure (Williams et al., 2019). It was clear in hindsight when reviewing the Stanford University projects (Jaffe's Toyon Hall student prison simulation, and Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment) that they both benefitted from each other (Jaffe, 1971; Zimbardo, 2018). Jaffe wrote scheduling, prison rules, and served as warden in the Zimbardo project, and the Zimbardo project followed the Jaffe project by three months (Griggs & Bartels, 2019). Zimbardo used a directive orientation for his project guards. Zimbardo was intentional about group cohesion and demanded specific characteristics, i.e., giving orders, assigning time constraints, and formal counts. The guard participants were to behave in accordance with his design even though they were not uniform in their motivation. This becomes a situational influence that was minimized in the analysis that followed. This becomes important when reviewing the experiment records including video and audio tapes and transcripts (Brady et al., 1988). This orientation empowered guards to employ methods that were abusive and psychologically damaging (Bartels, 2019). The officers executed physical and psychological abuse on the volunteer prisoners from the first day. The simulated officers

exhibited more sadistic behavior, including stripping prisoners naked and physically beating them. This behavior directly opposed the information given to the volunteer prisoners prior to the project (Zimbardo & Haney, 2020). This led to a riot breaking out between prisoners and officers on the third day. One simulated prisoner showed overt signs of being overtaken by psychological stress. Those outside the simulation who were aware of the behavioral conflicts and difficulties within the project questioned the ethics and morality of continuing the project beyond the third day. Zimbardo terminated the project on the sixth day even though the project was to last 2 weeks. Zimbardo, serving as the prison superintendent, noted that his girlfriend at the time called him to account for what was happening (Haney et al., 1973). Zimbardo admitted that he was pulled into the simulation as he himself tolerated unethical and immoral behavior (Zimbardo & Haney, 2020). Zimbardo later noted his own ethical missteps and since has assisted in dealing with ethical and moral concerns, especially in correctional and prison settings (Zimbardo & Haney, 2020).

The BBC prison simulation project in 2001 was distinct because the participant orientation was different from the Zimbardo project (Reicher et al., 2018). As a result, the guards in the BBC project were not abusive and the prisoner participants became more resistant while becoming more collaborative as a group. This was just the opposite of what happened in Zimbardo's project as the guard orientation was more directive than initially stated (Bartels, 2019). The claim of being non-directive to participant guards was countered by the findings of Le Texier (2019) with the orientation narrative presented by Zimbardo. Le Texier (2019) provided expository criticisms of the scientific deficits of

Zimbardo in his methodology and ethics. Le Texier called for more integrity concerning the Zimbardo project while little has been forthcoming (Griggs & Bartels, 2019). This author holds that these simulation projects and others that followed revealed the correctional officer role adoption in the prison environment as experiencing some influence by ethical and moral guidance in both directive and non-directive ways and having an impact on guard and prisoner participants through role identification (Bartels, 2019).

These projects drove change in ethical research methods and research participant respect by way of the National Research Act of 1974 (U. S. House of Representatives, 1974) and the Belmont Report (U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). The corrections environment study of Zimbardo involved examining his dispositional hypothesis, referencing difficult prison conditions and recidivism due to failed offender rehabilitation (Griggs & Bartels, 2019).

### ***Clear guidance and direction***

Corrections departments directed by the state government including legislated and enacted revised statutes help guide and direct the philosophy and practice within correctional facilities. The administrative regulations mentioned above help guide and support prison facility operations and practices and help maintain safety and security through responsible staff behavior. The corrections department has been intentional about moving beyond abusive methods used in the past, i.e., physical abuse by striking or electrically shocking offenders, and psychological abuse by verbal and nonverbal torment, and holds correctional staff accountable for negative behavior.

This specific study focused on correctional officers that served in corrections facilities. The study observed officer collaboration and interaction with each other while they managed offenders serving prison sentences leveled by government justice departments within the industrial history of corrections. Officials in justice departments send convicted felons to serve sentences to help maintain community safety (AR 100-01, 2019). While serving these sentences, these offenders are encouraged to learn, grow, and change in anticipation of returning to society after leaving prison. Corrections officers are a consistent presence among offenders and work caretaking and modeling tasks in support of offender progress toward growth to return to society. Other correctional staff members such as educators, counselors, chaplains, nurse practitioners, medical doctors and physicians assistants, psychologists and psychiatrists, social workers, and administrators may have contact with offenders depending on specific needs. Potentially, corrections officers have the longest exposure duration and greatest immersive influence beyond what any other correctional staff members would provide.

### **Correctional Officer Service Qualities**

#### ***Officer accountability***

Corrections officers manage operations to support and maintain regulatory accountability and are accountable themselves in how they administer that accountability. Officers are compliance accountable in method application actions when managing offender reactions and responses in their compliance accountability. Conflict can stem from abusive officer methods, or offender reactions, or both. Maintaining professional composure and safety and security priorities is a challenge when incidents erupt from

conflict (Koedijk et al., 2019). Besides maintaining compliance, corrections officers can become skilled facilitators in helping an inmate deal with anger and frustration behaviors through work experience and offender knowledge. Officers have been instrumental in working with offenders to process their behavioral issues and develop self-regulation to de-escalate to prevent incidents (Levenson & Willis, 2019; van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2019). Officers also have workplace environment circumstances that operate against officer ethical and moral behavior and against support for rehabilitation (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019b; Koedijk et al., 2019). Azemi (2019) identified the whistleblowing circumstance in California (Dryburgh, 2009) when two correctional officers exposed other officers perpetrating negative behaviors (physical abuse, and psychological abuse) toward offenders while showing no responsibility for their actions. The officers behaved contrary to their oath and code of ethics while administrators did not hold them accountable. This substantiated revelation became the basis for changes in the state corrections facilities (Azemi, 2019).

### ***Shared responsibility.***

The varied perspectives, attitudes, and outlooks of correctional officers and offenders within the prison environment can influence their interaction as individuals and as groups as each one views their own situation. This would also warrant observing and measuring correctional officers and their interaction with each other. Antonio, Young, and Wingard (2009) did research with basic trainees about shared responsibility in reinforcing positive social behavior with Pennsylvania Department of Corrections measuring staff attitudes and beliefs through training using a pre- and post-assessment. A

collaborative environment actively supported by officers as part of the line staff is optimum for supporting offenders in their progress to return to society (Antonio et al., 2009). They argued that perspective and attitude responsibility is pushed from an individual view toward a shared view as officers, staff, and offenders interact with each other (Antonio et al., 2009). Officers saw themselves as being primary in modeling social responsibility especially because of their numbers and their interaction with offenders. The research of Atatsi et al. (2019) focused on shared responsibility in research on employee skills and gifts to improve performance within the workplace environment. Performance focus was on task completion beyond goals and fulfilled expectations including organizational citizenship, innovative behaviors, and individual and team learning (Atatsi et al., 2019). Such behaviors serve to facilitate job performance reports, promotion recommendations, and mentoring skills. These areas are part of the correctional officers vocation and would be a health measure indicative within the industry along with offender success.

The shared responsibility construct becomes important within the correctional workplace as officers actualize the mass of policies, regulations, and security and safety practices that drive and support their daily duties. Goals in corrections, goal attainment processes, and the guidance for goal achievement as the officer team background knowledge support shared responsibility and their personal and group investment in this process (Zohar, 2005). This process is supported by psycho-social interaction with fellow officers in their intention and self-expectation for follow through in helping each other (Zeijen et al., 2020). This support is essential to the officer well-being and job

performance (Zeijen et al., 2020). Social support quality has been shown to require reinvestment and gratitude as part of its provision above one-time demonstrations (Lanaj et al., 2016; Uy et al., 2017; Zeijen et al., 2020;). This vision about climate within the workplace centers on workers actualizing goal achievement in practice through shared responsibility (Zohar, 2005). Shared responsibility among officers provide compliance through behavioral practice in a manner that demonstrates their individual and group sense of security and safety. The resulting climate would actualize their individual and group compliance vision to fulfil supervisory expectation. (Zohar, 2005). This also supports team learning and strengthens psychological safety. Leadership modeling social support that is both inclusive and reflective of responsibility actualized adds to the subordinate tools in psychological safety and individual and group thriving (Zeng et al., 2020).

### ***Correctional officer responsibility***

Correctional officers have been called prison guards, prison police, and custodial corrections officers reflecting the perspectives that the corrections industry has bestowed on them (Baldwin et al., 2019). Protecting offenders from each other and from society gives meaning to the name ‘guard’ similar to a shield. Officers serve as offender caretakers to give meaning to the name ‘custodial.’ This is true to form as officers bring meals to offenders and facilitate offender appointments with clinical and medical staff. The name ‘police’ in corrections refers to measuring offender compliance with the Code of Penal Discipline. This code or prison rule listing set as the offender behavioral standard in correctional facilities governs behavior while assigned in the correctional

system. In the past, correctional officers were called ‘turn-keys’ They gained this title because they served as the only service personnel in prison facilities to open and close cell doors by turning keys in door locks to open and secure cells. Corrections officers continue this role in a different way as many cell doors are now controlled by computer contacts and electrical power while the doors can still be opened manually with a key. Beyond maintaining facility security, corrections officers are the ‘turn-key’ staff members working in a prison. Corrections officers have more contact and social interaction with offenders than any other staff member in a correctional facility including administrative corrections officers. For example, O’Keefe et al. (2013) noted that line officers observe offenders in their cells every thirty minutes besides formal counts throughout the day. They are also best described as police vested with authority while in many ways are powerless (Viotti, 2016). These officers serve the state government by actualizing legislation that governs activity within state prisons. One pressure that officers experience is balancing discipline with safety and security, careful to perform their duties and oversee offenders in a manner that reflects multiple perspectives with careful perception. These officers learn that there is more to the task than opening cell doors or pressing computer keys.

In the past, besides being ‘turn-keys,’ correctional officers served as case managers, a position that is presently a separate staff job (Long et al., 2019). A case manager facilitates administrative procedures based on incarcerated offender needs for those on their caseload and facilitates the process to release an incarcerated offender from prison (Bouw et al., 2019; Long et al., 2019). As prison has its own life-schedule and

accountability structure, released offenders are expected to survive and be successful within society outside that structure. Offenders through their own legitimacy can take or leave their modeling experience in prison through the ethical and moral examples provided by correctional officers and staff. This modeling competes with offender history and experience that led them to prison especially if correction officer legitimacy is not established, stable, or trustworthy (Hacin et al., 2019; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015).

Hacin et al. (2019) researched the Slovenian experience of correctional officer legitimacy as a starting point for discerning the right to command in the prison workplace. Officer legitimacy is the power to command achieved and maintained through their interactions with offenders and offenders affirming or denying that legitimacy through compliance choices (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Hacin et al., 2019; Meško et al, 2017). This author would argue that officer self-legitimacy is attained with colleague officers through interaction with each other besides assumed authority through sworn commitment. he Bureau of Labor Statistics in the U.S. Department of Labor has identified success skills found in correctional officers in its Occupational Outlook Handbook (2021). Those skills help officers bring a quality of life by maintaining safety and security in the correctional workplace and positive relationships with fellow officers. The correctional officer has to be vigilant to head off potential conflict and danger for fellow officers as well as offenders. Doing cell searches involves skill and awareness. Officers maintain respect and boundaries in accordance with regulations, rules, and applicable laws. The officer as communicator varies verbal voice tone and body language to build respect among peers and offenders besides accomplishing other duties. Corrections officers produce accurate

and timely reports especially when written incident reports are required by supervision (CDOC, 2019[AR 100-07]). The officers provide continuity to those following on the next shift to avoid mistakes about decisions, policies, and procedures engaged when one shift leaves, and another shift of officers come on duty.

Corrections officer responsiveness is aligned with hypervigilance mentioned above. Officers that are invested in and present to their job tasks can anticipate impulsive behavior by thinking critically and acting quickly to guide these situations to resolution. Added to this is the negotiation skill to mediate conflict to resolution through situational awareness, sensitivity, and empathy along with discipline. Part of negotiation is being impartial in these situations. Offenders and fellow corrections officers are placed in situations that demand problem solving skills demonstration and execution in easy and severe incidents. Every instance can become a learning experience and may warrant review to identify the path forward in skill building.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic Response**

Novisky et al. (2020) and Nowotny et al. (2020) did research on the pandemic response in American prisons. They recognized the difficult conditions existing within the prison environment, i.e., overcrowding, ventilation, heating and cooling issues, and health care challenges without the luxury of social distancing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, corrections officers began wearing face masks to protect each other, offenders, and staff members in efforts to slow and stop the spread of the virus. Corrections officers were alerted, briefed, and involved themselves in additional health safety practices, i.e., serving meals directly to each cell, engage extra attention to cleaning especially handled

surfaces, and do their own regular hand washing (Franco-Paredes, 2020; Lanaj, 2016; Marcum, 2020; Pyrooz et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2020). One method to slow virus spread was offender decarceration (releasing) (Henry, 2020), and social distancing, i.e., social isolation, and redistribution to and from prison facilities (Akiyama et al., 2020). The activated decarceration policy allowed for faster outbound and also slower inbound offender movement to and from correction facilities (Akiyama et al., 2020). Convicts that committed less severe crimes and misdemeanors received suspended sentences while arriving offenders were quarantined and those infected were isolated (Akiyama et al., 2020). This policy activation was also a response to racist policy application that supported poor health and incarceration (Henry, 2020). Accommodations such as legal and personal teleconference visits were activated because family and friend contact with offenders in prison was suspended. Staff members were continuing to go in and out of these facilities continuing the potential for transporting sickness to offenders during working hours so masks were used by correctional officers, medical staff, and other support staff besides offenders in the effort to protect individuals from sickness. Akiyama et al. cited past sickness incidents that raised awareness of possible negative effects from facility pandemic yet many of these concerns were set aside because of cost issues and vigilance deficits.

## **Health of the U. S. Corrections Industry**

### ***Correctional Officer Importance***

It would be important for prisons to have law enforcement officers that are bound and committed to providing safety and security in an industry that provides significant

economic support throughout the United States (May et al., 2020). It would also be important for these officers to have a positive outlook in accomplishing this job because workplace danger and fatal and non-fatal injury potential (Liu & Taylor, 2019). For example, non-fatal occupational injury and illness rates among correctional officers in 2015 were quadruple the rate of those among all workers in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Corrections officers or those that have previously served as line corrections officers (officers that have interacted directly with offenders in prison facilities) operate the corrections industry at federal, state, and local levels. For example, prison wardens are usually officers that have attained the rank of major, the highest rank in the officer cadre. From that position, a warden might go on to support the department directorship in an administrative position. Screening for entry candidates for corrections officer were routine in the 1980s using the Minnesota Multiphasic Inventory (MMPI) and other personality inventories (Scogin et al, 1995). Previous to that time, corrections officer candidates had legal protection, i.e., California law, from being administered screening tests like the MMPI (Holland et al., 1976). The difficulty of doing any empirical study on screening results with officers render career revelations through their service duration that might have been a protection or an absolution from ethical or moral responsibility (Holland et al., 1976). In their day, the comparing of MMPI results between officers and inmates by Holland et al. provided a unique overlap rather than distinction between the two groups. Present day practice involves different measures with one unique deficit: the measure of intangibles, i.e., how the individual will behave and operate when subjected to a high stress environment (Low et al., 2021). Low et al.

embarked on research that would help in this area while the testing results are not yet available. In this way, the phrase ‘work as you train’ would become more reality than something yet to be achieved.

The large majority of correctional facilities are run under government auspices with some facilities under privatized operation as distinct from public operation. Recent thought and practice encouraged privatized operations through fully contracted services as there is a long history of privatized imprisonment (Harding et al., 2019). Transporting prisoners to the Americas from the United Kingdom in the 1700s and later discontinued could be compared to assigning offenders to privatized facilities established in outlying, rural areas (Harding et al., 2019). Prisoners were part of a labor system that allowed individuals that could manage convicts to serve as low-cost labor for those fortunate to gain such an economic advantage (Harding et al., 2019). In present day corrections departments, encouragement is present through corrections staff for offenders to work to accomplish rehabilitation based on established mission statements to offset recidivism (Col. Code § AR 100-01 [2019] LEXIS COAR 100-1). However, the impetus for this accomplishment is basically with the offender while staff provide support (Zhao et al., 2019). State-operated corrections industries support the corrections system and the industries themselves that can provide jobs with a wage as opposed to state-sponsored slavery while serving time. The intent is less about taking advantage of the offender and providing meaningful training and job placement within industry. Some present-day privatized prisons situated in rural areas serve as economic support while other facilities are designated as adult and youth detention facilities are more proximate to higher

populations. Outlying facilities employ local residents and provide some economic support for local government. Recent history reflects an advantage downturn in the privatized facilities as contracted agencies operating these facilities have shown compliance deficits with administrative regulations, service quality required by contract, and the occurrence of abusive treatment of offenders (Harding et al., 2019).

### *Specific Officer Wellness Areas*

The U.S. corporate world periodically studies individual and group engagement in different professions about job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and other workplace metrics. For example, in 2019, a worker engagement study with 3,000 participants across 20 diverse industries with management (25%) and subordinate (75%) contributors, indicated a 71% composite engagement level (Predictive Index, 2019). The 54-item survey revealed higher job satisfaction and co-worker followed by manager and organization preferences. Engagement among corrections officers specifically demonstrated a different indicator set because of its industrial uniqueness. Anderson et al. (2019) found an association between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and work-related violence among prison staff personnel. Work-related threats and violence that progressively led to PTSD symptoms was greatest among prison personnel (Anderson et al., 2019). Jaegers et al. (2019) engaged corrections officers from four jail facilities to measure PTSD prevalence and the relationship of Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) resources with PTSD symptoms. The participants lived in an urban area that was considered a 'crime hot spot' because of a city limit residency prerequisite for employment (Jaegers et al., 2019). Therefore, their residency brought added stress to their

living situation. Results also showed that ethnicity predicted PTSD to surface minority status as more prone to PTSD symptoms than white or European ethnicity (Jaegers et al., 2019).

Trounson et al. (2021; 2019) studied indigenous Australian corrections officers reporting various wellness concerns. One stress management method, emotional venting, appeared as Indigenous officers were “verbally intolerant towards others” (p. 9). Officers also reported negative service evaluations connected to employee support service deficits within the organization (Trounson et al., 2021). Lee et al. (2019) used the Demand-Resource model in corrections to help clarify its own condition as an industry. They focused on the psychophysical aspects that influence engagement including “work-related exhaustion” resulting in “occupational stress and impaired workability” (p. 1). If exhaustion was indicated, the employed officers working as managers and subordinates may have needed more resources than are available or sought after by the department. Increasing the workforce to support the working cadre would diminish double shifting staff when other officers choose not to engage in supporting fellow shift workers by their absenteeism (Lee et al., 2019). Knowing resources to support health among corrections officers in the workplace like team learning and psychological safety would counter some of what is considered adverse.

Comparing correctional officers in the U.S. to those in other countries, there were differences that surfaced that indicated an important expectation for U. S. officers. That expectation centered on their code of ethics and professionalism. For example, research about the police officers in Ukraine demonstrated their job commitment founded on their

pay, other benefits, job satisfaction, and their professionalism graded on individual physical abilities (Valieiev et al., 2019). Professional development was not shown to be of importance among these police officers. This led them to some confusion as professional development had not been a priority in the past (Valieiev et al., 2019). In Norway, research affirmed that there was measurable effort given to offender formation and education to ward off recidivism (Eide & Westrheim, 2020). Simultaneously, there was little effort given to their “prison officers” in providing quality standards and requirements for their vocation entry (Eide & Westrheim, 2020). Norwegian prison officers considered themselves a proud profession in their loyalty while exemplary in reflecting their offender treatment marked by equality and humaneness (Eide & Westrheim, 2020). These prison officers would welcome the opportunity of professional development for their own growth. In another country, the qualitative research of Rania et al. (2020) among Italian corrections officers pointed out the impact that the change to Law 395 (*correctional officer*) brought to their corrections industry. Previously, their officer training or formation had been characterized as militant and not humane. The change in their law put emphasis on rehabilitation rather than being overbearing (Rania et al., 2020; Viotti, 2016). This placed more ambiguity in the minds of officers as they were not prepared for this kind of shift. Stoyanova and Harizanova (2016) took on correctional officer burnout measurement among officers working in two Bulgarian prisons. They used three stages to describe burnout progression: a) strain, b) resistance, and c) exhaustion. Below are some of their findings which concurred with those doing similar research:

- 53% used longer sick leaves to stabilize physical and mental health and reintegrate into the workplace
- Some officers had taken as many as 52 excess sick days over a 2-year research period compared with those that had low burnout scores
- Higher absence frequency among those with low job satisfaction and low organizational commitment compared with those more satisfied and committed
- Prison wardens (high burnout levels) experienced 3 times more difficulty with medical programs than those without burnout symptoms
- 37% of Bulgarian officer sample showed anxiety and depression as distinct from a sample in France (24%)
- 42% of French officers experienced sleep disorders while the Bulgarian sample officer experienced less disorders.

(Liu et al., 2013; Pranjic & Males-Bilic, 2014; Stoyanova & Harizanova, 2016)

Research on U. S. corrections officers has demonstrated challenges that officers navigate within organizations, in their interactions with other officers and with offenders, and in their own personal lives (Trounson et al., 2016; Trounson & Pfeiffer, 2017). Professional development would be helpful in supporting U. S. correctional officers but their own attention to their duty burden limits this kind of formation. (DeHart & Iachini, 2019; Eide & Westheim, 2020). The research specifically reveals challenges with workplace adversity and how this is managed within the organization (Trounson & Pfeiffer, 2016).

Lin (2018) found that parole officers advanced misconduct accountability

motivated by a serious crime within a corrections department (murder of Tom Clemens, deceased executive director, Colorado Department of Corrections). This motivated a public relations fire storm and some reactions about policy, misconduct tolerance, and procedures that progressed to offender release to parole (Liu, 2018). Even as the research reflected that there was increased questioning of parole value and viability, there was no research on the possible influence the crime had on correctional officers. The potential for incidents and crime to influence attitude and behavioral shifts in the officer cadres was real because of the possibility of antagonizing retaliation whether toward working colleagues or toward offenders.

### ***Meshing Work and Family Issues***

Corrections officers come to the workplace from various situations. Some officers enter the vocation as single adults after completing secondary education or General Education diplomas. Some officers enter maintaining a married relationship or partnership that provides stability based on discerned expectations while negotiating anxiety based on perceptions about corrections in general (Obrenovic et al., 2020). Balancing demands of family-born expectations with expectations in the corrections work culture brings its own stress and psychological factors. Obrenovic et al. find some negative impacts on the corrections officer job performance especially when psychological safety and psychological well-being are in deficit as mediators. This surfaced when the researchers, using the COR, found that individuals experienced “negative emotions” because they could not maintain job performance while they lacked the resources to manage their emotions (Obrenovic et al., 2020, p. 12). The research of

Idris et al. (2014) gave indication that having psychological safety integral to the workplace environment helped employees manage negative emotions and increased weariness besides helping them be more engaged in their work. The research of Mansour and Tremblay (2016) affirmed organizational investment in their employees and the value of their family and personal life as a workplace stress reducer. For example, officers taking on double shifts when there was a family involved would be of concern or a red flag for supervisors.

Recognizing how psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception are integral to organizational commitment and viability, observation of these elements operating together in relationship with each other would be helpful to the profession and those supporting goals and objectives in corrections industry.

### **Psychological Safety and Team Learning**

#### ***Construct awareness.***

The psychological safety construct has existed since the mid-20th century and was part of organizational research at the turn of the millennium as affirmed by Frazier et al. (2017) and Schein and Bennis (1965). Awareness of this construct has grown because of how workplace creativity and innovation have become important in organizational and industrial development (Frazier et al., 2017). Utilizing creative skills and involving employee skills and knowledge in the workplace makes for greater success and organizational engagement. If employees can feel safe in these creative endeavors, positive outcomes can find fruition support. Simply stated, psychological safety is feeling safe in the workplace to work with issues whether positive or negative that are of

organizational concern to its leaders and members (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Each person seeks psychological security, “a state of feeling safe” and “free from harm or threat” (Afolabi & Balogun, 2017, p. 249). Some might view this as a paradox when perceiving the officer operating within the prison environment. The intent here is to see psychological safety in the context of officers collaborating inside the prison workplace as a place of psychological safety. Edmondson (2004a) focuses the construct within group parameters in distinguishing psychological safety from psychological security and personal trust. For Edmondson, psychological safety is not without risk, challenge, or conflict, but a recognition that individuals singularly and collectively can progress creatively through issues and consequences including problem-solving without personal attack, and still know that each one is respected and accepted as persons and as a group. Edmondson recognized that managing group error benefits psychological safety in helping individuals and groups learn from this process (1996; 2004b). Eggers (2011) pointed out that admitting mistakes in the open in being transparent was foundational to psychological safety coming to reality as a construct with individuals and groups in corrections. Eggers encouraged correctional officers on the line and in administration to be aware of each other emotionally, behaviorally, and psychologically to go beyond status quo management.

Clark (2020) recognized anthropological elements of psychological safety in the context of inclusion when it is founded on acceptance of a person as a human being avoiding the harm imposition on self or others. Inclusion was based on respect for and personal permission for the person as a human being. When that person was not afforded

simple respect and not given autonomy, the person would experience a negative result that being exclusion (Clark, 2020; Popovych et al., 2020). When the person or a group for that matter experiences exclusion, the tendency was to seek respect and autonomy in the midst of others in their environment. They might do so until it would make no sense for them to continue such an effort or fight. From recognizing exclusion (low respect – low permission), Clark (2020) noted that low respect – high permission would reflect exploitation, while high respect – low permission would reflect paternalism. Neither of these negative conditions would make room for increasing psychological safety to support learning, contributing, or creativity.

### ***Research about Corrections Officers***

More attention has been given to individual officers and their interaction with offenders in research than officers interacting with each other (Trounson et al., 2019; van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2019). Some corrections officer studies recognized workplace stress experience that led to burnout (Ferdik & Smith, 2017; Useche et al., 2019). This indicated other health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), sleep disorders, and other disorders. Fellow officers with these health issues that interacted with each other may become a background concern to administrator attempts to advance psycho-social activity among officers. Work concerns led to stress and depression among individual organizational members suggesting that fellow officers interacting with each other would bear study (Useche et al., 2019). Practitioners would encourage these efforts as it would be helpful in developing psychological safety presence in the organizational environment (Rebelo, Lourenco & Dimas, 2020). Team learning minimally experienced

through initial training would also give insight as to how strong the team experience was within the workplace. The team experience of belonging and collaboration was attractive when observed while becoming a participant in that environment. Rebelo et al. (2020) and Stewart et al. (2019) noted that developing team learning required time and encouragement as the experience advanced the learning process from receiving only. This benefit to the correctional officer made work costs easier to manage. Participation and stronger organizational engagement facilitated cost and benefit balancing in the prison workplace. The correctional officer entered the shift as a member connected to fellow officers and managing offenders together through prison life highs and lows. Others present with stress and anxiety might impact job performance and be more taxing than the day before. One possible support besides individual resources could be the experience of learning and working together as a team in the prison environment.

Corrections officers work to maintain command and control while managing offenders within the workplace. Historically, their traditions were more contentious and less controlled than in the present. Corrections has been called an industry with its own organizational culture with administrative, medical, and mental health aspects to accompany law enforcement represented by corrections officers. Some corrections officers manage offenders that make products sold to support the industrial complex. Some of these specialties include constructing office equipment, making (press and paint) license plates, printing three-dimensional items such as medical braces, farming jobs to produce dairy products such as mozzarella cheese used in restaurant food, contract obedience training for dogs, barbering and hair care, and food preparation industry

(CDOC, 2021[AR 100-01]; New Mexico Corrections Department, 2013; Washington State DOC, 2021). Other corrections officers oversee offenders that participate in clinical treatment for mental health disorders and addictive behaviors such as substance use and abuse and sex offenses. Other corrections officers manage offenders that have opportunities to develop their own knowledge and skills while serving their time.

### ***Required training***

Corrections departments have their own requirements including basic training with varied lengths and curriculum. Staff are trained and formed in the recruit stage to maintain integrity in the chain of command and to render respect to authority and to each other. Instructors direct participants to be positive, responsible, and maintain ethical and moral behavior to build and maintain positive perceptions about training or the department at large. Training content includes introduction to organizational justice. Organizational justice separates into three different types: (a) procedural, defined as fair decision-making procedures; (b) distributive, defined as individual employees receiving fair outcomes, and (c) interactional, defined as fairness of interactional communication and treatment (Karkoulia et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2017).

The United States Military Academy at West Point along with other academies use academics, military (ethics and instruction), physical training, and character development as foundations for officer formation as noted by Callina et al. (2017). Officer accountability is based on regulation that has legal consequences when broken. These foundations are included in correctional officer basic training with a unique perspective: these officers are to be leaders to represent law enforcement in the

corrections environment, inside and outside the walls. Correctional officer basic training staff maintains positive visibility to students, organization members, and the community. For example, if a training staff member behaved badly toward trainees, that would be considered a negative situation especially if the academy would be about to graduate a class into the prison workplace. Candidate behavior that reflects negatively within the training environment would call for staff leadership to handle such behavior discreetly or dismiss the candidate. Individual officers learn about these incidents in informal ways because nothing is hidden for too long mindful of “grapevine” communication in the law enforcement community (Watson, 2015). It adds to the cost side involved in SET occurring within the organization. In correctional practice, negative incidents among officers are dealt with by senior security administrators and resolved directly in due process by regulation. For example, an officer smuggling a can of beer or cell phone into a correctional facility would have significant consequences for the perpetrator along with the officer performing contraband checks at the gate and the officer team in a facility. Leaving situations to chance through counseling places leadership at constant and consistent risk and pushes leaders to judge ethical and moral behavior accountability. One would have to feel psychologically safe to question such accountability.

Psychological safety in an organizational environment supports individuals and groups while working through planning, making decisions, and managing difficulties. Corrections departments depend upon trained and experienced officers to be responsible both inside and outside the workplace. Officers are poised to act in both positive and negative situations to advance the correction department goals. Officer leadership

appreciates knowing about both positive and negative workplace incidents through oral reporting, audio-visual reporting (body-camera), and by accurate and well-written reports. These tools help to reflect the ethical and moral perceptions that corrections officers actualize in their daily service. Officer leaders are positioned to respond but responding may be difficult. Inexperience, fear, or anxiety are feelings that compete with team learning and management skills. Team reflexivity is a construct used to help maintain self-efficacy and to stay engaged with organizational justice (Wu et al., 2019a).

Team reflexivity is defined as:

the extent to which team members are able to reflect on or analyze their objectives, strategies, and processes. Teams that possess higher levels of reflexivity may be better able to recognize inappropriate tactics or strategies that may lead to failure, and thus be able to take corrective action. (Wu et al., 2019a, p.4)

Lack of action could be due to lack of team reflexivity (inability of the officers to reflect), inability to identify past inaction, or not having due process for affirmation or fraternal correction through the chain of command (Schippers et al., 2014; 2013). Deficits due to lack of management experience could lead to little or no follow-through leaving nothing to be done in response. Being responsible, i.e., engaging in fraternal correction, and changing the culture, would be set aside to maintain status quo such as organizational or personal agendas. Other circumstances may reflect system status in the organization as the system is more easily maintained when change does not take place when the system is not transparent.

## **Ethical and Moral Awareness**

Ethics codes and policies for moral practices provide direction to help support corrections officers in their service work in and outside the prison facility. These codes and policies help them collaborate with staff and deal with challenges. Those challenges include significant stress, pressure to maintain compliance, and great risk in representing and actualizing law enforcement (Gong et al., 2020). Hanna (2015) partially recognized stress as maintaining an image on and off duty. In and out of uniform, the corrections officer models a government protection agency. Any situation or story with an officer involved places their service as representing compliance with law and good order (Azemi, 2019). Media has made the officer position more transparent to the public with video footage using body cameras and other recording devices (Dodd et al., 2020). Some examples include fatal physical abuse of civilians while under arrest, fatal shootings without justification, and failure to protect offenders from viral infection. Some practices in corrections have helped to prevent fatalities.

### ***Ethical leadership***

Ethical leadership is important to organizations as workers strive for their own success within employment levels. Ethical leadership influences individuals and groups in performance, organizational commitment, creativity, and well-being (Xu et al., 2016). Xu et al. found that “ethical leadership behavior engenders employee trust in their employing organization, which in turn promotes their justice perceptions toward the organization” (p. 493). The connection with distributive and procedural justice that Xu et al. demonstrate has unique ties to corrections officers in how they are involved in justice

matters. They are entrusted with offender oversight that aligns with the oversight of officers themselves as each is sworn to model ethical leadership. Tu et al. (2019) research affirmed ethical leadership as directly related to “team creativity and average of member creativity” (p. 559). They also showed that “psychological safety mediates between ethical leadership and team-level creativity” (p. 559). Both psychological safety and ethical leadership would be important to organizational creativity and efficiency.

The research of Azemi (2019) exposed some of the ethical and moral challenges that occurred in Corcoran Prison in California when two correctional officers conflicted with correctional staff and the administration in complaining about officers abusing offenders without being responsible for their actions. The reporting officers felt psychologically safe enough to risk making injustice known; their trust and listening by authorities was important to the process (Beausoleil, 2019). The officers made the responsible choice to make the irresponsible behaviors of the abusive officers transparent. This led to department policy and legislative changes that were overdue. According to Azemi (2019), the department authorities and officers did not recognize the gravity and importance attached to the ethical and moral aspects in the corrections environment. It was especially clear that the two officers intended to be consistent with the regulatory, ethical, and moral aspects attached to their vocation and offender rights while in prison. Their follow-through also demonstrated their team learning and collaborative effort to make the corrections industry transparent to the governed and to be consistent with the corrections officer mission.

### ***Behavior visibility***

Concern for ethical and moral behavior in law enforcement has become more visible now because of justice issues about the use of force. Codes of ethics have been authored and placed in service through various associations supporting corrections officers and the agencies that employ them. The American Correctional Association performs inspection visits for agencies to achieve and maintain facility certification. Challenges to officer moral and ethical perception may require decisions that place these perceptions at the center of these choices. This may occur with individuals, with groups, when interacting with fellow officers and with offenders in their charge. Defining ethical and moral perception as judgment, Kligyte et al. (2013) observe sensemaking as integral to ethical and moral judgment. This discernment process leads to a “mental model” to facilitate working through conflict and confusing information (Kligyte et al., 2013, p. 298). The process to gather, evaluate, and discern eventually leads to making decisions with ethical and moral bearing that help or harm others (Kligyte et al., 2013). Kligyte et al. add to this process the influence of anger and fear, integral emotions in deciding to commit assault (Barnum & Solomon, 2019). These integral emotions produce “strong behavioral responses” (Barnum & Solomon, 2019, p. 662) when attached to an object (person, or incident) and flow from observable decision-making in how the subject behaves (Lerner et al., 2015). Corrections officers manage sensemaking and discernment within the workplace especially when offenders are uneasy or unsettled with regard to justice equity. Fridman et al. (2019) proposed a response-method development based on bodily rather than energy needs for police officers. Referenced incidents that Fridman et al. identify would have similarity to those experienced by corrections officers. They refer

to allostasis, defined as brain and body needs management, as a better method for predicting and responding to violent or assaultive incidents to support the cognitive and emotional balance of the officer (Fridman et al., 2019).

## **Management Progression in Corrections**

### ***Workplace Collaboration***

The contemporary business world has moved from management by objective to accountable management through constant organizational change (Alsharari, 2019). Growth in moving from minimum standards to high levels of quality calls for reaching beyond one, singular direction to collaborative processes and creativity (Chen et al., 2020). State government has shown interest in collaboration through creativity beyond previous oppressive practices to include reduction of recidivism in the corrections industry (Clark & Duwe, 2019; Cooksey, 2019; Kendig et al., 2019). Corrections officers as an organizational team serve together in the middle of the corrections industry and take on the significant service burden (Elechi et al., 2020; Ricciardelli et al., 2020b; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2018; Stichman & Gordon, 2015). They are prison law enforcement officers with the most contact with incarcerated offenders. Corrections officers based on their sworn oath and code of ethics model behavior during each work shift in their assigned facility. These officers have responsibility as a priority of keeping staff and offenders safe and secure in prison facilities by department regulation along with ethical and moral direction (Elechi et al., 2020; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). This study proposes that psychological safety in team learning would support collaboration among officers and continual skill development in working with colleague officers and managing offenders.

Organizations have performed research to see if participation in leadership through employee involvement would have some influential effect within the workplace. Caspar et al. (2018) tested the sense of agency from three perspectives (commander, agent, and victim). Their measurement results demonstrated that commander and agent experienced reduced agency when coercing or being coerced or not being able to freely choose. For example, a corrections officer loses their sense of agency when commanding an officer or offender to do something. If the commander provides the individual the choice to follow through, both the commander and the individual experience agency in their own actions. The corrections officer that coerces removes self-responsibility and responsibility of others. Coercion makes it more difficult to model responsible ethical and moral behavior within the correctional workplace when there are other alternatives than abuse or violence. Safety and security threat incidents require protective action yet responsible forethought would lead to more responsible practice and ethical behavior.

Opoku et al. (2020) affirmed the value of collaboration in their research among employees in Ghanaian manufacturing. Song et al. (2020) connects with Opoku et al. in the voice process of affirming trust without control or doubt through psychological safety. The research of Opoku et al. focused on psychological safety as a valued construct in the employee voice process when organizational leaders and employees interact with each other. Their intention was to measure how psychological safety impacts this interaction and what boundaries may be engaged (Opoku et al., 2020). The Ghanaian hierarchical culture recognized supervisors as a father figure while employees carry out their tasks as directed, seeking approval through task success and guidance for

affirmation and improvement (Opoku et al., 2020). The research of Song et al. (2020) affirmed the necessity for supervisor-subordinate trust to go both ways for that voice to be heard and understood. There is some similarity to the officer experience of the corrections culture in the prison workplace. When line officers are promoted, they later become supervisors and provide guidance and expertise to younger and middle management officers. At this level, psychological safety would allow for comfortable interaction within their service environment.

Carmeli et al. (2010) did a study to see if psychological safety would mediate in the relationship between employee inclusion in leadership and their creativity in the workplace. Utilizing items from three instruments (inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and employee involvement in creativity) through factor analysis, Carmeli et al. (2010) found positive mediation between psychological safety and employee leadership inclusion. Their study advanced the importance of the leader developing psychological safety in the workplace through inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership with its three basic elements, “openness, accessibility, and availability,” are supported by “relational leadership and leader support” (Carmeli et al., 2010). These basic elements being present and active was shown to be vital to developing psychological safety within the group or organization (Edmondson, 2004).

Chen et al. (2019b) affirmed that the psychological influence of a leader on followers resulted from the social exchange that takes place between and among both leaders and followers over enthusiasm. Chen et al. recognized a quantitative study (Yu et al., 2019) involving the defined elements (Luthans et al., 2010) of psychological capital

(optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and resilience) to base the SET affirmation. This recognition shows the leader position of responsibility and agency in bringing about change and growth through the psychological capital elements.

Framke et al. (2019) did a randomized controlled trial with employees in two groups (intervention and control), measuring to see if improving psychosocial working environment and job task focus would show a difference. They found no measurable difference between the groups except when they discarded the places where the intervention group worked (p. 5).

### ***Prison psychology***

Prison culture has been compared to and called slavery when observing the behavior and interaction between the keepers and the kept (Bierie et al., 2017). This slavery tag also gets attached when dealing with prison labor issues (Reiling, 2019; Sliva & Samimi, 2018). In the past, officers oversaw building projects in the prison that were accomplished through non-remunerated prisoner labor, i.e., mining and laying stone for prison walls. Kaun and Stiernstedt (2020) recall prisoners supporting transportation efforts, i.e., providing track labor for the U. S. railway system, excavating the Swedish canal system. Now prisoners have media jobs such as using a laptop to become digital facilitators for Finnish prisons to sell predictive and connected information based on technology (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2020). If officers perceive themselves as work drivers while offenders perceive officers in the same way, mistrust and negative perceptions that come from unresolved conflict are sustained within the prison workplace. When those judgments are examined by officers and offenders, the atmosphere changes enabling

positive resolution. Psychology from its beginning has regarded the potential for change among those sentenced to time in prison as part of its science and responsibility.

Presently in some corrections departments, correctional officers are part of the multidisciplinary team (correctional officer, clinical counselor, psychologist, medical specialist) in discerning how best to serve offenders in their rehabilitation. For example, Hean et al. (2017) reported increased relational coordination indicated by Norwegian prison officers when comparing actual with desired collaboration levels with other staff professionals. Collaborative accountability to one another as officers, to staff members, and to offenders still has the purpose of growing beyond the perception of slavery to one responsible profession. This is an affirmation that corrections officer actualize integrity along with other virtues modeled inside prison facilities.

### ***Gap in Literature***

Correctional officers are sworn to maintain accountability along with safety and security within the prison system as part of the corrections industry. Offenders as will be described below require varied levels of security depending on their assigned custody level. Corrections officers interact with offenders and with fellow officers through daily tasks in scheduled shifts. The present scholarship gap is the lack of research about how correctional officers interact with each other in terms of team learning and collaboration in psychological safety and in ethical and moral perception. Perception in this context refers to the judgment of an officer about right and wrong and what is legal and illegal in law and regulation in the prison workplace (Hanna, 2015). Since corrections officers have a unique perspective in the prison facility, it would be important to study their interaction

as colleagues (team learning, and psychological safety) and ethical and moral perception impact on each other (Ricciardelli et al., 2020a; Ricciardelli et al., 2020b). Corrections officer outlook is unique because of their authority position and how they perceive what takes place in their workplace as they work with fellow officers. Furthermore, corrections officers have experiences and learn together while making judgments through their work shift in executing daily duties and interacting with fellow officers, offenders, and staff in that process. A large part of the officer workday is spent with fellow officers and with offenders. With that immersion level during a work shift, thinking and reflecting during the workday is difficult; doing so before and after the shift is more difficult in the effort to clear shift agenda from the mind (Justice et al, 2020). Presence becomes an important factor with both groups of people. It would be clinically advantageous to know more about the impact of that presence from the officer interaction perspective. Corrections officers use some of the five reflection perspectives (constructivist, psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural, and enactivist) in accomplishing written incident reports and reviewing body-cam video (Lundgren et al., 2017). Formation in such a method would be optimum for advanced continuing education.

### **Problem Statement**

The prison environment is a workplace within the corrections industry. It is also a locale where law enforcement continues to work inside prison walls. In this industry, there has been little or no research on psychological safety in the prison workplace to reveal how safe individual officers or officer teams feel with each other within the prison workplace with each other as well as ethical and moral awareness based on correctional

officer behavior (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety is a distinct construct that can indicate the potential for work stress and burnout as indicated by the presence or absence of the construct. There is no research measuring how corrections officers learn and work as a team with one another to indicate psychological safety in the correctional environment. Psychological safety driven by dynamic and authentic leadership has been shown to buffer or diminish deviance including authentic leadership and discretionary aggression to encourage positive morale (Liu et al., 2018; Rispens et al., 2011). Psychological safety includes actualizing organizational accountability within the individual and officer team leading to positive action and adherence to ethical standards. Some corrections officers and others in law enforcement have provided articles to encourage initiation or re-establishment of psychological safety among peace officers. This study explored the gap in research about how correctional officers interact with each other in the context of psychological safety and team learning along with their ethical and moral perception. Their interaction is key to their ethical decision-making leading to healthy and well-directed management operations.

Corrections officers relating to fellow officers in the workplace is part of their work life. Fellow officers who relate and collaborate with each other support team learning and skill advancement for themselves working within a facility. Along with that support system, there is the presence of ethical and moral perceptions that are made constantly by corrections officers throughout their work shift in the prison. Added to these factors, the corrections industry has experienced historical changes toward reform. With these changes, industry research has shown that corrections officers individually

may have varied perceptions about how to actualize ethics and morals in managing offenders (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004; Hanna, 2015). The problem for study in this project is looking at how well sworn officers that serve the corrections industry work as individuals and as a team with each other and with offenders while modeling ethical and moral behavior. Their sworn duty requires everyone joining the industry to perform the department mission with the formation in ethical and moral awareness received, and the development and utilization of psychological safety together through team learning. There is the hope that, through job experience, individual officers can build their knowledge and connect with mentors to provide needed insight about duty and service. Dependence upon learning while on the job can leave important guidance to chance, placing these officers in position to ask what their next decision or action would be in the prison.

Correctional officers work as individuals and as team members in their organization. Difficult incidents or challenges may influence ethical and moral decision-making as each can be a threat to their mission of safety (Gordon & Baker, 2017). In addition, research affirms that corrections officers experience work stress (Suliman & Einat, 2018), burnout (Jin et al., 2018; Lambert et al., 2018), and deviance (Worley et al, 2018) as witnessed by other corrections officers and offenders. Papazoglou et al. (2019) would include compassion fatigue as part of the stress menagerie in the profession as it shares symptoms with PTSD. They affirmed that lessening officers experiencing compassion fatigue show common PTSD aspects (cognitive, behavioral, and emotional) with reduced job performance ability and increased stress. Research has shown that the

psychological conditions that correctional officers experience including stress levels, burnout, depression, and suicidal actions and thoughts (Useche et al., 2019) make the work more difficult. Previous researchers have noted psychological safety measured in the organizational workplace (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 1999) but have not noted this construct in the correctional environment. Psychological safety driven by dynamic and authentic leadership has been shown to buffer or diminish deviance and incompatibility including authentic leadership and discretionary aggression to encourage positive morale (Liu et al., 2018; Rispens et al., 2011). Psychological safety includes making organizational accountability operational within the individual and officer team. In this way, leaders can support teams to positive action and maintain adherence to ethical standards (Liu et al., 2018; Rispens et al., 2011). This study explores whether ethical and moral perceptions correlate with psychological safety and team learning in the corrections environment.

Psychological safety as defined above incorporates the construct of forgiveness, at least in its perceived form (Guchait et al., 2019; Salvador, 2020; Thompson & Korsgaard, 2019). This reflects awareness that missteps as an individual or group within a team does not lead to rejection (Guchait et al., 2019). This construct may not be unique to an organizational environment but is important to the environment in the intention to develop and maintain psychological safety. Supportive leadership is important to this perceived forgiveness within the organization especially in modeling and guiding if not facilitating how the team operates (Guchait et al., 2019; Javed et al., 2019).

Corrections departments in individual jurisdictions author ethics codes that are founded on the American Correctional Association to maintain standards across the industry. In this way, corrections can move away from practices and behaviors that would be considered abusive to inmates (Valentine et al., 2019; Weinberger & Sreenivasan, 1994). The ethics codes incorporate core values that include acting responsibly and maintaining integrity to support officers and keep offenders safe and secure under their supervision (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Foundational principles for these ethics codes would include being humane, developing competency, being even-handed with offenders, maintaining safety and security compliant with good order and discipline and being positive and professional in all interactions (Useche et al., 2019; van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2019). Corrections officers are to adhere to these principles even when incidents with offenders present challenges to actualizing them in behavior. Challenging ethical and moral perception of the officer requires quick choices placing the officer in a decision-making moment to respond as an individual and/or team. It also comes to mind that being professional includes interactions with fellow officers in the line of duty and with the chain of command.

Ferdik and Smith (2017) presented evidence that police and corrections officers have similarities in dealing with offenders along with having a good relationship with each other (National Institute of Justice, 2017). However, police law enforcement have resources to work through psychological challenges with the support of research while corrections personnel have much less due to limited resources. One example when the construct of psychological safety was absent was in the George Floyd murder case.

Christian et al. (2022) recalled the conflict points involved in the incident and the case trial including the lack of accountability in law enforcement up to the time of the incident. The litigation revealed a supervising officer in law enforcement that oppressed a Black suspect by placing his knee on the neck of the suspect after apprehending and securing the individual in custody (Christian et al., 2022). Three subordinate officers watched while the supervising officer administered this behavior. The subordinates did not question the behavior of the superior toward the suspect. Testimony during the suspect-murder trial of the superior officer proved that such behavior, while contrary to normal law enforcement practice, was no longer included in the officer training curriculum. At the same time, none of the other officers challenged the superior as he was executing this behavior. Similar negative behavior has been demonstrated in other apprehension scenarios.

Psychological safety deficits along with ethical and moral perception is a prison workplace concern, one that needs increased research partially indicated by workforce instability. Workforce instability due to turnover in corrections noted by Farkas (2001) would warrant investigation surface what leads corrections officers to leave the career field very early after basic training and workforce entry.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore correctional officer psychological safety and ethical and moral perception and perspective in officer interactions in the corrections workplace environment through qualitative means. The research paradigm in this study is ontological in that the research is attempting to clarify what is reality regarding

psychological safety and ethical and moral perception from the perspective of the correctional officer. Research has shown that people experiencing ethical leadership in the workplace (Brown et al., 2005) have felt psychologically safe (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019). Aware that the corrections environment is unique, it would be helpful to measure whether these two aspects would be present and influence corrections officers in their workplace as they work with each other. That measurement would encompass how safe the officers feel in raising concerns, learning together, and awareness of ethical and moral perception.

The primary query in this study is observing and exploring the presence of psychological safety in corrections officer individual and team learning. From that recognition, one could observe if the construct impacts ethical and moral decision-making in the corrections environment. The study uses an interview of individual officers using a set of open-ended questions to gain insight data for collation and analysis.

The need to address this issue is apparent because of support and training voids for correctional officers as noted by Farkas (2001). Training duration comparisons indicate that placing officers in the job after a short duration leaves them without workplace strategies, teamwork development, and health and wellness tools for their professional well-being. If officers do not have the psychological safety awareness to proactively work through problems with fellow officers within the prison workplace, it is logical that each of them will continue to experience health and wellness difficulties along with stress and anxiety challenges and have the potential for departing the profession.

### **Research Questions**

The research involves asking whether corrections officer psychological safety and team learning is present and impacts officer ethical and moral attitudes. It would be helpful to know if corrections officer attitudes about ethical decision-making connect with officer openness to team learning and whether they sense their own psychological safety while interacting with each other within the organization. I have listed each research question (RQ) for this study below:

- RQ1: What has been your experience working with correctional officers?
- RQ2: What formation did you have to prepare for entering the prison workplace?
- RQ3: How do corrections officers feel when raising issues about processes and operations in the prison workplace?
- RQ4: What resources do correctional officers utilize for maintaining ethical and moral behavior in the prison workplace with fellow officers?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study has been founded in SET as the basis for observing correctional officer psychological safety and ethical and moral perception along with team learning to provide support for interaction with fellow officers in the workplace. SET is defined as individuals, dyads, or groups establishing a simple or series exchange to advance their position or profit by investing the least resources at the lowest cost (Thibault & Kelley, 1959). Individuals and organization members may make choices to help themselves and/or each other to progress in their endeavors. These choices may have ethical and moral impact on behavior and attitude while focusing on advancement. SET is founded

on behaviorism, utilitarianism, and basic economics (Homan, 1958; Thibault & Kelley, 1959). The theory has a foundation that is integral to ethical and moral psychology, namely the context of choice. The process involves choosing to give over, engage with, or open up to new or present relationships with others. When persons decide the reward and the cost or investment to gain the anticipated value by engaging, the exchange can begin, continue, or end if agreement does not exist. Individuals or groups continually decide if situational or relational value warrants continuing investment or costs involved when compared with the rewards. Value or worth depend on the comparison of two elements: cost and benefit. They are perceived as central to relational value or worth. Cost is what is given to initiate, foster, and maintain relationships, i.e., energy, stress, and attention. Cost is also what is discerned as withheld when the relational value does not proceed from the exchange. Reward or benefit is the gain or positive outcome rendered from the relationship, i.e., fun, loyalty, camaraderie, and attention. Cost and benefit can in turn become opposites depending upon evaluation within a relationship timeline. Deciding to invest or give over the cost would provide for promised or visioned rewards to the individual or group that makes this decision (Wang et al., 2019). Other rewards can play into this equation including goods and services, interconnectedness with others, and relational development of trust. In some instances, rewards become pro-organizational while becoming unethical toward those externally invested, i.e., corrections department over offenders (Wang et al., 2019). The common thread within theory is the intention for one, both, and multiple individuals advancing their own self-interest with a balanced intent. For psychological safety and team learning to take place, the choice to engage

with colleagues would be important to enable social exchange to progress in whatever direction is deemed needed or required.

The equation proceeding from the theory does not measure an emotional metric with the relationship; value could be referred to as an emotional measure, but by economic perception, the emotional aspect is limited to the preferences, i.e., likes and dislikes, of those involved. This may be the struggle that correctional officers experience when they are dealing with stress, burn-out, and other negative wellness outcomes as they attempt to balance worth of self and occupation with rewards and costs.

SET is founded on four assumptions about human nature and human relationships. From the beginning, human life and interaction with others assumes that humans seek reward and avoid punishment. Humans would support self-care by wanting what is favorable more than what is potentially harmful or difficult to bear. Employee-organization relationship helps in balancing this equation when observing and actualizing human resource management and employee expectations (Wang et al., 2019). Managers are making decisions for employee benefit or deficit while employees balance wellness in their tasks with their own workplace challenges (Lambert et al., 2017).

Another assumption is that human beings are rational, observing that persons can measure their worth by considering costs and rewards to decide what would gain maximum profit with minimum cost. People would also consider consequences and behaviors that follow after such choices. Individuals in the workplace develop or diminish social support through choices of interaction (Lambert et al., 2017). These

choices can lessen or increase strains that are initiated in the workplace (Lambert et al., 2017).

An added assumption is that the decision or discernment process would take place before making a choice. That process may involve decisions about justice and self-care. Some individuals make choices about rewards and costs while immersed in the situation or conditions influencing their thoughts and emotions. The opportunity to reflect and think through what is at stake is still possible so as to avoid situations that are difficult to manage or control when they are unforeseen or not anticipated (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019a; Boateng & Hsieh, 2019b).

SET plays into the vocation of corrections officer because the officer discerns and decides to respond to the call to serve their sworn duty each day. Officers manage and balance their self-care, care for each other, and their care for offenders within the correctional facility. They choose to provide service by giving of themselves by walking into, within, and out of a dangerous environment. Officers have some awareness of physical and psychological consequences within that environment. They have some collegial and social support with fellow officers starting from basic training. Officers strive to maintain their self-care while holding one another accountable along with the offenders they interact with during their shift work. The theory provides the map for their choices in giving of themselves to maintain the work value while balancing their self-costs with the rewards received, i.e., payment for work, connection with fellow workers, and advancement opportunity through promotion.

Psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception connects with SET as these constructs can support the officer in maintaining compliance with their ethics code, administrative regulations, and with themselves. Psychological safety has been encouraged within law enforcement as a support method for accountability among colleagues to include ethical and moral behavior. The cost is related to change in some ways in adjusting to expectations that may not have been foreseen upon entry (Butler et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019). These variables can be viewed as costs if they are difficult for officer investment. They can also be viewed as rewards in that these variables support officer well-being (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Phenomenology in Social Constructivism**

As Creswell (1994) delineates the qualitative paradigm into various approaches, social constructivism identifies with the correctional officer workplace experience in the attempt of the professional to connect with the world while working with colleagues behind the wall. Through open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview, the study participant becomes a reporting diary revealing experience with meaningful successes and challenges. These revelations indicate psychological safety levels present and their ethical and moral perception in those times. Harvesting correctional officer phenomenological experience becomes the priority for analyzing the impact of leadership, the decision-making processes, and other consequences on teamwork and collaboration in the prison workplace. Phenomenological research as Creswell (2014) describes involves gaining participant perspective as each one provides their own

experience of the same phenomenon. The phenomenon in this study centered on psychological safety experience and exploring ethical and moral perspective in the prison workplace. The study explored the experience that correctional officers carry with them especially how they experienced colleague interaction inside the walls that lends itself to the prison workplace environment (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Continually the officer turn-over question is asked but not fully analyzed. The thinning workforce leaves the corrections work force scrambling to cover the workplace requirements with the remaining few officers. Sometimes overtime invitations turn into requiring coverage that takes advantage to potential harm and burn out (Lambert et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2018). This framework is purposeful in asking research questions that flow from phenomenon reflection and provide perspective for future formation with officers in this environment.

### **Nature of the Study**

This was a qualitative, nonexperimental, exploratory study of examining corrections officer psychological safety, team learning, and moral and ethical perception, and to observe how safe officers feel working with each other in the prison workplace. Participants were given a consent form to describe what the study is about and affirm confidentiality. Participants affirmed their consent by sending an email saying “I consent” as an institutional review board approved method. After each provided consent, they participated in an open-ended interview with me. There was an incident when a candidate participant, even though providing consent decided not to follow through with the interview. The interview questions based on the research questions were presented

verbally to each participant so they could provide responses for data collection. The demographic information was limited to age, ethnicity, rank, and duration of correctional work experience.

### **Definitions**

*Correctional officers* (or corrections officers or prison officers or prison guards) are trained individuals (sometimes related to military authority while usually related to civilian jurisdiction) (Viotti, 2016, p. 871) that serve to maintain security and safety within prison confines (CDOC, 2020 [AR 100-18]). They perform custodial tasks (deliver meals, accomplish maintenance projects and response, and facilitate laundry operations) to support staff and offenders present and the operations taking place within prisons. Correctional officers have had other titles to include gate keepers, penitentiary police officers (Testoni et al., 2015), custodial officers (Marzano et al., 2015), ‘turn-keys,’ and prison keepers (Canning & Buchannan, 2019).

The *guard subculture* was identified by Kauffman (1988) as a social presence within prison culture. The prison officers code (Table 1 below) is an unspoken code of nine norms that help found their solidarity with each other and is influenced by their prisonization in strengthening the subdivide (Worley et al., 2021). The code typifies the subculture itself which identifies specific social behavioral responses as correctional staff and offenders interact with each other. Each of these characters played their part in representing a cultural response to would-be colleagues and offenders, allowing for a kind of segregation with intentional divisiveness: Pollyanna officers were pro-offender and pro-officer, burnout officers who were negative to both offender and fellow officer,

**Table 1***Prison Officers Code (Kauffman)*

Norm	Description
1	Always move to the aid of an officer in distress: Never leave an officer behind
2	Do not lug drugs: Do not carry drugs into the facility for offenders
3	Do not rat: Never testify against a fellow officer
4	Never make a fellow officer look bad in front of offenders: Be careful not to correct or admonish an officer in the presence of offenders
5	Always support a fellow officer in a dispute with an offender: Be present with the officer when there is a dispute ensuing
6	Always support officer sanctions against offenders: Make sure an officer is not alone when administering sanctions
7	Do not be a white hat: Do not be an offender sympathizer
8	Maintain officer solidarity versus all outside groups: Do not share information with media, interest groups, or others
9	Show positive concern for fellow officers: Never leave another officer a problem that is rightfully yours

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(Kauffman, 1988, pp.85-114)

white hats were pro-offender while dissing fellow officers, hard asses, the officers who held offenders to the letter of the law while bowing in respect to fellow officers, and functionaries who were disinterested officers that had little or no engagement with officer and offender (Higgins et al., 2022a; Kauffman, 1988). As ostracism (Tretyakov, 2022) is part the prisonization of the offender, being outside the guard subculture can become another ostracism type in and out of the workplace. Later, Farkas (1997) did her own

research about code norms actualized by correctional officers. The similarities with Kauffman included agreeing with fellow officers in actions and decisions, careful not to cross a colleague. A significant difference from Kauffman was for officers to cover themselves in negative situations that included never admitting to mistakes in the prison workplace (Farkas, 1997).

*Dark triad* is the name for the combination of three negative behaviors that can influence organizations when exercised by individuals or power groups. The individual behaviors focus down to psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism. Psychopathy is associated with antisocial tendencies, absence of restraint as displayed by avoiding or rebelling against social convention, and impulsivity (Valentine et al., 2019). Machiavellianism is related to having the desire and predisposition to manipulate situations for various purposes including personal gain or power. Narcissism is related to total focus on self to the detriment of all else. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism combine antisocial behaviors including antagonism for personal gain (Valentine et al., 2019). Dark triad surfaces in the Cognitive Theory of Beck about depression as a person focuses on self, the world, and the future from a negative perspective. Correctional officers dealing with pressures from their daily duties and tasks may experience influence from negative thinking and behavior, especially in decision-making. Discretion becomes important in managing people and relationships, especially when ethical and moral perspective is involved (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020). Grover and Furnham (2020), using an undergraduate student sample (United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Australia), recognized the discretion of a person in the workplace because of the higher

potential for termination when negative social behaviors were apparent. However, other situations showed less discretion and more anti-social behavior operating in relationships. In their research, Grover and Furnham (2020) were able to show significant differences between male and female participants in marking higher psychopathy, neuroticism, and other Dark Triad behaviors among males. The lack of discretion among correctional officers has at times placed them in a unique bind: when an officer has been released from one workplace situation and ends up working in another corrections department, the officer ends up in a situation similar to the last (Grunwald & Rappaport, 2020). The wandering, wondering officer becomes an itinerant worker only to end up in the same situation as had been experienced before. This does not suggest that all prison officers tend to be akin to behaviors related to the Dark Triad. However, it does suggest that some officers, even with a completed background check, may display behaviors that make it difficult for trust to be established with and among colleagues.

*Disciplinary and criminal charges* can be brought against correctional officers just as they can be brought against offenders in prison. An offender is notified of disciplinary charges but does not have the right to a trial or to an attorney. When an offender is found guilty of misconduct, s/he loses privileges, may be housed in a separate location away from others, and may lose other positive incentives previously gained. The offender will have no alternative except to comply with the penalties pronounced. The correctional officer, because of the trust placed upon him/her in law enforcement, can be brought up on charges based on proof that the individual officer perpetrated physical assault, sexual misconduct, indifference to serious medical condition or substantial risk of

harm, and/or failure to intervene (U. S. Department of Justice, 2020). Conviction of these charges may result in the officer being dismissed from service along with possible incarceration for such misconduct.

*Officer habitus* is the ethical and moral learning and life experience that individual officers bring to the prison workplace environment. The individual officer habitus is not exactly the same as or aligned with the habitus of every other officer colleague that is part of their security workforce in their particular facility. Some officers will wonder if their habitus is the same as their own when another officer demonstrates their own brand of discretion in dealing with situational incidents. They will see that some decisions are automatic while others seem to disappear without a trace with no decision apparent or visible (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020). It becomes more challenging when officers are moved from one location to another within a prison facility: it is quickly clear that discipline administration is not as consistent in all quarters making the workplace that much more unstable. An officer expecting an environment that has some uniform characteristics may be disappointed and confused as they discover a different habitus.

*SET* is a relational theory that envisions social interactions as an exchange: individuals or groups seek the greatest value for self or themselves by maximizing the benefits or rewards. The benefits arise from the rewards received minus the costs involved. The theory was developed focused on choice: the choice to engage in openness to new situations especially relationships, choosing to begin, maintain, or end these interactions based on value and benefit (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958; Thibault & Kelly,

1959). The equation would be similar to value equals benefit plus cost. The decision or choice centers on giving over or withholding. SET has other perspectives interwoven within making it less precise than others (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Equity and Reciprocal theories (always seeking what is most fair in any situation) can be involved in social exchange especially if there is an economic element involved. Balancing rewards with costs would be within the limits of what is fair or just. The similarity of the Equity Theory to Social Exchange carries fairness to the extent that it exists when all involved have similar benefits in relation to resources invested.

*Organizational culture* embodies four types: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy (Di Stefano et al., 2019). Organizational culture includes the values and behaviors that support or block progress, whether positive or negative (Di Stefano et al., 2019). As values can be positive or negative, success or failure due to talent or deviance displayed can have a powerful organizational effect in the authority chain. Professional culture (Tretyakov, 2022) would build on organizational culture through the addenda of being actively social and moral, and diminishing freedom abuses and rights violations.

*Organizational justice* is the collaboration of three components that support sustainability within an organization. Kim and Park (2017) identify the components as procedural justice (procedural fairness used in decision-making), distributive justice (fairness of outcomes received by individual employees), and interactional justice (fairness of communication and treatment of individual employees). Boateng and Hsieh (2019a) recognized the importance of organizational justice in corrections in identifying attributes of integrity and legitimacy as needed values in correctional officers, both for

offenders, and for themselves as officers: (a) Officers that exercise procedural justice will treat offenders with positive discretion and equity; (b) Officer experience of distributive and interactional justice know that supervisors model positive judgment and respect their subordinates while demonstrating integrity when accomplishing performance reports (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019a; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2018).

*Organizational workplace* is the area an organization describes as where members or workers receive, process, execute, and complete jobs, assignments, orders, or requirements directed by the organization for achieving its own purposes and goals. The execution process integrates organizational culture so that the goals achieved are executed to the best ability by the worker for organizational needs.

*Psychological safety* is a construct that indicates an individual and group confidence level about bringing up ideas or concerns that may be difficult to discuss or confront (Edmondson, 1999). It has similarities with psychological security (Maslow et al., 1945) and psychological well-being (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, life purpose, and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 2008, 1996), both of which are centered on individual perception more than the individual within a group or team. Popovych et al. (2020) recognize characteristics of psychological safety that relate to the learning environment: supports communication competency and collaborative environment, and realization of self-resources. Popovych et al. (2020) see psychological safety as supported by subjects having a positive attitude toward each other, being satisfied with their environment, i.e., free to express views, having personal views, self-respect, and personal dignity, being open and able to seek assistance, and stepping up to

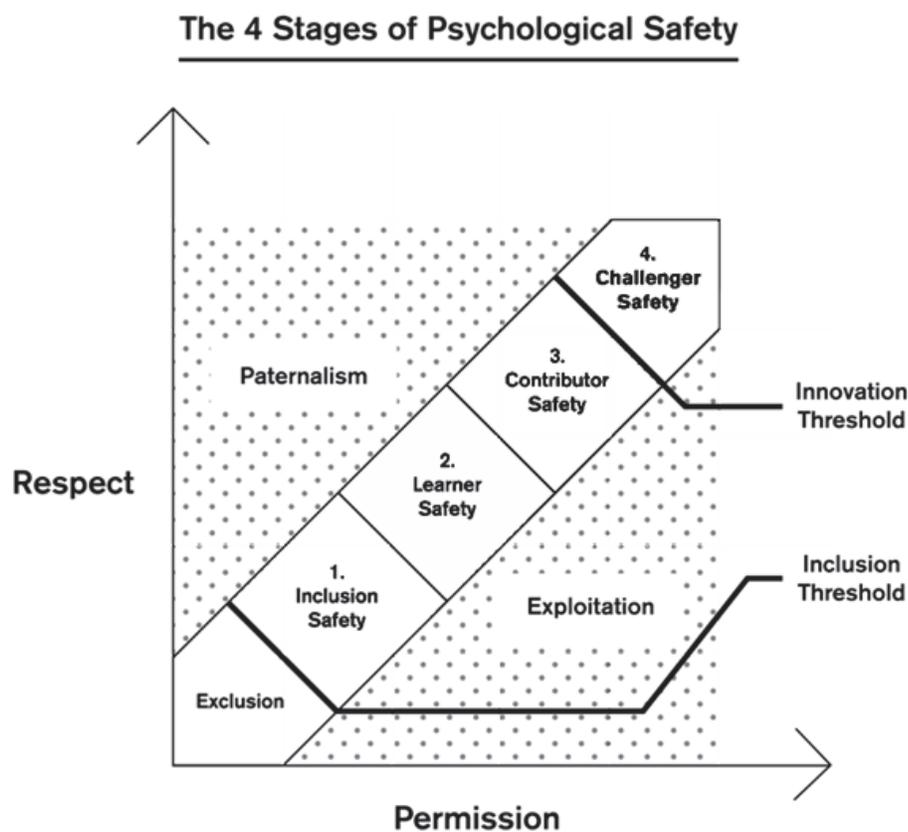
create while managing their own concerns. Psychological safety would not be present when subjects experience violent threats, being humiliated, being ignored, and/or being pressured or forced to act against their will (Popovych et al., 2020).

*Team psychological safety* is the group version of the construct originating in group members believing that each member can take risks with each other for the purpose of change (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 1999). It is distinct from the concept of groupthink which is thinking cohesively as a group to protect harmony and unanimity to the point of overcoming realistic options (Griffin, 1991; Turner & Pratkanis, 1998). Psychological safety in a team is the quiet confidence that members are not criticized, punished, embarrassed, or ostracized for speaking out about specific issues that concern the member and/or the group (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 1999). The belief is based on “mutual respect and trust among team members” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354). Clark (2020) identifies specific stages (inclusion, learning, contributing, and challenging) that individuals and groups may experience as a person or group increases construct presence (See Figure 1 below). One aspect that has become more prominent is actively earning or acquiring inclusion in experiencing psychological safety. Some would argue that the construct is bestowed rather than sought or built. Others encourage seeking to develop psychological safety so that the construct is actualized through those stages (Clark, 2020). Observing Figure 1, we see that exclusion is the natural result of a person experiencing or having low respect and low permission.

It would be difficult for an individual to experience inclusion if they experienced little or no respect from others while having low autonomy besides. With more respect and permission in personal or group experience, the more learning, contributing, and

## Figure 1

### *Stages of Psychological Safety*



*Note.* (Clark, 2020, p. 6, used with permission)

creating that can occur. Negative aspects that influence psychological safety development are exploitation and paternalism (See Figure 1). Exploitation demonstrates low respect with high autonomy for the person while paternalism shows high respect with low autonomy (Clark, 2023). Paternalism has different aspects within itself like an

authoritarian (negative) dimension and benevolence and moral (positive) dimensions (Islam et al., 2022). The ultimate goal of creativity as argued by Clark (2022) and Tretyakov (2022) involves a gradual transition to transform to a professionalized culture within an organization. Yet such a change or transition involves engagement with self and with colleagues from vision to reality.

Edmondson (1999) used the Team Learning and Psychological Safety Survey (TLPSS) to measure team learning climate, internal and external team learning behaviors, and work team outcomes. Team learning climate is characterized by high acceptance in dealing with errors or mistakes as well as discussing tough or difficult issues. This climate also provides acceptance in taking on interpersonal risk including the situation of asking for help from individuals and the team at large. Internal team learning behaviors provides openness to working through problem processes and acting to improve processes. As in the learning climate, internal team behavior shows openness to talk about mistakes, to work through conflict in discussion, to seek new information to facilitate change, and openness to discuss concerns about plans and choices for change (Edmondson, 1999). External team behaviors include welcoming attempts at trying something different, increased use of open-ended questions for discussion, increased feedback requests, establishing clear expectations, better boundary respect through maintenance and modeling, and respecting conflict (Taylor, 2022).

The *rational model of psychological safety* involves how individuals think through their own process of raising issues with fellow staff members and with other

groups. There is also the recognition of how the individual fits into the group when concern about performance and competence are part of the perception.

The *relational model of psychological safety* focuses on how individuals feel within the workplace in getting along with fellow group members. The individual would seek to belong to the group and be valued in group process so that relationships at present and in the future would continue to prosper within that safety and avoid being shut out of future relationship with other individuals and with the group.

*Oleoresin capsicum spray* is a propelled liquid spray made from the cayenne pepper plant resin. It is used to slow an attack on a person or to force compliance when direct authority is resisted (Haskins, 2019). Some corrections officers and staff members are authorized to use this tool when other defense protocols have been used in a conflict situation and failed and no other self-protection is available. Haskins (2019) notes that other agencies have summarily authorized its use including law enforcement. Using this tool is similar to using other compliance tools as it requires the user to produce a written report that includes identification and factual information to maintain a paper trail of accountability within the corrections facility and the department (CDOC, 2019[AR 100-07]).

*Team learning* is important to the corrections officer based on the foundation that their learning experience is in a group. Their individual self-efficacy and perception of learning in teams provides them with a starting place for gaining confidence within the prison workplace and working with different colleagues with varied roles (Yoon & Kayes, 2016). Rebelo et al. (2020) notes the fifth discipline or systems thinking (Senge,

1990) when defining team learning as the ability of the team to achieve team desires by arranging and developing themselves for their chosen purpose.

### **Assumptions**

I centered my assumptions for this study around the participation of former corrections officers. I established the assumption that corrections officers would be honest in responding to the interview questions. I trusted that each participant experienced no coercion from a supervisory staff because they were outside the chain of command. These former officers freely chose to participate or not to participate without any workplace repercussions. It was assumed also that participants answered from their own knowledge and experience resources without peer consultation or familial substitution. These assumptions were important to this study because of concern about anonymity and confidentiality. It was assumed that there is some level of psychological safety present in the lives of the participants. If these participants would still be in the workplace, they might have had difficulty participating since their organization would be engaged to provide permission as required by the institutional review board. This might be due to their being judged or sized up by co-workers. Collegiality may not exist depending on the attitude that co-workers may have toward their colleagues if these interviews were to be accomplished as focus group interviews rather than one-on-one.

There was an assumption that officer participants could speak and read English as their primary language and may be bilingual with Spanish as their second language. This would be assumed by their providing consent. Language may be a barrier in actualizing this study in other population samples along with education limitations.

Furthermore, it was important to note the assumption of their ability to listen and comprehend the interview questions (at least a fourth-grade reading aptitude) in the study and to respond to them. It was assumed that participants would have adequate knowledge to respond to the interview questions provided by me. The academic knowledge of the officer was assumed and would have been proven in their academics by reason of their objective tests during and at the end of their training. From their basic training experience, it was assumed that corrections officers had a training curriculum that included law, ethics, and moral guidance. It was assumed that each participant had their own moral resources for participating in the study. The assumption was that officers would be classroom-present and could hear and understand the interview questions as they were presented. It was also assumed that the participants had the ability to cognitively integrate the questions they received and heard during the interview. The cognitive proving ground would be within the experience memory from the corrections workplace. Lastly, there was an assumption that the interview for the study was appropriate for the study participants in that their reading ability and knowledge would be sufficient for them to participate in the interview work.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study involved exploring correctional officer psychological safety and ethical and moral perception within their team learning with fellow officers in the prison workplace. The delimitations in the study were characteristics that limited the problem range. Another delimitation was that participation is only with corrections officers while excluding any other facility staff members employed in the prison

facilities. Participation in this study was not gender specific as it was open to all male and female officers that have worked corrections. The study interview involved a few participants with experience in corrections work. Hence, some level of transferability may be possible but may not be so for a larger officer sample.

### **Limitations**

The limitations, elements proved to be weaknesses or elements that prevented individuals from participating and that are comparable to other studies of this nature, were present in this study. The interview questions presented some challenges as limitations are viewed as elements that may prevent individuals from participating or studying weaknesses. Participants may have found the interview long and complex and therefore too burdening an involvement, a source of complacency or becoming overwrought. Some participant candidates gave their consent but did not follow through with the interview. Participants indicated some challenges because of varied meanings in the verbiage. There was also the concern that confidentiality may be breached in this process. This anxiety could have caused some participants to steer away from such participation because of the fear of repercussions despite reassurances. Assurance was given in the informed consent form that information security would be maintained. This may not have been assurance enough for some individuals thus limiting participation.

Therefore, corrections officers may have hesitated to participate in this study for various reasons. The law enforcement vocation in prison facilities positions individual officers as maintainers of order in the corrections environment. Participation in this study could have been perceived as another challenge for the officer to manage or handle. The

desire to be consistently viewed from the best perspective in decision-making and sense-making could also surface. Inviting officer participation was intended as an opportunity rather than a requirement. Getting beyond the single gender offender barrier would be helpful in generalizing findings in this population and provide better perspective but it would have been safer not to specify gender as part of demographic identification. Not involving corrections departments as originally planned was intended to avoid the trust impediment that would generate hesitancy in participation.

### **Significance**

#### **Corrections Officer Team**

This study intended to explore the gap regarding corrections officer interaction with each other in the prison workplace in the context of their psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception. When engaged in the workplace, individual officers have many challenging responsibilities. These responsibilities can become a measure of individual authority and confidence managed more easily through teamwork. Scholars have researched team activity in organizations and find that responsibility shared is positively managed and energizes the worker (Hanaysha, 2016). Corrections departments train officers to lead and manage within policy and regulations. With little research presented about psychological safety in corrections environments, this study was to help baseline psychological safety among corrections officers as individuals and teams within the organization. This study supports the practice of attitudinal and behavioral screening for corrections officer candidates for this vocation and their openness to team learning in developing management skills. Exploring interview data from officers about

psychological safety elements will help indicate organizational openness and fearlessness in working with each other (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Officers take on the challenge of actualizing ethics codes that support psychological safety and organizational commitment. Corrections officers that are conscious and intent about ethical and moral behavior build trust supporting psychological safety among fellow officers. This in turn empowers fellow officers and the offenders they manage toward respect, dignity, and creativity in the prison environment.

### **Value of Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership in the prison workplace is an important element for corrections officers as each one is called to lead in supporting and actualizing ethics codes. Ethical leadership is promoting personal and relational behavior that is appropriate and normal, and modeling such behavior to others through dialogue, encouragement, emphasis, and making good choices (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019; Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leadership studies have focused on measuring ethical and moral perception to mark how ethical leadership is operative in the workplace. Ahmad and Umrani (2019) identify ethical leaders in SET as moral agents. These leaders reflect organizational reciprocity in trust. Members enjoy reward as they are compelled by example to act ethically and morally (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019). Brown et al. (2005) identify social learning as both direct and vicarious methods so that modeling is a valid way to learn ethical leadership in the workplace. In the correctional facility, each officer is positioned in leadership to show altruism as a vicarious learning value. Shareef and Atan (2019) identify intrinsic motivation as the method to meld ethical leadership with followership in positive

workplace outcomes. Tu et al. (2019) show that ethical leadership, with creativity support from supervisors, can build a psychologically safe environment and support team learning. This in turn fosters team (consensus), combination (additive or group), and varied creativity levels (dispersion) in an organization (Tu et al, 2019, p. 554). Being proactive in relationships between supervisor and subordinates supports positive organizational elements including psychological safety and harmony among individuals (Xu et al., 2019). Distinct from ethical leadership, this study centers on group leadership and how the psychological safety construct is present to influence the operation and interaction that corrections officer teams have in the workplace.

Ethical leadership is founded on ethical decision-making and having awareness of ethical and moral principles to support this decision-making. Latta et al. (2020) affirms that organizations have provided training and formation to advance leadership skills but have had little in the way of success to show for their provisions. Added to this, the opportunity is missing to put into action such training and formation making the training and formation experience baseless (Latta et al., 2020). It would be important for ethical leadership to have the ability to actualize this knowledge so that such leadership growth would be visible and measurable. Latta et al. verbalized the intention to gain research and to seek practices to “promote moral integrity and accountability” within organizations to develop ethical leadership (Latta et al., 2020, p. 74).

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided the framework for understanding how psychological safety and team learning are important to the organizational commitment that corrections

officers make to the individual prison facility where they work and the state department of corrections. In this chapter, I described the problem, the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study. Corrections officers take on offender management daily in individual facilities while actively and simultaneously aware of both offender activities and facility operations. Added to this complexity is reporting rapidity required when corrections officers report non-compliant behavior of offenders while monitoring fellow corrections officer behavior that may not be ethical and moral. All staff members are corporately responsible by their oath and personal commitment to model ethical and moral behavior. Research has shown that corrections officers have the most immersive exposure to danger and violence in working with offenders, committing to modeling ethical and moral behavior by their intention of service (Haynes et al., 2020; Viotti, 2016). This intentional behavior helps facilitate safety and security to help offenders choose to progress in their return to the community. One accompaniment to modeling is the encouragement of collaborative practice (Lamberti, 2016) within the corrections department to diminish recidivism statistics. His vision of correctional officers (justice system staff) and mental health professionals working together uses elements of engagement, assessment, planning and treatment, monitoring, problem solving, and transition to show the path for offender rehabilitation (Lamberti, 2016). This endeavor is initiated through a) identifying risk factors, b) requiring appropriate behavior, and c) behavior reinforcement through appropriate intervention (Lamberti, 2016).

In this study I focus on both ethical and moral perception with psychological safety and team learning as foundational constructs in corrections officer behavior. This study focuses on the impact that team learning and psychological safety can have on ethical and moral perception and how that could influence workplace environment and offender management. The contribution to social change here is helping to advance normalization through more positive responses in offender management. The study results can influence regulation adjustment through policy change in the department, may require training adjustments for staff and corrections officers, actualize collaboration in staff, officers, and offenders, and positively lower recidivism rates.

In Chapter 2 of this study, I will display a literature review with topics including ethics and morality, misconduct, employee moral perceptions, occupational attitudes, authority abuse, and organizational commitment. In the review, the study highlights research work in various corrections facilities. The literature brings more information about the corrections work environment leading to potential methods for increasing psychological safety and team learning, and more innovative responses for corrections officers in working with negative behavior. Responding to the literature gap with awareness of ethical and moral perception and how this interacts with team learning and psychological safety continues because much of what happens behind bars remains there. Much of the literature focuses on law enforcement conduct and the resulting effects that individual corrections officers experience measured in job performance and emotional and psychological impact. This is only the outset because of how job performance and

emotional and psychological influence impacts offenders and fellow staff members in the workplace.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this study, I examined correctional officer's interaction with each other. I used a phenomenological approach to explore officer psychological safety in team learning, working together, and officer ethical and moral perception. In this chapter, I outline the background for corrections officers and their workplace environment, the different security levels and responsibilities involved in managing offenders, and aspects of working with each other. In the chapter, I discussed corrections as an industry and corrections officer health within the industry. I laid out the problem, purpose, the research questions, the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, the definitions, the assumptions, the study scope, limitations, and delimitations, and significance of the study.

In Chapter 2, I established a literature search strategy with its keywords and database sources. In the chapter, I elaborated about the theoretical framework used in the study, namely social exchange theory, connecting the theory with the key elements in identifying the cost of team learning supported by psychological safety and the context of ethical and moral perceptions from the corrections officer perspective.

Corrections officers, like many professions, have developed standards of practice that are founded on ethical and moral behavior within the workplace, and on individual interactions with fellow workers and those they serve. Having principles of ethical practice that also direct moral behavior becomes an aspiration for professional behavior but does not assure competency that guarantees principled thought and action (Gerson,

2019). Those in professions that involve skill training competency require continued learning to maintain their specific licensure and expertise as affirmed by Schmidt (2019) and Tyler and Dymock (2019) . Those in health professions have requirements to be current as they are challenged to work with persons that have medical and mental health conditions requiring diagnostics and prescriptive direction (Green et al., 2009; Sasiadek et al., 2020). Appelbaum et al. (2021) viewed the corrections officer as challenged to respond to various facets in offender management and care to see them as persons, secure and accountable, in their own environment.

The corrections officer is a profession that reflects immersion in and among fellow officers they work with and offenders that they serve. Kang-Brown et al. (2022) views the officer supporting the offender in the return back into society after the offender serves a sentence established under the auspice of the justice department. The officer is doing all that is possible to support that process in concert with officer colleagues and multidisciplinary professionals. Corrections officer integrity and legitimacy can be lost or removed when trust is broken trust or there is no consistent follow-through in the sworn service of the officer (Lambert et al., 2021). The formal removal from the profession takes place when an officer is walked out of the corrections facility by the judgment of leadership or due process. The informal version would be displayed in how officer colleagues and offenders would interact with the officer.

Corrections officers experience the pressure of doing a job that presses them to maintain ready knowledge, execute strong administrative and organizational skills, and act proactively and positively all while risking self in a dangerous environment, working

with colleagues to often manage offenders that provide little or no reason for trust (Anderson et al., 2018; Trounson et al., 2016; Trounson et al., 2019). Officer support becomes imperative as they manage their own lives while under the pressures within the officer vocation (May et al., 2020).

Affirmation of positive influences and outcomes from ethical and moral behavior and the perceptions that proceed from this impact is present in research (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019; Remišová et al., 2019; Shareef & Atan, 2019) although it may not be as present in Western culture. What is different about Western culture that mitigates against this positive impact is the influence of individualism researched by Eckersley (2006) and Humphrey and Bliuc (2022) and displayed in behaviors directed by self-determination theory among other influences. There is also affirmation of negative influence when unethical behavior and perception are present. The Machiavellian influence that encases individualism can bring a negative display that disconcerts others whether intentional or not (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2019).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I gathered the information for Chapter 2 from peer-reviewed journals through the Walden University EBSCO database, ProQuest, ProQuest Central, Taylor & Francis, Sage Premier 2000, and Evergreen. I used some keywords to find the research information including *ethics*, *ethical leadership*, *morality*, *unethical behavior*, *dark triad*, *psychological safety*, *team learning*, *corrections (correctional, prison) officers*, *misconduct*, and *perceptions of misconduct*. I used some research beyond 5 years to reflect historical gaps in research and the seminal character of some topics that have

earlier roots in literature. Some research came from historical surveys from university level historical research, i.e., Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO that supported background information based on foundational behavioral philosophy and behavior in correctional psychology to include interaction between correctional officers and offenders. Consistently, because of research deficits with correctional officers' interactions with each other, there was more focus on their individual physical and mental health and professional development than on their team interaction and team health.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **Social Exchange Theory**

##### ***Social Exchange Definition***

I used SET developed by Homans (1958) as the theoretical foundation for the study. According to Homans (1958), SET is based in sociology and economics as a discernment process for making relational decisions. Thibault and Kelly (1959) viewed SET as person preferring a specific direction in their work situation by basing their choice on relational value gained in balancing benefits and costs for their own best interests. They saw people basing their choices on how they compared benefits (what is positive for the person) with costs (what is negative for the person) to arrive at an expected outcome. As the benefits outweighed the costs, the person would continue their preference. When the costs overpowered benefits, the person would stop choosing the present course and choose another course of action because of negative expectations. People sometimes experienced situations when decisions based on expected value

become negative outcomes. In that situation, the expected benefits did not appear leaving behind unexpected negativity.

The relational process in social exchange can provide many avenues for individual workers to find support and to build a sense of belonging in and outside the workplace. Consistently those in corrections have been directed to recognize their role as representatives of safety, order, and honor as consistent values in and out of the workplace (Hanna, 2015). Together with fellow correctional officers, they can actualize those values to make ethical and moral perceptions visible. Being a provider among peers would be a strong foundation for positive relational environment and for further actualizing these values (Zeigen et al., 2020).

### ***Social Exchange in Corrections***

To support a positive relational process in corrections, social exchange is important as a support mechanism for officers as it supports affirmation to individuals. Zeigen et al. (2020) viewed colleague officers serving together in a prison as sensing support from each other that is described as social worth or self-worth and social support. As the social aspect is consistent, this support is not something that is one-way. The interaction of individuals, whether provider or receiver, is important to the exchange. The reactions that individuals have with and for each other support the relational process in negative and positive ways. As in the exchange equation, if the benefits continue to be dispensed while the costs rise, the value in the exchange dissipates even to negative value. This would lend itself to the negative conditions that research has revealed when

dissatisfaction, stress, depression, and anxiety surface among correctional officers as viewed by Anderson et al. (2019) and Trounson et al. (2016; 2019).

Correctional officers have displayed uncompromised care and support for fellow officers when negative situations arise (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Officer presence enables them to observe change for better or worse with offenders within the prison environment even when media paints them as less than caring (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Their presence makes them best able to see colleague changes while working with them through regular contact (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Correctional officers work through each day and make the decision to work in the correctional environment. Cho et al. (2020) provided research from correctional officers in a Korean prison that reflects the character of responsibility that officers actualized in the workplace:

- Choosing to serve and act as a correctional officer
- Rendering care and safety for fellow officers, staff, and offenders within the facility
- Choosing to model ethical and moral values in their behavior as described by mission and values statements. (Cho et al., 2020; Ricciardelli et al., 2020b)

Those supportive associations that establish codes of ethics and values represent and encourage officers to actualize safety and security in the prison workplace.

### ***Psychological Safety in Social Exchange***

Social exchange theory also involves the concept of team learning and psychological safety. The officer is choosing to be compliant with administrative regulations and to bring their own creativity to the work environment reflecting their personal openness to risk, identifying knowledge deficits, and bringing concerns to light

relationally with others (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety as a construct is not directly connected to relational development as it provides a path to expanding agency and changing facility to grow and develop (Wanless, 2016a; 2016b). However, the construct provides a path for creativity through team learning while correctional officers invest themselves as a cost for achieving progression. The decisions that correctional officers make consciously and unconsciously influence development and the outcomes of social exchange in working with comrades in service, staff, and offenders.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **Psychological Safety**

##### ***Psychological Safety Research***

Research literature about psychological safety has increased in recent years by focusing on the organizational context (Newman et al. (2017). Newman et al. (2017) focused on organizational studies in general identifying 29 studies measuring individual perceptions of psychological safety, 42 studies at the team level, and two studies at the organizational level (Newman et al., 2017). The researchers for these studies used different versions from similar quantitative measures with samples from populations in organizational and industrial settings. This is where the present study presents some similarities and distinctions that make the corrections environment unique. The construct psychological safety requires organizational support that proceeds from workplace leaders with established practices and behaviors and relational networks (Chen et al., 2019a; Chen et al., 2019b; Chen et al., 2020). Newman et al. (2017) pointed out that

psychological safety is related to learning behavior and team performance, recognizing that members having required information and process awareness (know-how) have greater success in industry and stronger organizational commitment. Newman et al. also identified through Conservation of Resources (COR) theory that resource presence and depletion was influenced by the involvement and deficit of psychological safety when health of organizational members was analyzed. When organizations invested in providing resources that supported the voice, communication, sharing knowledge, and feedback provision of the workers, motivation within worker attitudes, individual and team performance and learning, and innovation mindset was advanced along with their own health (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). The alternative of withholding resources of support rendered increased stress for individuals and conflict behavior among individuals and teams (Hobfoll et al., 2018). There have been many corrections research studies on staff conditions including corrections officers dealing with job stress and satisfaction, burnout, job engagement deficits, low organizational commitment, and depression driven by work exhaustion (Butler et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Useche et al., 2019; Viotti, 2016). Some research conducted in corrections has been about ethics training and criminal justice with a focus on the corrections officer formation with the majority focus on law enforcement agencies (Hanna, 2015). Previous research into decision-making when considering officer-offender interaction paradigms has experienced more prominence over that of officers working and relating with each other (Trounson et al., 2016). Incident severity and organizational concerns have prioritized officer-offender interactions to the point that

there is slower awareness about officers interacting with their colleagues (Trounson et al., 2016). Studies about corrections officer psycho-social aspects have increased, including countries other than United States (Viotti, 2016). Officer interaction with each other has been difficult to research as law enforcement personnel show themselves as a closed system. The nearest thing to self-revelation for officers is their writing incident reports about their own behavior. My use of video and audio recordings helped me interpret verbal and non-verbal data following each interview. In the corrections workplace, such recordings are kept secure and only shown when charges require them for evidence.

### ***Characteristics Involved***

In her study, Edmondson (1999) suggested an assessment to identify and integrate characteristics that reflected psychological safety for display to individuals and groups. Individuals and groups that did the assessment helped themselves to identify psychological safety as part of their organizational environment. Characteristics that reflected psychological safety centered around the elements of (a) personal and group respect, (b) being proactive, (c) gather and share information, and (d) coordination and collaboration. For example, respect included support rather than undermining others and recognizing and using talents rather than hiding, despising, or forgetting talents (Jiang et al., 2019). Harvey (2019) noted that psychological safety encourages proactivity when seeking out new information from multiple sources. The construct also encourages facing adversity directly rather than managing off-line and identifying and managing error to avoid getting stuck in problem-solving (Harvey, 2019). Gathering and sharing information includes embracing difference rather than squelching it, getting info and

perspective from within and without, seeking to understand assumption and belief within issues (Jiang et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2019). Hallmarks for psychological safety include coordination and collaboration (Wheeler et al., 2020). Time for information sharing becomes a priority when greater goals and objectives take individuals and groups beyond the selective. When individuals and groups use the construct, they respect the need to work on objectives and goals together inside and outside the group to foster psychological safety throughout an organization beyond the parochial perspective (Wheeler et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2019).

### ***Security to Safety***

The literature shows research foundations in the 1940s when Maslow began to describe psychological safety as a psychosocial construct as psychological security versus insecurity in a life satisfaction context (Afolabi & Balogun, 2017; Maslow et al., 1945). Psychological security is connected with the relational model of psychological safety. Psychological security included in its definition that the individuals felt strong and courageous, experienced self-acceptance, belonging, acceptance or being liked by others, and interested in others while being cooperative (Afolabi & Balogun, 2017; Maslow et al., 1945). This security is aligned with life satisfaction as an essential experience with security described as feeling safe from danger, threat, or overt risk. The opposite condition would render a person feeling anxious or believing the person is in danger, experiencing hazardous risk. As suggested earlier, psychological security is more individually felt and experienced than being instrumental in bringing change or influencing a group (Edmondson, 2014). In future descriptions, psychological security

moved in the direction of learning and change that is akin to psychological safety. Schein and Bennis (1965) cited Change theory from Lewin (Burnes, 2019) that included the three stages involved in change: unfreezing, change or adjustment, and refreezing (Cummings et al., 2016; Hussain et al., 2018; Schein, 1999). The unfreezing stage itself included disconfirmation, the presence of guilt-anxiety, and the construct of psychological safety. With individuals experiencing a deficit in confirmed reality, and guilt-anxiety present due to situational circumstances, psychological safety would provide threat reduction and removal of change barriers. The construct would allow persons in groups to experience freedom from threat, risk, or harm, giving the benefit of the doubt to the individual (Edmondson, 2014; Edmondson & Lei, 2004).

### ***Individual and Team Safety***

Corrections officers experience risk when they enter the workplace: in the midst of that risk, they balance job tasks with managing human lives intending to preserve life with and through defined boundaries (Cooke et al., 2019; Eide & Westrheim, 2020). Corrections officers engage the workplace with its offenders and staff having completed basic training including objective testing, self-defense assessment, and weapons testing for prison work (Blumberg et al., 2019). The basic training curriculum, content, and experience varies from state to state depending on openness to learning, government funding, competency achievement levels, and responsibility readiness (Blumberg et al., 2019). For example, California requires a corrections officer to complete 16 weeks (640+ hours) of training (Blumberg et al., 2019). Successful completion provides a full-fledged police officer for their corrections department comparable to police officers serving on

the street. This study involves recruits that have completed a five-week training and competency course taken with other staff member candidates. The shorter training period renders an officer eligible to receive their badge. The neophyte officer may have experience through job rigors and workplace challenges, while that experience may be less than those with more training. The officer is immersed in situational tests of attention to detail and relational engagement (Blumberg et al., 2019). Safety and security remain a priority whatever the training vision while becoming part of the team working within the organization. Individual team involvement is critical to individual and team success. The process impact brings change influences on the individual, team, and organization. An officer engages with the team during their shift while continuing to individually learn and grow in experience with team members. Integration into the team from the beginning and continuing to engage in the learning process is critical to their own perseverance and well-being in the short and long term.

### ***Psychological Safety Supporting Service***

When looking at the concept of serving others, it is clear that those connected to first response have a unique role in public service across the globe. Increased population numbers in correctional facilities place much responsibility on corrections officers as public service personnel. One perspective that pervades the corrections industry but stands in the background is that of service. Corrections officers are part of this service industry as they provide service and loyalty to their officer colleagues, to staff, and to offenders as they are service customers. These officers have their own attitudes and perceptions about their work and about the people with whom they interact in shift work

(Shannon & Page, 2014). Shannon and Page call them “street-level bureaucrats” because they have the authority to do resource distribution within the prison facility (p. 648). Shannon and Page (2014) hold that officer belief in the positive programs and resources of their facility supported by positive attitudes toward offenders “result in less work stress and greater support for management” (p. 648). Bani-Melhem et al. (2021) recognized that customer satisfaction and loyalty assures service quality within an industry while supporting and facilitating offender rehab and recovery (Pasamehmetoglu et al., 2017). Psychological safety as a construct allows for individuals to judge interpersonal risk consequences within their own situation including the workplace (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety has been shown to facilitate positive outcomes for organizations (Frazier et al., 2017; Guchait et al., 2019). The construct allows for true self-expression without negative repercussions on the individual or future endeavors (Liang et al., 2012). In past history, the corrections industry experienced malevolent personality demonstrations of social dominance and exploitation for personal purposes, i.e., physical, and psychological abuse (Bani-Melhem et al., 2021; Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2015). Psychological safety, supported by effective leadership behaviors has been shown to diminish actualizing dark personality traits, e.g., dark triad elements, and facilitate pro-social engagement with subordinates through welfare interest (Bani-Melhem et al., 2021; Kock et al., 2019). Psychological safety also encourages pro-active behaviors beyond task and contextual performance including extra-role behavior and receiving and reporting customer complaints (Bani-

Melhem et al., 2021). Hence, psychological safety would be important to support organizational health and progress within the corrections industry.

### ***Becoming a Psychologically Safe Team***

Psychological safety has been defined as distinct from the construct of trust (Javed et al., 2019; Maximo et al., 2019). For officers to sense their own psychological safety, trust needs to be evident among themselves. For corrections officers become a team with the completion requirements of management roles increasing through the officer work-day, they would need to sense that trust is evident in their work experience. Corrections officers take on ethical leadership role modeling when they are sworn in as law enforcement officers. Singh et al. (2013) did a study to see if psychological safety would mediate between diversity climate in the workplace and job performance. Psychological safety prerequisites present in the workplace indicated a positive mediation to both of these conditions and proved stronger for minorities than for Whites. Kim et al. (2020) wanted to see if the construct would mediate team efficacy and team learning behavior. In their study, they found that psychological safety influences team efficacy and team learning behavior but does not drive team performance (Edmondson, 2008; Kim et al., 2020). It was clear that the sense of safety in the team brought an obvious behavior change and performance influence on the team (Kim et al., 2020). It has not been identified at this point but absence of psychological safety may be indicated in the George Floyd murder case during custody and at the point of the death of the victim (Christian et al., 2022). The lead officer influence, i.e., being an instructor, a senior leader, and/or his own thoughts and beliefs (racial aggression, authority threat from non-

compliance, or other perceptions) over his officer team was strong enough to prevent team psychological safety from bringing change to the arrest incident (Murrell, 2020). The other officers subordinated themselves by demonstrating deficits in awareness, efficacy, and performance by not crossing the purpose of the perpetrating officer (Ghezzi et al., 2021). As has been shown, psychological safety mediates team efficacy and performance with greater influence among minorities than with Whites.

The rehabilitation priority of assisting offender progress back into society provides officers the opportunity to render guidance along with guardianship. Young et al. (2019) affirmed the value of offender learning and formation anticipating release to the community. They also found differences between female and male offenders about a) departure formation value, b) assisting them to employment, c) differences driven by imprisonment frequency, and d) work experience from gendered perspective (Young et al., 2019). Being conscientious of these differences brings a critical vision among offenders because the modeling of equity by officers becomes part of the offender philosophy. Simourd and Olver (2019) recognized the value of avoiding template dosage of rehabilitation treatment and encouraged prosocial skill development with middle-ground treatment goals. Recognition of individual abilities and skill become the baseline in this formational effort and become foundational for offender affirmation.

Officers with fellow colleagues are present to offenders during a long duration of their work shift. Prison officers with their colleagues bring their own change experience to the job and manage their own lives while leading and helping in offender management.

This holds that psychological safety with fellow officers is important in the workplace to facilitate choices to support a safe environment with colleagues and with offenders.

### **Team Learning in Psychological Safety**

#### ***Team Learning Value***

The presence of individual worker autonomy with the increasing use of organizational teams has provided some unique energy to the workplace in modern times (Zhang et al., 2016). The research indicates that workers thrive on their own learning and progression through self-efficacy and organizational affirmation (Zhang et al., 2016). Yoon and Kayes (2016) found self-efficacy an antecedent for learning in general has an association with team learning in an organization. Their study also showed how employee team-learning behaviors influenced self-efficacy and learning perception as individuals (Yoon & Kayes, 2016) Present and future need requirements call for team learning and action as time and expectation necessitate worker skill and group knowledge collaboration for innovation and creativity to succeed. Team learning is enhanced and strengthened by individual authenticity reflecting moral behavior in employees being their true selves (De Freitas et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). These team efforts have been shown to involve inclusive group leadership distinct from individual leaders involving psychological safety for the organization and individuals workers to survive (Zeng et al, 2020).

#### ***Team Interaction with Other Staff***

The literature indicated a traditional separation between corrections officers and other correctional staff, i.e., medical staff, counselors, clinical professionals, and

administrators except for what transpired with the 1990 Italian law no. 375. Italian corrections officers were by law directed to participate in the multidisciplinary team to support offender rehabilitation (Testoni, 2015; Viotti, 2016). This legislation was not supported with training provisions for officers. This became an addition to the duty agenda to ordered daily in their job description. This additional task besides maintaining good order, safety, and security is presently not something ordered by legislation in American correctional facilities even though clinical staff desires this agenda. Correctional officers have the majority of contact with offenders in comparison to other staff members including clinical staff. Medical and clinical staff may have specified and tailored contact in scheduled groups or individual sessions by appointment. The increased offender numbers with mental health difficulties in prison environments calls for more training in mental health management for correctional officers and staff (DeHart & Iachini, 2019). Because corrections officers have a major amount of contact with offenders, research has supported mental health training for officers beyond maintaining regulation compliance (Gangemi, 2019). Officers collaborate with each other in executing duties in their scope of work. Their presence and exposure to each other and offenders can become a provision of modeling to invite collaboration, isolation, or a mix of both depending on what is seen and heard. Gangemi (2019) points out how both offenders and officers along with other staff can collaborate to maintain safety and security even as regulations direct the officers to have ultimate responsibility.

Correctional officers can have challenges especially in working with each other as well as with other staff specialists. This would suggest that there would be potential

conflicts in working through and actualizing direct procedures and policies. Task conflict among teams has its benefits as demonstrated through research (Bradley et al., 2012).

Officers and other staff members in the correctional environment can facilitate decision making processes and invite creative thinking when there is an environment founded on trust and is psychologically safe (Bradley et al., 2012). Shared belief in team skill and integrity along with mutual respect supports creativity and the courage to take interpersonal risk in favor of team performance (Edmondson, 1999).

### ***Learning Environment***

Leaders and followers building and maintaining the workplace learning environment is important to worker creativity and self-investment with colleagues and the organization. If there is a shared leadership built within that learning environment, there is greater potential for interactive learning to take place (Liu et al., 2014).

Psychological safety is a construct that consistently refers to team member sense of welcome of their own understandings, thoughts, and perceptions among leadership and peers (Newman et al., 2017). Rosenbaum (2019) simplifies understanding the construct further: it is the “willingness to take interpersonal risks at work, whether to admit error, ask a question, seek help, or simply say, ‘I don’t know’” (Rosenbaum, 2019). When referring to the interpersonal risk involved, Edmondson (2002) uses the term “tacit calculus” (silent or quiet rock), an expression that describes people measuring risk when contemplating a behavior choice. Psychological safety developed from Maslow et al. (1945) when he referred to the construct of psychological security as different from insecurity. Psychological insecurity is a recognition that individuals sense the presence of

personal emotional reaction like fear or anxiety in bringing ideas into the open. Later, Schein (1999) along with Bennis identified psychological safety as part of the first step (referred to as unfreezing) of the Lewinian change perspective in learning on an organizational level. Psychological safety meshed with disconfirming what is known and familiar allows for recognition that there are other ways to work through challenges and decision-making distinct from a unilateral approach from an authoritarian perspective. This would include openness to giving and receiving feedback, experimentation risk, and voicing personal ideas (Edmondson, 1999; 1996; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). This would counter act threats to learning and acting as an individual within a group or organization and as a group or team. Involvement in a successful, high performing team would call for psychological safety to be an important part of the team environment, providing a stronger base for organizational commitment and involvement (Newman, Donohue & Eva, 2017; Bergmann & Schaeppi, 2016).

Efforts to measure psychological safety value for team learning have met with challenges in the past. This is because development and advancement within and among individuals draws higher value and receives greater reward (Vilert, 2021). Service vocations like the military and law enforcement have rewarded their members with awards and honors that focus on individual achievement at a higher rate than team achievement (Vilert, 2021). Individual progress has been the typical measure for growing leaders to bring honor and distinction to an organization. Honored individuals identify their team involvement as supportive of their own creativity and success. Contrary to the organizational intent for growth and development, singular honor or reward may not

bring developmental progression, but little or nothing changes from such reward. Sometimes teams are mentioned that bring success in a specific way or method. Methods for developing psychological safety are listed by Rosenbaum (2019) when she recognizes supportive efforts made at the Mayo clinic to build psychological safety among medical professionals. Some of those methods include spending recreative time together, eating a meal together, and discussing individual experiences especially focused on listening. One group-context method involved listening to one another without interruption, without popularity or power competitiveness, and without judgment, leading to speaking turns void of one dominating the others. The curse of knowledge is that it is difficult to recognize that someone else does not know what we know when we know it ourselves (Heath & Heath, 2006). In this way, group performance is not the sum of its individual skills, but rather group ability to work together. So then group performance is the quality of how individuals interact with each other and not the sum of the whole.

The entry of the construct psychological safety came in the 1960s but was not really visible in organizational psychology until the 1990s, notwithstanding the law enforcement environment (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It now has connections within organizational research to specific “phenomena such as voice, teamwork, team learning, and organizational learning” (Edmondson & Lei, 2014, p. 23). Change in practice and policy has provided better awareness of the construct among individuals and groups. More organization employees know what psychological safety is, its presence in the workplace, and its influence in group work. Knowing the construct has led employees to encourage its development and presence among law enforcement employees. For

example, Chen et al. (2018) affirmed how psychological safety and procedural justice moderated job satisfaction and career success among law enforcement officers. Also, Chen et al. (2019a) recognized spiritual leadership (support of employee values and spiritual needs) as a mediator between being proactive in the workplace and psychological safety. Yang et al. (2019) go another step forward in identifying spiritual leadership as an energizing factor for employees along with supervisor integrity, job performance, and relating psychosocially with colleagues. The supervisory integrity both job performance and spiritual leadership support while relational energy diminished performance and spiritual leadership (Yang et al., 2019). These connections bode well for corrections employees in building and maintaining ethical and moral perception and their own well-being.

Some employees in work teams may not recognize psychological safety as missing based on individual perception and perspective (Edmondson, 1999; 1996; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). For some it would be more easily identified by situationally involved individuals or groups that are familiar with psychological safety than for those lacking awareness, foresight, and courage. Myopism of this type leads to management and subordinate staticity. What Edmondson (1999; 1996) envisioned was that organizational teams could recognize their own progress, identify errors without reluctance, seek feedback to help the learning process continue, and work on problem-solving together all without personal or group threat (Dutton, 1993; MacDuffie, 1997). This would allow for cognitive and behavioral flexibility to evoke a creative

responsiveness beyond the potential for threat rumination (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998).

## **Ethical and Moral Perceptions among Corrections Officers**

### ***Perception Reflection***

Ethical and moral perception with individual officers in law enforcement organizations involves both intentional response for community victims and perpetrator care. Conduct for better or worse demonstrated by law enforcement indicates choices supportive or destructive of ethical and moral perceptions within the profession. Law enforcement is not always referenced as a helping profession when gathered or compared with clinical professions like medical care, social work, and mental health care. Sometimes law enforcement is characterized in very negative terms because of displayed behavior that at times appears uncontrollable or out of control (Lerman & Harney, 2019; van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2019). Yet, law enforcement care rendered in community places them in a helping profession role when other professions are not immediately present. Previous research focused on helping professions and how ethical and moral perception supported their practice and built significant professional trust among citizens (Sugrue, 2019). This would make helping profession involvement with the community much more facile and easily integrated. There is a plethora of research about the helping professions and how their core beliefs, values and principles shaped by codes of ethics and professional behavioral standards guide their own continual development in ethical and moral behavior (Sugrue, 2019). Similar to the helping profession standards, those who lived as the citizen community have their own varied prerequisites about how law

enforcement should carry themselves in following through with their own profession to protect, serve, and enforce (Boateng et al., 2019) as they are shaped in moral terms (Sugrue, 2019). If law enforcement became a question of professional integrity and confidence, that would become a present concern (Boateng et al., 2019).

Correctional officers have ethical and moral orientation as part of their formation curriculum that is characterized as utilitarian or formalistic (Pearsall & Ellis, 2011). Utilitarian is defined as individual judgment about results and consequence to decide the next step in the process, and formalism bases choices on what has been done before, and what is rule based and what is socially acceptable (Pearsall & Ellis, 2011). Based on the positive and negative predictions of Pearsall and Ellis (2011) respectively, formalism and utilitarianism both present the potential for teams to operate unethically as long as there is no harm as a result from team perspective. Without the presence of administrative regulation, codes of ethics and morals, and policy influence, this author would hold that this ethical outlook could be destructive to the corrections workplace.

### ***Negative Occupational Factors***

The qualitative study of Viotti (2016) that provided five organizational factor sets revealed some of the ethical and moral perceptions that corrections officers shared in Italy. Work content factors showed professional role confliction causing officer stress when dealing with fellow officer and offender relationships when physical or psychological abuse as a potential possibility throughout shift work durations. The stress within the workplace made burnout a possibility for officers to manage and endure (Lambert et al., 2015b; Lambert et al., 2013). Their work contract including schedule and

pay issues made family life and life in general away from the workplace difficult, i.e., working multiple night shifts, and inadequate remuneration for professional service (Viotti, 2016). Social factors illustrated how the profession was more individually focused, i.e., individual duty assignments, and general and specialized tasks to individuals, rather than group or team focused which precipitated loneliness and abandonment (Viotti, 2016). The added awkwardness of superior/subordinate relationships was characterized more by harassment and bullying rather than upbuilding. A cadre-type group identity among officers can develop positive characteristics while demonstrating strong core values. Core value demonstration would be an empty and unfulfilled assumption when these behaviors are apparent. In other callings, having a cadre-type identity benefits both the individual and the team. External factors revealed the poor social status that corrections officers experienced in the community (Viotti, 2016). There was no prestige in wearing the uniform when prison service focused on violent prison incidents, i.e., assaults, riots, escapes, and forced cell entries, and other offender/corrections officer interactions. Lastly, organizational factors revealed the significance of two forms of organizational justice: procedural justice connected to procedure or policy fairness within the prison system for officers, and distributive justice linked to fairness of allocation of outcomes among officers (May et al., 2020). In particular, officers revealed the instrumental communication deficits that existed within their own hierarchy. There is also the disintegration element that connects with a psychological safety deficit, that of officers not really belonging to or with the

organization. This contributes significantly to the job satisfaction deficit and the lack of organizational commitment (Viotti, 2016).

Guard subculture is another aspect that can play positively or negatively outside and inside the prison workplace as witnessed in the nine norms of the officer code (Higgins et al., 2022a; Kauffman, 1988). Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) added to this aspect of the professional in prison because of the unique workplace and the environment it presents. Some have noted that offenders are “prisonized” when each begins to settle into a corrections facility (Smith & Kinzel, 2020). The professional officer along with the offender is “prisonized” gradually upon entry, dealing with the stress, short staff, and conflicts that characterize correctional facilities (Ferdik & Smith, 2017). Each officer is invited to the code of shared values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect facility and personnel characteristics while managing cultural, ethical, and moral identity present prior to entry into the profession. The guard subculture involves the prejudices toward and against fellow colleagues, staff, and offenders that compete for workforce allegiance (Higgins et al., 2022a; Kauffman, 1988).

### ***Significance of Modeling***

What is expected of law enforcement as affirmed by Ascencio (2019) was their modeling of ethical leadership. In taking care of individuals, the law enforcement officer has the calling to care for the community at large and to witness to ethical leadership because of the oath of office each one takes and the code of ethics that each periodically commits to within their specific service. Misconduct does occur whether those commitments are honored or not; officer modeling becomes the model for the community

to discern and possibly integrate. Scholars debate about two perspectives about commitment to ethical leadership: individual characteristics of an officer, and the characteristics of the organization (Boateng et al., 2019b). Lee (2017) presented the context of individual employees taking charge and the ethics of doing so. This proactivity, to include modeling, initiative, and creativity, is antecedent to change and can be presumptuous on the part of the individual while providing a model for followers to be take-charge persons (Lee, 2017). The initiatives indicate the risk element needed to advance employee autonomy to help support growth and change efforts to foster movement forward.

Law enforcement that includes corrections officers suffers from present corruption with all the possible consequences (economic, political, and social) as noted by Ascencio (2019). Misconduct in the form of corruption may include demonstrations of excessive use of force and the presence of menace. This ethic fault has been called integrity deficit as opposed to corruption. Ascencio (2019) also noted that lack of integrity would involve corrupted efforts focused on attending to inequality and poverty to call for greater efficiency and improved effectiveness in the prison workplace to control what is not in order. Scholars have produced literature that focuses on deviance in law enforcement, specifically police organizations, with a secret, covert character (Gross, et al., 2008; Knox et al., 2019; Worley et al., 2019). Even as those involved attempt to maintain ethical and moral character, the deviance is revealed, visible, and apparent to those observing law enforcement operations.

### ***Managing Authority in the Prison Environment***

Corrections officers exercise power through the authority bestowed on them by their sworn service position. Officers develop awareness of antecedent resources based on knowledge that is both formal (laws, policy, and regulations) and informal (verbal and non-verbal knowledge, and facility tradition). Their knowledge informs their authority and becomes the foundation for authoritative and authoritarian behavior when interacting with fellow officers and offenders. Regardless of rank, officers can behave in ways using that authority in their attempt to achieve preferred responses through manipulation within the prison workplace. That manipulation is sometimes manifested as a negative behavior within the construct called the dark triad (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) (Valentine et al., 2019). Prison officers use antecedent awareness leading to reactive behavior among fellow officers and offenders in these incidents. Reactive behavior may become violent and can involve one or many offenders while corrections officers simultaneously manage offenders before, during, and after these incidents. Following incidents, corrections officers are required to produce fact-based detailed reports that are based on what each one saw and heard as an eyewitness. Officer reactions while managing offenders and other officers during conflict situations impact their own psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). That impact, present and post-traumatic, has led to predatory or abusive behavior to each other and to offenders. Officers can be charged, disciplined, or terminated in these situations based on use or non-use of force and accompanying legal consequences. Situational awareness of these parameters in the mind of the officer can have an influence on how each one executes their duties and how each one demonstrates their own knowledge and skill in this environment. Relational

deficits between officers and between officer and offender can be destructive to emotional, social, and psychological well-being and can challenge both moral and ethical foundations while required by their oath to actualize the mission of safety. Measuring psychological safety and team learning behavior in the light of ethical and moral attitudes provides an opportunity to observe potential impact of corrections officer morality and ethics.

The research of Scherr et al. (2021) and Valentine et al. (2019) indicated the presence of social convention deficits and impulsivity among corrections officers and that the correctional environment indicated some congruence with the dark triad and the negative cognitive triad elements of Beck (negative views about self, others, and the world). For example, corrections officers that choose to autonomously administer a punishment to an offender when operating with accountability absent depart from the officer-team perspective (Brownsword & Harel, 2019; Lopez, 2019; Wu et al., 2019b). The officer runs the risk of non-compliance with regulation and rights provision for the offender. There is also the risk of broken trust with colleagues that work with the officers.

Corrections officers make choices affecting offenders that are already separated from the complement of society. Corrections officers may or may not take into consideration that not all offenders seek to be punished repetitively but such behavior may still be imposed for various rationales. It becomes the corrections officers prerogative to choose how s/he would interact with individuals or groups of offenders in the corrections environment. At the same time corrections officers are challenged to maintain safety and security among all offenders that are in their care charge while

maintaining a positive welfare environment within the facility. They are civil witnesses because they have been vested with authority and have a calling to provide an example of the values attached to that civility. When that example becomes a question or presents doubt, the influence of that doubt or question can pervade that environment and become divisive among corrections officers and offenders.

### *Correctional Officers as Ethical Leaders*

Earlier studies observing negative symptoms that were physical and psychological in nature among correctional officers may bear another look from an ethical and moral perspective. Correctional officers serve at the pleasure of governmental authority by their being an extension of the justice system within the confines of prisons. These officers represent professional and institutional codes of ethics and regulatory accountability within prison facilities. Part of the officer role in corrections is to adhere to and actualize codes of ethics as standards of behavior (Sugrue, 2019). These behavioral standards are established by the profession and by the agency and institution represented by the presence of the officer (Sugrue, 2019). Their profession challenges the officer to integrate the guidance given by these codes. The American Corrections Association is one organization that does certifying visits to correctional facilities to help maintain an important accountability based on the code of ethics from their agency. This code provides an important baseline for safety and security behavior within the prison workplace as noted in the following list:

- Respect and protect the civil and legal rights of all individuals

- Treat every professional situation with concern for the welfare of the individuals involved and with no intent for personal gain
- Maintain relationships with colleagues to promote mutual respect within the profession and improve the quality of service
- Make public criticism of their colleagues or their agencies only when warranted, verifiable, and constructive
- Respect the importance of all disciplines within the criminal justice system and work to improve cooperation with each segment
- Honor the right of the public to information and share information with the public to the extent permitted by law subject to individual right to privacy
- Respect and protect the right of the public to be safeguarded from criminal activity
- Refrain from using their positions to secure personal privileges or advantages
- Refrain from allowing personal interest to impair objectivity in the performance of duty while acting in an official capacity
- Refrain from entering into any formal or informal activity or agreement which presents a conflict of interest or is inconsistent with the conscientious performance of duties
- Refrain from accepting any gifts, services, or favors that is or appears to be improper or implies an obligation inconsistent with the free and objective exercise of professional duties
- Clearly differentiate between personal views/statements and views/statements/positions made on behalf of the agency or Association

- Report to appropriate authorities any corrupt or unethical behaviors in which there is sufficient evidence to justify review
- Refrain from discriminating against any individual because of race, gender, creed, national origin, religious affiliation, age, disability, or any other type of prohibited discrimination
- Preserve the integrity of private information; refrain from seeking information on individuals beyond that which is necessary to implement responsibilities and perform their duties; refrain from revealing nonpublic information unless expressly authorized to do so
- Make all appointments, promotions, and dismissals in accordance with established civil service rules, applicable contract agreements, and individual merit, rather than furtherance of personal interests
- Respect, promote, and contribute to a workplace that is safe, healthy, and free of harassment in any form (American Corrections Association, 1994)

Ethics and morality are part of the prison environment as regulatory compliance is under persistent scrutiny by correctional officers and prison staff. Correctional officers and offenders make constant judgments on each other while in the facility based on the incidence of broken trust: incarcerated offenders previously violating laws serve sentences, and now officers ensure offender compliance with regulatory direction in how those sentences are served (Lambert et al., 2021).

### ***Misconduct Influence***

The literature notes that police administrators admit to the argument that misconduct takes place at times with some officers employed by law enforcement agencies (Boateng et al., 2019). When this argument is made, it weakens the idea that deviance supersedes officer characteristics to incorporate department characteristics (Boateng et al., 2019). Scholars have examined causes and effects of misconduct including corruption, excessive use of force, and abuse of authority (Lobnikar et al., 2016). Most misconduct is difficult to observe as it takes place out of sense record with only those involved as witnesses (Boateng et al., 2019). Misconduct is difficult to hide in present day methods because of the use of body cams, video review, and comparison of video record with the written reports of the officers involved. Corruption persists in correctional institutions even as laws, regulations, and control efforts been set in place (Ascencio, 2019; Menzel, 2017).

Participation in professional misconduct as a moral transgression leads to “moral injury, distress, and demoralization” among corrections officers (Sugrue, 2019, p.5). Moral injury brings lasting harm through actions that negatively break with personal beliefs and self-expectations of moral behavior, revealed in “guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, and anger” (p.6; Jinkerson, 2016). Moral injury in the professional would disrupt individual confidence, motivation, and expectation of moral behavior.

Moral distress renders the professional psychologically imbalanced or pained when aware of what is morally expected yet not able to behave as expected (p.8). Moral distress is generated from system practice distinct from an ethical dilemma which is connected with individual perspective (Lynch & Forde, 2016). In distress, the

professional knows what is right but is not able or prevented from doing right. The morally distressed professional would experience “anger, frustration, guilt, shame, anxiety, loss of self-worth, depression, and powerlessness” (Lynch & Forde, 2016, p.8; Corley, 2002). Behaviorally, morally distressed individuals may not interact with coworkers and those under their care. Distress as an emotional impact on a professional person can lead to their disavowing personal beliefs, ending moral adherence, or simply leaving the profession, also so known as demoralization. Demoralization is the threat to or loss of personal or professional values considered by the individual as important to a sense of well-being (Costanza et al., 2020; Berardelli et al., 2019). Participating in or knowing about misconduct within the profession can bring this experience when seen in organizational context (Boateng et al., 2019; Boateng & Hsieh, 2019b). Those professionals that experience demoralization know feelings of despair, isolation, and impotence. They also report feeling trapped, helpless, unable to respond to a stressful situation. Burnout, a long-term reaction to chronic stressors in the work environment, is distinct from demoralization.

Recognizing how psychological safety, team learning, and ethical and moral perception are integral to organizational commitment and viability, measuring their relationship with each other would be helpful to the profession and those supporting the goals and objectives of corrections.

### ***Corrections Officer Accountability***

The corrections officer is required to execute policies, regulations, and practice while actualizing ethics codes and moral practice in the prison workplace. While

sometimes acting as caretakers, these officers continually serve as judges to measure compliance with regulation and policy. Like other professionals, police officers take the concern of fairness seriously as each one of them is judged on their own behavior (Roch et al., 2019; Trinkner et al., 2016). If policy and practice reflects procedural justice among managers and employees, there is greater potential for the officer to demonstrate organizational commitment (Roch et al., 2019; Trinkner et al., 2016). Corrections officers lose credibility among their peers when they choose non-compliance. That judgment position is evaluated at all times in the prison workplace by offenders and by fellow officers with each other. Corrections officers usually are not present at sentencing hearings when an offender is sentenced to prison. However, officers function as judges when they charge and administer penalties to offenders in prison during discipline hearings when offenders break the penal code (Col. Code AR § 150-01 [2019] LEXIS COAR 150-01). Officer presence makes the judge, jury, and society present in the facility by representing that accountability that is required by those in the justice system until the sentence of the offender is satisfied.

Research on correctional officers using force within prison facilities and correctional actions, i.e., offender transport to court, hospital, and other prison facilities, indicated that training to use de-escalation methods in serious and violent incidents is still checked by using less-lethal weapons, i.e., OC spray, TASER, and conducted energy devices (Rockwell et al., 2020). The potential point to be examined is how the de-escalation training was prioritized in officer formation; if weaponry is presented as a higher priority, the de-escalation would be perceived as an option rather than a norm

(Rockwell et al., 2020). High tension incidents that take place in the prison workplace place the correctional officer in conflict because each one represents management authority on the frontline. It becomes difficult in some situations to anticipate these conflicts. The intent is to help offenders and staff work out conflicts by their demonstration of problem solving and conflict resolution. When conflict is seen as an attack, that demonstration becomes difficult to model. The conflict could lead to revenge rather than resolution. Curry, Whitehouse, and Mullins (2019) raise the question as to whether or not morality- by-cooperation theory would be the best way ahead in all circumstances. What becomes concerning to them is the inclusion of seeking revenge as good morality when considering what is morally good. When individuals seek revenge in a reciprocity context, there is greater potential for misconduct to escalate through corruption as opposed to settlement.

Prison facilities have a code of ethics and professional conduct as part of their policies and regulations. Code of conduct renditions have their content modeled after those established by associations that support corrections work. There are other renditions of the code of ethics including those established by each state department of corrections, and the International Corrections and Prisons Association. Aware of the prison officer code (Table 1 above), there may be conflicts of interest between these two listings. Because the officer code is something that is not written down, the potential for paternalism and exploitation is present as there is in any organization or industry in operation.

To move beyond behavior alone, Toronjo (2019) presents research that focuses on community corrections encouraging a vision of value-based operations for the corrections industry in the future. She clarifies by reviewing corrections as an industry that is based on deciding and acting “as a means to an end” as distinct from operating out of a value set to mold and direct policy and practice (p. 3). Parole officers have parolees assigned to their caseload to coach. Each officer has the challenge to coach their parolees to a better perception and outlook while aware of the foundation of the parolee and moving forward from that point. Even as corrections officers do not have an offender caseload while they serve time, the potential to be a coach along with other coaches in the corrections industry suggests a value-based progression through collaboration.

### ***Concerns of Recidivism and Officer Retention***

The recidivism rate describes the statistic that identifies how often an offender is released from prison and then returns to prison for various reasons. The reason might include committing the same crime that led them to prison before, rejoining similar psychosocial circles connected with their social life prior to being in prison, or returning because being in prison became the easiest choice since the lack of success of the offender was not remedied. This has been a concern of corrections department leadership, pushing leaders to ask questions and to discern what controls or influences the rate, and how the rate can be managed (Cuddeback et al., 2019). At the same time, administrators see the corrections officer retention rate fluctuate (Butler et al., 2019). Resources are invested to screen and train officers to operate within the prison workplace. A job within a working environment has a creative aspect present that supports the working member

by making room for improvement. The creativity that each employee brings to the workplace provides an opportunity to impact the workplace in a positive way and build a stronger commitment to the organization. Not all trained officers remain within the employment of the corrections department. The intent is that those that do remain would have a creative influence on both recidivism and retention from their own creative perspective.

Another pressure that has crept into the correctional officers perspective is the social movement to discontinue mass incarceration as an industry (Jahn, 2020; Minkler et al., 2020). Correctional officers can be perceived as instrumental in keeping offenders inside the walls to provide job security for themselves. Offenders have picked up on this perception, seeing themselves as pawns or slaves to a larger enterprise that has become a burden upon the back of the offender. This would be an issue within correctional officer ranks when those with seniority are striving for recognition to remain placed in an authoritarian position as young line officers see the potential for their own well-being come into serious question. These concerns become motivation for negative behaviors upon subordinates, whether collegial officer or incarcerated offender.

### ***Boundaries in Corrections.***

**Discretion.** Correctional officers have the challenge of dealing with both disciplinary and criminal charges in the corrections environment. Haggerty and Bucerius (2020) provide an abridged list of offender “misconduct” offenses that officers are challenged to deal with every day in the prison workplace. Officers are also challenged with deciding whether or not to bring disciplinary and/or criminal charges against

individual offenders while measuring the attached consequences in either direction.

While dealing with this set of decisions, there is also the possibility of officer colleagues getting into trouble for their own “misconduct” behavior that have some similarities to that of individual offenders. For example, charges could be brought against individual officers if they participated in bringing contraband, i.e., alcoholic beverages, cell phones, drugs and drug paraphernalia, or recorded media, into the facility simply because it would be against administrative regulation. It is an assumption that officers are aware of these regulations to the point that they would police themselves to prevent such behavior. However, with the added element of discretion, officers have covered for themselves as well as for offenders to protect themselves from such consequences (Haggarty & Bucerius, 2020). This kind of coverage places the officer in a type of jeopardy that becomes self-incarceration. The officer makes discretionary choices each day to maintain or discard ethical and moral behavior that will influence how safe the officer would be within the prison workplace

**Power and Ethics.** Because the U. S. Department of Justice has provided guidance for correctional industry circumstances and in law enforcement in general, ethical boundary definitions are present to direct and guide corrections officers in their duty (Office of the Inspector General, 2009). The Department of Justice recognizes that the correctional officer and offender are at “unequal positions” (Office of the Inspector General, 2009, p. I; Worley et al., 2019a; Worley et al., 2019b). A relationship between the officer and offender is not an absolution for boundary violations that are unethical and immoral (Cooke et al., 2019). The values communicated in this defining effort help the

officer in the profession and make it possible to communicate such values to offenders. Basic training curriculum provides for training in establishing healthy boundaries that respect persons and positions to include care and custody in corrections (Ricciardelli et al., 2020a), and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (Smith, 2020). Still, there are incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the correctional workplace and in prison activities when and where ethical and moral boundaries are discarded by officers and offenders. These incidents infringe upon and abuse persons that do not intend or wish to be the subject of a perpetrator. These incidents take place whether or not the perpetrator has been educated and formed in professional ethical or moral codes. As indicated by their provision, the corrections officer duty to maintain safety and security within the correctional environment is erased as consequences set from this boundary violation (Cooke et al., 2019).

### ***Algorithmic influence in Corrections.***

An algorithm is defined as a step-ordered process for problem-solving or decision-making toward a specific end or solution (Logg et al., 2019). Using algorithms lends itself to situations where massive data and large populations are involved in organizing, stabilizing, and managing operations within the workplace (Logg et al., 2019). There are various ways to view algorithms in the corrections context. One way is to create and utilize ready methods available for staff and offenders to manage safety and security within the workplace. For example, officers and staff trust a scheduled life for offenders so that it is known what will take place during the day. This algorithm provides convenience for planning so team members can anticipate and provide for need-fill

deficits. When offenders know the schedule, they may take advantage in planning their own day for good or for ill by anticipating actions and movements. This algorithm requires officer and offender submission and compliance regardless of what they prefer and can influence stress within the prison workplace (Hannah-Moffat, 2019). Yet these algorithms may be unfairly biased even as officers and offenders are themselves creative and innovative. An algorithm may not serve those set aside those that do not comply, find it difficult to be social, or are not encouraged in their own skills and gifts (Chiao, 2019).

Another way algorithms could serve the corrections industry is using it as a method to avert conflict. This is done by incident anticipation: observing antecedents and awareness of past behavior allows staff and offenders the opportunity to prevent negative incidents (Abbiati et al., 2019). Compliant offenders usually depart the cell they occupy when officers ask them to do so. Compliance resistant offenders demonstrate behavior that leads to forced cell actions (officers extract non-compliant offenders from the cell). Officers initiate a protocol set that escalates from inviting the offender outside the cell door to forcing the cell open to bring the offender out. The correctional officer chain of command provides counsel and guidance through the protocol to work through an incident including forced cell authorization. Following negative responses to invitations to comply, an authorized forced cell action involves unlocking a cell door followed by officers moving into the cell to safely secure the resistant offender. The actions of the offender become critical to officer response actions. Tools including body camera video, submission equipment, i.e., protective shield, body joint pads, olea capsicum spray, and hand cuffs (metal cuffs or snap tie cuffs), important. The officer team is authorized to use

these tools to manage offender response. The corrections officer profession on occasion uses some algorithmic elements to make access and practice consistent and methodical. Those elements are formal and include administrative regulations, policy statements specific to facilities, and protocols that are used to manage incidents. The informal algorithms develop through observation and team learning. These algorithms support team knowledge and practice in presenting unity as an attribute to each other, staff members, and to offenders.

The literature refers to ‘predictive policing’ and ‘algorithmic patrolling’ as nomenclature for algorithms to actualize solutionism for social problems to include crime, racism, and injustice in law enforcement including corrections (Završnik, 2019). Corrections and policing manages data and populations in the situation of managing social behavior as an equation over persons interacting, particularly to solve and decide (Završnik, 2019). Corrections officers consistently work with people in prison facilities including fellow officers, superiors, support staff, and offenders. With their own professional ethical and moral codes, the corrections officer has been expected to be psychosocial ambassadors and facilitators (Purba & Demou, 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Observing psychological safety in team learning and the ethical and moral perception within the corrections industry provides a look at how human behavior competes with algorithmic elements when officers work together as a team (Martin, 2019). That expectation persists even when officers may or may not be consistent in their behavior. The officers that attempt to make interactions predictive, anticipated, and successful demonstrate innovation in maintaining workplace stability (Abbiati et al.,

2019). Anticipating and predicting behavior suggests algorithm use in the prison workplace. For example, corrections officers develop algorithms by being knowledgeable of offenders and their behaviors avert incidents and protect officers, staff members, and offenders from injury and violence. If an offender demonstrates tension behaviors prior to an interaction with a colleague or another support staff member, the corrections officer that knows the challenges of the offender can interact with him with a known de-escalation method (Abbiati et al., 2019). Following the incident, the offender is able to self-regulate and return to normal. Future efforts would see the offender gain better self-regulation by recalling past successful practice. Learning this algorithm type has success with corrections officers and support staff. As each one learns how to do this, they model it for each other and offenders. The ethics of using algorithmic practice from perceptions about offenders comes into question when corrections officers develop knowledge about an individual offender and the officer may be absent during a negative incident. Preventing discrimination, irrationality, or managing frail human behavior and judgment may be important in such a situation (Martin, 2019).

Corrections officers that are compliant with set standards to include their own code of ethics and professional behavior required by ethical leadership bring their own stability to the prison workplace. This compliance behavior strengthens trust and psychological safety with colleagues and with offenders (Remišová et al., 2019; Valentine et al., 2018). Each actualization of ethical and moral standard, i.e., met expectation, and choice in line with consistent values, has its own influence and effect on prison culture and workplace environment (Remišová et al., 2019; Valentine et al., 2018).

There is greater potential to avoid increased difficulty through offender escalation when corrections officers engage in managing offenders rather than depending solely on algorithmic applications (Martin, 2019). Corrections staff involved in custody and control have a closer knowledge of offenders than computers calculating outcomes based on integrated source and training data (Završnik, 2019). This would only be an execution that has accuracy and efficiency accomplished believing that what was established in the algorithm was neutral and focused well enough without condition to provide the answer requested (Martin, 2019).

### **Corrections Environment and Collaboration**

The corrections environment is governed by various boundaries including legislation, regulations, and policies that extend from correctional philosophy. These boundaries provide legal direction and management guidance in prison operations for officers to run a facility that is more familiarly identified as a prison or jail. The title corrections facility distinct from the name prison came into existence when government leaders encouraged active reformation and rehabilitation modeling for offenders by officers. Legislators believed this would protect offenders from harassment, abuse, and violence from each other besides negligence from officers. This is one area that presents role confusion for corrections officers. The guardianship role (maintaining safety and security) has been the primary role of the officer while the behavioral rehabilitation role has sometimes become competitive (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015). Safety and security maintenance methods used by officers can mean the difference between feeling safe and being vulnerable (Ellison & Gainey, 2015). For example, direct supervision reflects

stronger offender control by officers providing clearer boundaries, better security, and less violence among offenders and toward officers (Ellison & Gainey, 2015). Linear or indirect supervision was shown to allow opportunity for safety risks and violence due to 'blind spots' leading to 'unsupervised times' for offenders and led to more officer assaults as safety was less perceived (Morris & Worrall, 2014; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015).

### ***Psychological Challenges in Officers***

Correctional officers are sent to serve in units within prison facilities with other officers while keeping staff and offenders serving their assigned sentences safe and secure. These officers arrive at the workplace maintaining their own mental health. After some time in the prison workplace, they have more experience with traumatic incidents as part of their cognition and memory. Reporting these incidents is mandatory although there is the potential for underreporting (Crisanti et al., 2019). Some of these are traumatic events such as physical and psychological assaults by offenders, supervisor reprimands, and increased anxiety from the workplace environment and these events tax the correctional officer. For example, the prevalence of mental illness issues has been shown among provincial corrections workers in Ontario, Canada including correctional officers. Carleton et al. (2020) found 59% of their corrections officer sample section screened positive for one or more mental illnesses. Those mental illnesses indicated included post-traumatic stress disorder, general anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder (Carleton et al., 2020). Other negative influences would include job dissatisfaction, burn-out, and job stress (Carleton et al., 2021). The preponderance of

traumatic incidents within this environment would suggest the possibility of increased ideation and attempts of suicide and suicidal behavior (Stanley et al., 2016). For example, Carleton et al. (2021) found that rates of suicide ideation, planning, and attempts indicated by correctional workers exceeded those of the general population.

Corrections industry goals to diminish prison violence and focus on rehabilitation bring stress to the work environment as not all workers are organizationally committed to this mission. This ambiguity within the industry impacts employee and organization investment in following through with worker goals and offender progress. Ricciardelli and Perry (2016) used risk assessment tools to measure risk within correctional facilities even though there are value and authenticity questions thwarting this effort adding to this ambiguity stress.

### ***Correctional officer management***

Much research has been given to authoritarian decision-making that reflects an individual and often intuitive character (Akinici & Sadler, 2019). This focus draws attention to how team decision-making impacts that individual character. The correctional environment has incidents with situational dynamics that impact decision-making because danger, anxiety, and fear are present especially in violent circumstances (Akinici & Sadler, 2019). Correctional officers are challenged to develop the skill of predicting and managing these incidents so that safety and security are maintained (Abbiati et al., 2019). Mindful of both individual cognitive and social development, seeing how those influences are integrated into team decision-making and collaborative actions are also important. Corrections officers do collaborate with each other because of

the regulatory, ethical, and moral context that provide authoritative governance. They demonstrate their own perception and compliance by working through decision-making processes. They act on group decisions, respecting their chain of command, and maintaining their service perspective. The value of making decisions together provide solid management practice with significant offender numbers in the small spaces used for incarceration (Abubakar et al., 2019; Hean et al., 2019; Kendig et al., 2019). There have been deficits in defining collaboration in this environment. Some models can help frame the definition of collaboration and then clarify its application in the organizational context such as corrections. The consulting model or mentoring sees an expert offering advice in technical assistance when the relationship between expert and followers may be one of inequity whether by training, work experience, or confidence (Farnese et al., 2017). This relates to the supervisory relationship based on mentor and mentee knowledge and experience (Farnese et al., 2017). The coaching model is seen as parity between expert and followers. This support model displays collegial encouragement and recognition establishing the priority of collaboration more than superiority of one solution over another. Finally, a teaming process demonstrates professional interaction leading to group problem solving, especially through multidisciplinary teams (Appelbaum et al., 2001; Loving, 2021). Appelbaum et al. is important because of their idea introduction to professionals collaborating beyond power struggles within the organization. This method is similar to coaching in collaboration while distinct in utilizing group resources for processing (Hean et al., 2019). These models present situations for staff member participation opportunity to work together through the

learning process and engage in new experiences adding to their own knowledge bank. Participation opportunity would also present itself to provide moments to add, subtract, and observe depending on how psychologically safe participants would feel and think within their circumstance.

Leadership in developing collaboration becomes important as verbal and non-verbal communication lines up with the values and objectives supporting this goal of working together (Hean et al., 2019; Kendig et al., 2019). Expectation clarity in communication from leaders to subordinates helps in identifying and supporting collaborative behavior. When leaders talk about the value of collaboration in terms of actualizing ethical and moral behavior, organizational collaboration is shown as something real above an aspiration. Knowing what is expected and interacting with each other in following through with expectations shows leadership intention especially when operations experience negative outcomes. Lastly, affirmation of teamwork and collaboration through recognition and reward helps collaboration development come full circle. Identification of collaborative behavior as a developmental influence and individual and group affirmation shows that teamwork is valued along with individual achievement.

### ***Environmental research***

Prison environment research about corrections officers has gained some traction presently while difficult to gather for description (Taxman & Gordon, 2009). The research centers on staff equity and fairness in the prison workplace. In present day corrections operations, authority figures might avoid ethics and morals because of placing

oneself in the position of judgment behind prison walls attaches the behavioral expectation of compliance (Ghezzi et al., 2021; Haggerty & Bucerius, 2018). The decisions in managing offenders may be less calculated and impulsive when emotions and tempers are raw, visible, and dramatic. Trust can also be absent in these situations as the reflection element may be absent as well. The observers, both fellow officers and offenders, may be part of the staff and resident agenda, measuring individual strengths and weaknesses. Making decisions on how to interact with offenders when one or a group are resistant involves discernment, consultation, and team tactics that make choices different from matching offender intensity (Benefiel, 2019; Lugo et al., 2019).

Part of the work environment that corrections officers experience involves the resistant attitudes of offenders within each facility (Sauter et al., 2019; Simourd & Olver, 2019; Zarling et al., 2019). Offenders deal with deprivations like coerced compliance, the objective and subjective rule enforcement of officers, communication ease or difficulty with staff, and strive to gain losses back through their best manipulation (Wooldredge, 2020). Sometimes there is violence (inmate-on-inmate, and inmate-on-staff) that leads to injury (sometimes physical, most times emotional and psychological) to prove or maintain status within the system. Officers have been known to encourage such conflicts for their own entertainment or gratification (Wooldredge, 2020). Some offenders practice manipulation throughout their incarceration by trial and error to measure their success in various integrity levels. Offenders each use these various integrity levels and learn what is acceptable behavior. Offenders see the success levels of themselves and each other especially through their interactions and how they manage practice versus policy

enforcement (Pesta et al., 2019). Corrections officers may have different enforcement levels from each other in managing offenders while they manage their co-workers in doing their job as they are at the first contact level with offenders within the facility.

Fear and anxiety are two emotions that can be present in corrections officers and offenders in the corrections environment. Corrections officers inject the workplace environment with their perspective that can be for good or ill, driven by emotions or mental health (Cooke et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Worley et al., 2019b). Officer may bring the fear and anxiety of society toward the offender into the environment because they may not know offender background or behavioral history from early development. Offenders are not always seeking trust among corrections officers as the offender and officer may have had negative experiences in their history (Walters, 2020). The same applies to the corrections officer in wielding authority while perceived in various ways as their own presence and personality rolls down and touching those in the facility. It is what the corrections officer brings to the environment that influences offenders and other corrections officers. Each adds their handprint on operational behavior and morale (Walters, 2020). The organizational mission and the staff intention by philosophy is to maintain a positive, healthy environment psychologically, emotionally, and physically. Past practice of consistently working an offender while in the prison context has given way to becoming part of industry and organizational leadership, becoming mentors in industrial skills and being peer assistants to support individual offenders get through challenging times and perceiving their own progression toward freedom based on responsibility, integrity, and beneficence.

The character of supervision has some bearing on the workplace environment (Valle et al., 2019). It becomes easy to rationalize abusive behavior towards officer subordinates when the senior officer has experienced this kind of treatment previously when progressing through the ranks. The result of passing such attitudinal behaviors on to offenders is qualified because offenders are deemed unfit to have benefits over and above those given as standard provisions. The abuse cycle is not broken until someone within the cycle is intentional about stopping the negative behaviors. Stein et al. (2020) research reflected the value of leader support with their subordinates and for leaders to actively organize themselves to provide this support. At the same time, they found that forced or unnatural leader support was “positively related” to “emotional exhaustion” rendering support detrimental to subordinates (Stein et al., 2020, p. 838). Similarly, being non-supportive toward subordinates within the chain of command either by neglect or intention would lend itself non-supportive behavior toward offenders to continue the cycle. This would disintegrate the environment in corrections incrementally with each incident. The leader-member exchange is influenced by intention or default leading to moral engagement or disengagement by choice (Valle et al., 2019).

### ***Workplace Stress and Burnout***

Corrections officers by their sworn oath are part of the law enforcement community. In research, distinctions are made to separate different government levels such as federal, state (provincial), and local. El Sayed et al. (2019) recognized that those serving in law enforcement as a job and vocation experience increased stress because officers are in “a constant state of anticipation” (p. 411). Police officers work in a more

open environment whereas correctional officers work inside an architecture of four walls with one way in and out. Anticipation of negative incidents leads to stress among officers. Corrections departments demonstrate support for their employees in providing resources to help officers manage this stress but utilizing them becomes the personal responsibility of the officer. The tasks on the corrections officer of security practice, i.e., team accompaniment for offender appointments in high security environments, overseeing or bringing meals, observing recreation activities, provides multiple responsibility layers that push and pull the officer in the workplace. These taskings, being listeners in the workplace, anticipation stress, and other layers or responsibility while managing personal fears and trepidation have been shown to impact the individual beyond the workplace (El Sayed et al., 2019; Gould et al., 2013). This also impacts decision-making, hampering the corrections officer from a wider view, and acting impulsively. Correctional officers staff facilities in 8- hour shifts, 24 hours per day, all year. Staffing resources have been so thin at times that scheduling required having officers serve double shifts to cover requirements (Lambert et al., 2015). If the coverage is not there, the facility must declare itself short staffed requiring specific protocols.

Canadian research among federal corrections officers showed higher mental disorder rates while there were non-significant indications of suicidal behavior (Fusco et al., 2021). These officers indicated various maladies including PTSD, SAD, depression, anxiety, and stress (Fusco et al., 2021).

Research in China among community corrections officers show comparative results with United States corrections officers about stress even as these individuals work

outside the prison architecture (Jin et al., 2018). For example, the research indicated that these officers experienced role ambiguity, job stress, and job dangerousness in their work leading to officer burnout. It was recommended to continue research about burnout because Chinese community corrections was in its nascent stages (Jin et al., 2018).

Research in India among police officers indicated prevalence of burnout comparable to law enforcement in Western culture (Lambert et al., 2018). Continuance (organizational) commitment recognizes the employee need to stay with an organization when looking at the elements of burnout (“emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of accomplishment”) (Lambert et al., 2018, p. 85). The social exchange of the job in this commitment shows that value is worth the costs expended compared to the rewards gained. Justice, both procedural and distributive, would influence rewards as antecedents to support organizational commitment (Lambert et al., 2019). The measurement in this term was “highly associated” with being depersonalized and emotional exhaustion. (Lambert et al., 2018, p. 85). The impact of this commitment would suggest that individuals hanging on too long could bring destructive burnout (Lambert et al., 2013).

### ***Prison Violence and Misconduct***

Correctional officers are at risk of work-related injury at any time while doing the work of the corrections department (Goulette et al., 2020). These officers represent the corrections department's single most important asset for the industry because of their offender contact and prison institutional management (Goulette et al., 2020). Because of that contact, they risk physical and psychological injury whenever they enter a shift. Some corrections work situations provide legal immunity to liability for officers as seen

in the Australian corrections system (Gray, 2018). The argument of Gray (2018) is to repeal such immunity so that officers would carry the same responsibility as other law enforcement personnel when they might go beyond legal boundaries in offender ill-treatment. Abbiati et al. (2019) noted that violence in the prison environment ranging from physical through psychological impacts staff and offenders. Much of their research focused on offender impact including theft, prisoner-on-prisoner assault, verbal abuse, and deaths. Police personnel have had an interaction history with researchers in utilizing evidence-based findings in practice that may set them apart from some corrections officers and their offender interactions (Pesta et al., 2019).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter provided the literature search strategy with its keywords and database sources used to gain references for research. Following this was the theoretical framework (social exchange theory) connecting the theory with key variables to measure the team learning costs to corrections officers when supported by psychological safety and the context of ethical and moral perceptions from their perspective. Following this was the listing of key variables discussed within the corrections environment context. These included psychological safety and its scholastic progression, and its connection with team learning. Another variable discussed was team learning, its value to team interaction with colleagues and with other staff members and groups, and the learning environment itself. This was followed by discussion of corrections officer ethical and moral perception, their occupational factors including modeling and being ethical leaders, managing authority, their accountability and misconduct occurrence, the recidivism and

retention factors, officer boundaries, and algorithmic influence. This was followed by discussion of the corrections environment and collaboration. This study will facilitate understanding about how officer teams in corrections work interact and if psychological safety is part of that interaction with each other. It will also shed some light on the ethical and moral foundations within the target population and their impact on the prison workplace, colleagues, staff, and offenders.

In Chapter 3, I will provide the research design and method overview presentation including method rationale, the procedural methodology used, the population and population sample (corrections officers in various corrections departments in the United States), the procedure for recruitment to participation, the data collection process, and the data analysis plan.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to explore corrections officer psychological safety and ethical and moral perception to determine if there were clear indications of these constructs by observing officer colleague interactions and team learning in the prison workplace. I explored psychological safety from the corrections officer perspective and whether their ethical and moral perception supports that construct and their decision-making when operating in the corrections environment. In Chapter 2, I defined the literature search strategy with its keywords and database sources. I elaborated about the theoretical framework, namely social exchange theory, connecting the theory with the key concepts in observing team learning supported by psychological safety and the context of ethical and moral perceptions from the corrections officer perspective.

In Chapter 3, I will define the study research design and method overview including rationale for the phenomenological method that I used. I will list the research questions for participant responses about their psychological safety experience and ethical and moral perception among correctional officers in the prison workplace. I will explain my role as the researcher and the procedural methodology used (in-depth interviews using internet conferencing and open-ended questions about the prison workplace experience), the population and population sample (corrections officers that have served in corrections facilities), the recruitment procedure toward participation (social media invitation and snowball sampling), the data collection process (introduction to the semi-structured interview format), and the data analysis process using qualitative

software to code and analyze thematic data presentation. I will discuss the issues of trustworthiness to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. Lastly, I will enumerate the ethical procedures including the treatment of human participants and dissemination of data.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

My research design for the study provides a method for revealing the experience of correctional officers as they served and operated in the prison workplace. To support process integrity, This revelation process also provides a strategy for measuring data trustworthiness. The revelation process begins with establishing research questions that will help the participants to verbalize their experience recalling how they operated in the workplace and how their superiors and co-workers through collaboration and cooperation interacted with each other.,

### **Research Questions**

For this study, I used research questions to ask correctional officers about their experience in the prison workplace. Specifically, I wanted to learn if they experienced psychological safety and ethical and moral perception as they interacted with their professional colleagues. The research questions I used were as follows:

- RQ1 – Qualitative: What has been your experience working with correctional officers?
- RQ2 – Qualitative: What formation did you have to prepare for entering the prison workplace?

- RQ3 – Qualitative: How do/did corrections officers feel when raising issues about processes and operations in the prison workplace?
- RQ4 – Qualitative: What resources do correctional officers utilize for maintaining ethical and moral behavior in the prison workplace with fellow officers?

I developed these questions to help reveal how officer experienced psychological safety and how their ethical and moral perception would influence their interaction within the prison workplace. The participants displayed through resulting data the stage progression of psychological safety and the potential impact of how this experience influences ethical and moral perception as officers interact and work together in this environment.

### **Qualitative Design and Phenomenological Method**

I used the qualitative research method in this study as described by Creswell (2014) to search for a psychological safety and team learning baseline among correctional officers particularly to explore motivation, opinion, and rationale. There are some assumptions that are part of this paradigm. Ontologically, the nature of reality is both subjective and multiple as perspective is presented by research participants as envisioned by Creswell (2014). The researcher and the participants interacted with each other in the data collection process since qualitative method has little to nothing to do with metrics. That interaction allowed for bias and value inclusion. As values are personally relative, they need to be understood so that critiquing ideologies can promote needed social change. As Creswell sees it, the methodology involves an inductive process simultaneously shaping factors, allowing the design to emerge within the bound context.

Qualitative method in this population sample would be difficult to accomplish not only because of the numbers involved. The corrections officer population continued to become smaller as the trained officer numbers were shorter in supply especially during the COVID-19 pandemic years. The prison officer culture in and of itself tends to be more closed in character and nature as they operate, collaborate, and interact among themselves as many of them describe the daily challenges they face (Viotti, 2016; Sturgess & Hardesty, 2005).

Three different corrections departments displayed hesitancy in response to the invitation to participate in quantitative research method as demonstrated by the research or analysis section responses (See Appendix). Furthermore, it was also clear that there was resistance from officers invited from social media sources. Therefore, I discerned in coordination with the dissertation committee that the best course of action was to change to a qualitative design while using a phenomenological methodology. I made the choice to use a study foundation of exploring the experience and perceptions of officers to understand their own world as described by Creswell (2014). It was important to gather the participant experience and thoughts as they began to construct their own meaning in the midst of discerning what was going on with and around them. Their discussion as reflected by Creswell (2014) made it that much more important to them. This study was about affirming theory by understanding participant behavior from their perspective. The participants experienced the prison workplace phenomenon, attempting to make sense of their own interaction with each other while working with offenders and other staff members. The population sample consisted of corrections officers that worked in varied

corrections departments. Each officer made a choice daily to serve their sworn duty as prison law enforcement. These officers saw value in their work as they maintained a cost and benefit balance for themselves as they served as individuals and as a team in the prison industry. This study was about the experience that is the test of social exchange as corrections officers have worked as sworn law enforcement officers. Their service involved recognizing costs and benefits that comprise their organizational commitment and identifying the value that came through the cost-benefit balance to sustain individuals along with the prison security work force at large (Lambert et al., 2015a).

This study was about observing and understanding how corrections officers have operated to maintain a safe and structured environment while collaborating with fellow officers and everyone working with and taking care of offenders serving judicial sentences. Prior to entering both the prison workplace and basic training curriculum, corrections officer candidates learned as individuals and with other groups. After entering the prison workplace and completing basic training, officers continued their individual learning while beginning to do team learning with colleague professional candidates. Ringer (2007) noted that the team learning process was unconscious or intuitive until colleagues would become aware of it in working together. Part of the officer formation process was viewed by Haynes et al. (2020) and Worley et al. (2018) as being founded on trust while learning about psychological safety and not directly identifying the social relationship component or the construct respectively. Ringer (2007) would say that there may be a question about officer candidates being conscious of their engagement or collective thinking with each other. Ringer (2007) identified part of that connecting

process in the elements that formulate the concept of collective thinking that trainers would encourage their trainees to build within their own skill set through their formation. These elements actively present in and among officer candidates from the outset would be an assumption on the part of trainers and supervisors:

- Colleagues sharing a clear purpose
- Colleagues being psychologically and emotionally mature
- Colleagues making or providing space to feel psychologically safe
- Colleagues being responsible together for making space to be psychologically safe

(Ringer, 2007)

Officers would feel psychologically safe in the team environment through their sense of inclusion (Clark, 2020). Aware of the assumption noted above, it would be advantageous to trainers and supervisors to examine whether officer candidates sensed their inclusion as established from their initial work experience and basic training.

Lateef (2020) affirmed the positive elements that come from psychological safety and called for the construct to be more than a small curriculum inclusion for those working together as teams. These early formation experiences would be integral to the foundation that officers would have at the beginning of their professional career. Participants in the study described their experience of psychological safety among officers and its impact on team learning in their own point in time in the prison workplace. There was also an assumption that individual officers and officer teams had their own ethical and moral perceptions in relation to their work based on their own life experience and ready knowledge. An important element in this study was how

corrections officers collaborated, interacted, and related with each other. I focused on team learning and psychological safety that would influence collaboration and interaction processes. Some of these processes were created by participants themselves when they operated in the workplace. The participant experiences, researcher observations, and marking safety levels would help in identifying team building efforts, advancing commitment to fellow officers, and incidence of trust development to support each other in the workplace. Creswell (2014) defined the phenomenon context for generating meaning in research data from the former officers in the study that worked in the prison workplace.

I chose to seek the research data from consenting participants through in-depth interview to support the qualitative design. According to Creswell (2014), in-depth interview could be used to qualify descriptions of individual trends, attitudes, and opinions from a population sample under study. This method allows participants the opportunity to reflect on their responses in the data collection process. Trull and Ebner-Priemer (2020) point to the interview and survey challenges that corrections officers experience when researchers request and receive data in the moment. Corrections officers find this difficult because they want anonymity when speaking about their prison workplace experience and interactions with each other. I employed some open-ended questions based on the research questions that were directed toward psychological safety, teamwork, and ethical and moral perception. Lucas (2014) described snowball samples as exponential and nondiscriminative, allowing for more open engagement with participants in the process and helping participants to easily engage. The participating officers served

previously in the prison workplace. I offered invitations to corrections officers that had previously served in the corrections industry to participate by providing an individual informed consent form for their review. They were invited to read and ask questions as they needed to do so. They were directed to respond 'I Consent' by email if they desired to participate. After providing their consent, they each engaged in an interview with me. Using the open-ended questions, the participants provided data about the prison workplace environment for analysis. The data reflected how officers interacted and worked together with each other. After interview completion and data collation, I used NVivo (Release 1.7.1 [1534], 2020) software to transcribe interviews and then edited the product. The result was a set of subject perspective statements to observe, compare, and contrast with one another. This analysis revealed codes and nodes to clarify thematic patterns and connections and revealed characteristics that described how correctional officers led, learned, and related to each other in their workplace. Creswell (2014) anticipated this type of result from qualitative method and the possibility of result inclusion in the narrative.

Research by Ferdik et al. (2022) showed that corrections officers committed to their workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to be in short supply . They followed through with scheduled tasks of service work that left little time for anything beyond that agenda. Focusing on a small number of former officers for exploratory research minimized the time and money involved in qualitative research like interviews, focus groups, and data management through open-ended questions. Viotti (2016) should be commended for his qualitative work in gaining the correctional officer

perspective. His study marked clear revelation of conflict factors impacting officer psychological and physical health making it difficult for officers to have a collaborative mindset that supports teamwork (Viotti, 2016).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as researcher is motivated by my practicum and internship experience in the prison workplace context. One could perceive that I had a professional relationship with officers and offenders because of practicum and internship. I completed that work 3 years before working on this study. My work involved teaching and facilitating group sessions that focused on guiding offenders to develop positive habits and building mental health knowledge in dealing with their own life situation and condition. Sometimes offenders cited their interactions with and perceptions of correctional officers and how they related with each other. My developing interest in correctional officers and their psychological safety and ethical and moral perception came from observing law enforcement administering justice as they did so through normal shift assignments. The key element was how law enforcement acted from the position of power rather than influence, and singularly rather than as a team. Singularly here suggests that individuals on the team followed the leader rather than working out a process together and actualizing it together.

Working as a teaching and counseling clinician, I had the opportunity and privilege to interact with correctional officers while working with offenders as assigned by supervisors. Some of the officers that I worked with demonstrated a very professional approach as they worked with people on a constant basis; in effect, these officers knew

their charges well to anticipate their behaviors and what they needed in varied circumstances. Others demonstrated varied levels of engagement in their tasks and were not as accurate in knowing the offenders in their unit.

I accomplished this research process outside the prison environment and distanced by time since it was done after completing practicum and internship. My role as researcher was to observe, transcribe, analyze, and interpret the data from officers and to be open about my own beliefs and how bias might impact the research process as noted by Gillani (2021). Being reflexive and recognizing researcher position required my ability to be reflective about what I brought to my observation. As Gillani (2021) affirmed, it is not realistic to be value-neutral when observing participants talking about their experiences. When principles based on values come through the data, reflexivity becomes a prerequisite. The data collection process itself becomes complex.

I used an interviewing technique in this study in which former officers volunteered to participate; they placed themselves into the interview and were able to remove themselves from the interview at any time throughout even to completion as described by Halling et al. (2020). I displayed no intentional purpose to misguide or deceive the participants during the interview as described by Gillani (2021).

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore correctional officer psychological safety and ethical and moral perception in the prison workplace. My intent was to interview, observe, record the experience of quality in officer teamwork and collegiality in the correctional environment. I engaged five correctional officers from this population: all of

these participants worked previously in corrections department facilities as corrections officers. Previously working is defined as retired by choice, by health-related employment termination, by life changing events, or ending employment to take another work situation. Three participants previously worked for the same department but not during the exact same time period or facility. Other participants worked in facilities in different departments and facilities and different government levels. My selection of participants was more ordered toward exploration even as Campbell et al. (2020) would posit that precision would lead to more trustworthy data and results.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The target population for this study was a group of nonactive corrections officers that worked in prison facilities operated by government corrections departments. Participants fit the criteria as other participants knew them as formerly employed in corrections through snowball sampling process. The participants were homogeneous in that they had worked in the corrections industry. However, they were heterogeneous in that the five participants were of differing ages, had differing experience levels, different genders (four female, one male), and different backgrounds. Their backgrounds were unique in that some had business world experience, and some had more education than others. Correctional officer statistics are more difficult to identify. The numbers varied significantly since the pandemic and the efforts to lower the prison census to avoid health complications during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor (2021), there were over 400,000 correctional officers in the United States with gender ratio of about 59.2% men to 40.8% women. Women continued to be employed in male-

majority facilities. The possibility of gaining active corrections officers for participation was difficult as noted previously. This would partially be due to non-specific compliance with the prison officer code that includes avoidance of revelatory information about what takes place inside the wall (Higgins et al., 2022a; Kauffman, 1988). Requesting departments to participate in three states were turned down for various rationales as will be discussed later. The study plan was then to gain participants that had previously served in the profession. Those that had served previously were themselves hesitant about participation for similar reasons but were able to overcome their own anxiety and chose to do so.

Corrections officers reached the age of 18 years and eventually completed basic training including defensive tactics and marksmanship prior to entering sworn corrections service. They began their own shift workplace experience by wearing an approved uniform and attending roll call to maintain continuity prior to beginning their work shift. Corrections officers received work assignments serving for eight or more hours depending on availability and competency as discerned by the security senior leadership teams. An officer work schedule may vary from three to five days or nights on and two days off and may involve weekends. Security staff completed extensive background checks on each officer prior to entering the service. The background check included a sworn interview that security staff check and investigate for integrity. Some officers demonstrated their ability to speak languages other than English but most are English speaking, having completed their secondary education to graduation or General Education Diploma.

The sampling frame was described as a snowball or chain-referral sampling (non-probability technique). This method involves asking present interviewees to provide referrals to recruit additional participants for the study sample. The sampling type, exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, differs from linear snowball sampling in that the first subject provides multiple referrals instead of only one (Lucas, 2014). It is distinct from the exponential discriminative snowball sample in that the non-discriminative sample provides data from each new referred subject rather than choosing a new subject based on the nature of the study (Lucas, 2014). The population participants that volunteered in this study previously served as corrections officers specifically as security staff working in corrections facilities. The corrections officer participants worked in various types of facilities at varied government levels with different security levels as defined above. The participants worked in two specific government level facilities: state and county government.

The participants were contacted by email providing an invitation to participate that included an electronic copy of the informed consent form. The choice to join the study required participants to respond “I consent” to the invitation email. Some invitees chose not to participate by not responding to the invitation. One of the demographic questions asked about the participant specific work experience including location. This provided information to fulfill screening criteria.

In considering a sample size for saturation for this study, there have been studies to deal with this area. For example, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) provided a study of different approaches to sample size for saturation including statistical models and

empirical data. The study provided a sample size for saturation range from 5 to 24 interviews. The sample size for saturation in this study was five interviews. Past experience with this population has proved to be difficult because of the officer code held internally in their profession (Kauffman, 1988). Aware of the code, some officers hold that persons outside the wall should not be provided knowledge of what takes place inside the wall.

The interview appointments were coordinated with each participant individually so their identification with specific data was kept confidential. The interview data provided by the participants consisted of robust experience descriptions of shift work from their time in the workplace. This resulted in four thematic areas with multiple child codes to support the themes.

### **Data Collection Instrumentation**

I used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions for the data collection instrumentation. The questions would help participants respond in the interview and support the participants in answering the research questions. As interviewer, I provided an interview question and the participant was given the opportunity to respond to the question in their own way. As interviewer, I was attentive to ask clarifying questions as needed while monitoring the recording process using a computer to record both video and audio, and a digital voice recorder for audio in the case of internet failure. There was no published source for the interview protocol that I used for the data collection interview; I authored the open-ended questions to support the process to respond to the research questions. No historical or legal documents were used

as a data source for the population. Hence there is no reputability demonstration needed to justify participants as the best data source. The data collection instrument contains a list of demographic inquiries (present work status, age, ethnicity, gender, and professional work duration) and open-ended questions to form a semi-structured interview protocol for me to use during the interview.

I built an appropriate data collection instrument (interview protocol form) from questions that supported the research questions. The dissertation committee reviewed the questions and the committee found the questions helpful for gaining data to answer the research questions. The committee also found the questions as appropriate from the standpoint of being open-ended to add facility to the interview process for the participants.

There was a need to develop an instrument to facilitate an interview process for collecting data. As Newman et al. (2017) pointed out, psychological safety is related to learning behavior and team performance, recognizing that members having required information and process awareness (know-how) have greater success in industry and stronger organizational commitment. Newman et al. also identified through Conservation of Resources (COR) theory that resource presence and depletion was influenced by the involvement and deficit of psychological safety when health of organizational members was analyzed. Developing an instrument that opened the door to correctional officer experience of psychological safety would facilitate the revealing of the construct in the prison workplace. Additionally, previous research focused on helping professions like law enforcement specifically corrections officers and how ethical and moral perception

supported their practice and built significant professional trust among citizens (Sugrue, 2019). Inclusion of inquiry about ethical and moral perception resources would help in discerning how significant personal internal resources are for correctional officers and if formation in the profession provided additional resources for their safety and security in the workplace as individuals and as team members.

The content validity development in the interview protocol was actually confirmed because some of the protocol questions asked the research questions directly rather than questioning around the research questions. When looking at psychological safety, asking how the participant felt about asking questions or bringing up issues for discussion would provide a clear indicator of how present the construct was in the prison workplace. Similarly, asking about resources that participants used in handling decisions in the workplace with colleagues would prove content validity about their ethical and moral perception. There were no culture specific concerns involved in the content development as the questions were focused more on process and experience rather than judging participant abilities, talents, or background. The open-ended questions were key to helping participants reveal their rich experience descriptions providing a wider picture perspective of what each one was about and how they were at times heroic in bringing their own commitment to the prison workplace.

The participants exited the study by my asking the participant to report what they thought and how they felt about the interview experience. I did this to post-check their own emotional and physical well-being following the interview. Each participant affirmed positive feelings and thoughts concerning the interview. One participant noted

initial hesitation about doing the interview. The participant comment after the interview was the expression of gladness for participating. I also provided assurance that they would have opportunity to look over the transcription to provide their own content approval; this member checking met with great approval. Based on the transcriptions from the interview content provided by the participants, there was no specific need to do follow-up interviews save one participant except to check and make sure that the transcriptions were true and correct from the participant perspective. The follow-up interview was to allow member checking of some specific content.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data analysis plan was to connect the research questions with the child codes tabled in the thematic categories below. I planned to use both content and thematic analysis for coding types and procedures. The plan included using NVivo software (version noted above) to facilitate coding and thematic categorization following interview transcription and editing during recording reviews. If there were discrepant cases, they would be treated as part of the study. Treating discrepant cases was not necessary as each participant was engaged and supported the process of responding to the interview questions that supported the research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Since I chose to change from a quantitative to qualitative methodology, it was imperative to assure trustworthiness to provide for validity and reliability. My challenge as researcher was to provide evidential trustworthiness to give integrity to the research data and its analysis (Shufutinsky, 2022). Qualitative methodology is sometimes

questioned because it does not have the same character as the metrics demonstrated in quantitative method. As discussed initially by Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness in its elements (credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability) provides intentional validity and reliability in qualitative method. It was necessary to provide evidence stability in data identification through coding. This kind of identification shows the data as substantial, rich, and expansive, proving the validity and reliability without quantitative metrics. Beyond this exploration, future use of quantitative method could further substantiate findings especially from more specified perspectives.

Pratt et al (2022) referred to the value of being in the field as a way to authenticate qualitative data. In this study, it was difficult to be in the field as the participants had departed or retired from it. Still, the awareness within the participants would be significant enough to them that it would protect the trustworthiness of the data. Pratt (2018) also contended that researchers have responsibility to recognize experience for what it is rather than bend and mold it for templating a theory of its own. This becomes a work of respect that also provides the moment when the participant is not seen as a pawn but as their own sculptor in bringing authenticity through experience.

### **Credibility**

This trustworthiness check centered on how truth-proven the data and research analysis are in a particular study. Altenmüller et al (2021) in connection with both benevolence and integrity specified credibility as openness of the layman to truth in science and made it part of their own world. Ivey (2022) recognized the importance of engaging other researchers to view the data from their own perspective. This would move

the research community closer to discerning method integrity revealed in the data from their own view. Here is recognition that credibility from the judgment of a scientist through systematic coding and thematic identification without guessing or speculation would take precedence (Ivey, 2022) in research credibility. Credibility would find its value by linking the research with reality as it demonstrates truth in research findings. Stahl and King (2022) delineate four triangulation types as an evidence method for credibility (data, investigator, theoretical, and environmental). They also identify member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement as viable methods.

### **Transferability**

This method to prove trustworthiness searches to see if the study findings can be applied in different contexts. Stahl and King (2020) noted that systematic inquiry is important to gaining perspective and understanding when researchers utilize qualitative method. For example, it is helpful in research to see if the findings may or may not be applicable in different industrial situations or with different working groups or conditions. Rich experiential descriptions can help in discerning if such findings can be applied in different situations or with different groups.

### **Dependability**

This check is sometimes called consistency in qualitative method. This trustworthiness check is the qualitative method version for reliability in quantitative method. The study findings are dependable if the methodology can be replicated. There should be enough information from a study that the methodology can be repeated under the same conditions. Such dependability would also prove meaning stability within

another study. Ivey (2022) refers to meaning stability as a way to anchor what participants reveal in their experience map. Being able to have that stability across the data helps strengthen what meaning is for those in the study even as they do not consult each other in the process.

### **Confirmability**

This trustworthy check inspects for findings neutrality. In data analysis, it is important that the data is clearly from participants and not the result of biased management or manipulation from the researcher. Stahl and King (2022) refer to this check as getting as close to objective reality as possible. This is more like quantitative method because this check would use “precision and accuracy” as part of the research process with multiple researchers (p.28). If the researcher has specific agendas that are to be fulfilled by such manipulation, confirmability is nullified. Other trustworthiness marks would also become void as the data and analysis would be skewed from the understanding of the participant.

### **Intercoder and Intracoder Reliability**

Lack of attention in the coding process would have a negative effect on trustworthiness of analysis. Hence, it would be important to be intentional about the coding process. Intracoder reliability is how consistently the same person codes data from one time to another at various points on a timeline (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020); the question becomes whether the coder coded differently or the same at different times. Intercoder reliability provides a congruence measure between different coders involving the same data (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). The dissertation committee members provided

their own feedback and encouragement with regard to the research process. Thus, the researcher, taking the risk of being the primary coder, utilized reflexivity in processing codes and their thematic outcomes with NVivo software assistance for transcription, editing, and processing.

The listing of research questions are as follows:

- RQ1 – Qualitative: What has been your experience working with correctional officers?
- RQ2 – Qualitative: What type of preparation did you have to enter the prison workplace?
- RQ3 – Qualitative: How do corrections officers feel when raising issues about processes and operations in the prison workplace?
- RQ4 – Qualitative: What resources do correctional officers utilize for maintaining ethical and moral behavior in the prison workplace with fellow officers?

Some examples of the open-ended questions for the participant interviews are found in Chapter 4.

### **Ethical Procedures**

There were no agreements needed to gain access to participants or data because participants volunteered through invitation. Participant candidates were provided an email invitation with an informed consent form attached. The candidate provided their informed consent per the method directed by the IRB, namely, to send an email back to the researcher with two words, I Consent, as proof of their consent to participate. The institutional review board at Walden provided their initial permission and an extension

due to the change from quantitative to qualitative method. Those dates and numbers are as follows: Initial approval date 7 Dec 2021 – Approval number 12-07-21-0482963; Extension approval date 11 Nov 2022 – Approval number 12-07-21-0482963.

The IRB approved the consent form found in the appendix that maintained that the study was strictly voluntary and that there was no coercion imposed on participants. There were no ethical concerns about participant privacy or power relationships because the participants were no longer employed in the various corrections departments. The transcriptions were numbered with no reference to participant identification with the transcription. Each participant was not in the corrections profession at interview time. Therefore, there was no requirement for any of them to obtain permission from any government corrections agency to participate.

The data was treated as confidential as per the IRB documentation. The data was stored in the computer and voice recorder of the researcher. The computer data will be stored on a data memory stick for the required duration secured in the possession of the researcher before being destroyed. The voice recorder will also be in the possession of the researcher until digital voice recordings are erased at the closure of the project. The researcher will be the only person with access to the data.

Consent was given by participants for transcription usage in the future. However, since the transcriptions are confidential, the ethical issues have been handled and no further consent is required.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 provided a research method outline that included research design, methodology, recruitment, participation, data collection procedures, instrumentation, operationalization of construct, data collection, and data analysis processes. In this study data was collected from in-depth interviews conducted by me with participants using open-ended questions based on the research questions. Officers who served in different corrections facilities within corrections departments with their varied security levels had the opportunity to participate in this study. The participating officers provided responses to the questions presented during their respective interview. They were also offered a member check session to check and provide addenda. The data was transcribed and edited for accuracy. The resulting transcriptions were uploaded to qualitative software (NVivo) and then analyzed by thematic coding to observe for any patterns and connections with the literature review. The study results and data analysis have been examined in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 3, I presented the methodology for this exploratory study to map out what procedures I executed to find out about correctional officer experiences while working together. The special focus was on their experience of psychological safety and ethical and moral perception. This chapter centers on the method execution results from following through with the method described. The chapter begins with the research setting to include the results of using the social media flyer and snowball sampling for recruiting participants, followed by how the open-ended interview provided the interview event of the data collection by using the protocol form. After this, I placed a participant demographics table that lists participant information for comparison. This is followed by my list of the four themes that evolved from the data analysis and the data examples of the subthemes. I display the subtheme evidence to affirm similarities and differences in participant experience.

### **Setting for Research**

#### **Social Media Flyer**

The social media flyer met with small success: many of the corrections officer Facebook pages accepted my membership so that I could place the participant invitation before page members. Few visitors to the invite liked the accompanying picture but another individual warned about being open to doing research; this reaction was congruent with the guard subculture norms, making it clear that participation in such

activities was not compliant with the officer code (Higgins et al., 2022a; Kauffman, 1988).

### **Purposive and Snowball Sampling**

I used both purposive and snowball or chain-referral sampling (non-probability technique) as the sampling frame to facilitate the qualitative method. Purposive sampling was the method of being intentional about selecting participants. In this study, I selected former officers for invitation to participate. The institutional review board placed a condition on inviting active officers as they would have to procure written permission to participate in the study. For the snowball sampling process, I asked existing subjects to provide referrals to recruit subjects for the sample needed for the study. Lucas (2014) describes this sampling type as exponential, non-discriminative, and non-linear. This is distinct from linear snowball sampling in that the first subject provides multiple referrals instead of only one (Lucas, 2014). It is distinct from the exponential discriminative snowball sample in that the non-discriminative sample provides data from each new referred subject rather than choosing a new subject based on the nature of the study (Lucas, 2014). The study participants were previous members of the corrections officer corps that worked in prison facilities. The participant officers worked in various facilities of different security levels as defined above.

I met minimal success with the snowball sampling. The participant officers served in two different states and had previously left the profession. They were open to participation and did complete the interviews. Their efforts to invite others to participate

met with limited success as many of their professional cohort had been exposed and/or immersed in the prison officer code themselves.

### **Open-ended Interviews**

I was successful in completing open-ended interviews with the participants. They provided rich data for analysis revealing their experience of psychological safety while they maintained their own sense of ethical and moral perception. I gained participants by sending interview invites to the participant candidates for their review. The participants returned an email with the words, "I consent," as directed by the IRB as a positive response. I prepared the Zoom link and sent it to the participant along with the day and time for the interview. I encouraged their being forthright about their own location so that there would not be any interruptions and that each participant would secure confidentiality for the session. I also prepared an audio recorder so that I had two sources for recording and could each confirm and edit the transcription following the session. I used the software package from NVivo to computer record video and audio and used the software for data transcription and editing prior to analysis. The sessions flowed smoothly and were uneventful. When the first participant was asked if he wanted to participate in member checking, I was assured that he trusted my abilities as a researcher and that there was no need for a second session. The second participant was open to member checking, so a second session was scheduled. That session was also recorded, transcribed, and edited prior to analysis.

I formulated an interview form (Appendix A) as a protocol with consistent interrogatives based on the research questions. The protocol had an entry and closing

statement that was open to participant questions. The protocol has an assurance statement of follow-through from the consent form content, and an invitation to schedule a member check session appointment in the near future. I used the protocol for each interview session outside of the member check sessions while always open to participant questions.

Despite early misgivings about technological efficiency, the transcription process went flawlessly. The computer recording transcription process from the software allows the computer to hold the recording for 90 days at which time, the recording would automatically be deleted. I followed the guidance provided for transcription allowing time for the software to produce a Word document for each interview. I began editing by placing a three-digit participate code for each participant, and then moved the document over to the project internal source section to facilitate continued editing and begin the coding process.

### **Demographics**

Responding to invitations, four individuals contacted me with interest in participating in the study. By intention and expectation, participant demographics varied, providing a more randomized sample. Participant identification was replaced with three-digit numbers to maintain confidentiality. The other identifiers included age, gender, ethnicity, rank, work tenure, and present employment status (see Table 2 below). Participants confirmed their own identifiers at the beginning of the interview protocol prior to responding to interview questions. Their ages ranged from 28 to 69 with the mean age being 51.4, and the median age of 54 with no outliers. Their work tenure ranged from 3.5 years to 14 years with a mean of 8.1 years, and a median of 5 years with

no outliers. All participants were previously employed in varied correction facilities. There was one male participant and four female participants; three participants (one man and two women) worked at the state corrections level while two participants (women) worked at the county level. One of the participants that worked at the county level brought a lot of resources (6 years of military experience, and licensed practical nurse). This level of training from outside the wall raised practical accountability in the facility especially about inmate medical care, i.e., pharmaceuticals, detoxification, and medical facility collaboration.

**Table 2**

*Participant Demographic Data*

Participant	Age	Gender	Rank	Ethnicity	Tenure	Status
001	54	Male	Sergeant	Caucasian	14 years	Self-Employed
002	51	Female	Officer	Caucasian	5 years	Self-Employed
003	69	Female	Officer	Caucasian	14 years	Retired
004	28	Female	Floor Officer	Caucasian	4 years	Employed
005	55	Female	Detention Deputy	Caucasian	3.5 years	Currently Unemployed

**Data Collection**

Data collection approval came well after the Walden University IRB had approved the study due to the change in methodology from quantitative to qualitative method. An extension was approved anticipating the quantitative participant challenge as officers exhibited anxiety and fear demonstrated in a few social media responses. There

were two Change in Procedure submissions: one to use social media invites due to three state corrections department refusals to participate, and one to switch to qualitative study method to deal with low quantitative survey participation. The most recent procedure change approval came on 13 January 2023. This involved updating the IRB Form C, the consent form, and the social media invite. I modified the data collection strategy by changing the recruitment announcement circulated on Facebook.

I selected five former officers (one retired and four that terminated on their own) to participate. Participants were previously employed as correctional officers in various correctional facilities: four in one state and one in another. Interview participant ages ranged from 28 to 69 years old with the sample average of 49. The average sample service tenure was 6.1 years. The predominant participant ethnic background was Caucasian. Participant ranks were officer, similar to detention deputy, and sergeant.

I began data collection by posting a recruitment flyer on various social media sites. Potential participants emailed me to express their interest in the study. I provided a consent form through email. I advised participants about the interview structure and study purpose prior to conducting interviews. I received electronic consent by email from participants prior to scheduling an interview. I obtained participant permission to use a video and an audio recorder for the duration of the interview. I used a web conferencing platform to conduct the interviews to continue maintaining health safety protocols from the pandemic. I set up the interviews so they would be semi-structured open-ended interview questions and to encourage participants to elaborate in their responses about individual experiences. In this way, the participants could provide richer data to

strengthen confirmability. I selected participants based on a purposeful sampling allowing for a comprehensive phenomenon analysis. I designed the interview questions to address correctional officer participant experience that may include psychological safety and ethical and moral perception as they operated and interacted in the prison workplace.

Each interview consisted of five demographic questions and 12 open-ended questions directly related to the research question. I provided three interview questions on the informed consent document so that participants would have a content sample and could better imagine the interview event. Some of those interview questions are listed below.

- How did you feel about asking questions or voicing concerns about operations or processes in the prison workplace?
- How were you treated when you or others offered your ideas about the prison workplace?
- What personal resources did you use when dealing with ethical or moral situations and decisions with other correctional officers?
- How did you personally manage or deal with other correctional officers breaking regulations in the prison workplace?

At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were invited to comment on their interview experience. This was the participant opportunity to give their own feedback on the data collection experience and to indicate what went well and what could be improved.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began after transcription and editing based on listening to each interview multiple times and comparing it to the hardcopy transcription produced by the software. The analysis process was first founded on content analysis. This was done by listening to the participants to see what they were experiencing when each was in the prison workplace. This analysis would be the best foundation for observing what the data was producing in the way of consistencies and differences as described by Adu (2021). This observation produced some connections with the demographics later in the analysis. Rather than producing codes prior to listening to the data, I developed the coding from the data content. In analyzing the data, I observed some patterns or consistencies that helped describe the interactions that took place between and among officer colleagues including superiors and subordinates. I observed some repetition within the participant data that strengthened thematic progression to the trustworthiness of the data including credibility and confirmability. Another analysis method within the software called word cloud development from word density within the content also strengthened dependability and transferability in the data. The themes and supporting child codes are listed in the process results. Treating discrepant cases was not necessary as each of the participants were engaged and supporting the process of responding to the research questions based on the interview questions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness can be a challenge because of how researcher perspective can be varied as each one looks at data and its analysis with reference to time and experience

(Stahl & King, 2020). The trustworthiness term, as a substitute for validity from the quantitative method, can also be termed rigor in the effort to prove validity and reliability (Adler, 2022; Cypress, 2017).

### **Credibility**

Credibility perception provides stability in trusting what has been studied, how that study took place, and what the study provided as results (Adler, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). I served as the data receiver with the support of a computer and a voice recorder to serve as redundancy for the audio-visual recording on the computer. I took notes on the protocol form during the interviews to add to the interview transcript for credibility and exactness. I incorporated the bias protections practices by holding previous knowledge (bracketing) as described by Chan et al. (2013) and Tufford and Newman (2010). I also practiced reflective analysis as described by Shufutinsky (2020) so that I would maintain a more open disposition. I inserted block and narrative quotations from the data to support the interpretation of findings. I used member checking to align transcript with participant message. Triangulation using the data and my own experience from practicum and internship was an additional credibility assurance.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the second factor in ensuring trustworthiness. As noted by Stahl and King (2020), transferability ensures trustworthiness based on the application of study results in different environments beyond the context of the study. To prove this factor, software was used for accuracy throughout maintaining clearly consistent analysis and

findings. Nothing was lost from the rich data descriptions and the coding process by using a checklist protocol.

### **Dependability**

This trustworthiness factor is a way to check for replicability of the study. The method elements have been enumerated throughout for clarity and repetition so that they can be used to replicate the study in different situations as may be needed. There are examples in the interview protocol, sample interview questions, and method description for using conferencing tools, voice recorders, and transcription and editing tips. The participants were able to dialogue about their experience in safety and did provide rich descriptions in the interview process. The data responses were based on the participant descriptions of their experience in the prison workplace in their respective facilities. I used participant quotations to demonstrate theme and subtheme support from the data.

### **Confirmability**

I demonstrated the confirmability evidence in the study by the intentionality displayed the semi-structured interview questions. I developed questions that provided the stage for participants to speak openly about their experiences, positive and negative, as they operated in the prison workplace with their colleagues. This was the opportunity to get as close to what they saw, heard, and felt as objective reality as possible (Stahl & King, 2020). The participant responses were analyzed with identified thematic consistency in mind as they were revealed in the transcriptions. The process was journaled as suggested by the software utilized as coding proceeded. Facility was observed in the coding process as categorization (Grodal et al., 2021; Neale, 2016, 2021)

played out in its different facets. Some codes were merged by making them child codes of general themes.

### **Process Results**

Five former correctional officers each consented to participate in an interview using Zoom conferencing. This opportunity to share about their workplace experience from behind the wall placed them in conflict with the prison officer code present in the correctional officer work environment; such a code is unheard, only seen operating within and without the workplace context. They had taken refuge from potential backlash and harassment from colleagues as they had each stepped away from the profession in recent years. The interview questions that comprised the interview protocol were intended to help answer the four research questions stated earlier and just below. The participant responses were recorded, transcribed, edited for clarity, and member checked with each of the participants providing a positive affirmation from their transcription review. Thematic codes with supporting child codes based on repeated participant expressions were identified from the interview events. The four themes with their child codes were expressions of participant experience of psychological safety and ethical and moral perception in the prison workplace. With the support of these child codes, the research questions provided the foundation for the detailed thematic analysis.

### **Research Questions**

The analysis results helped provide insight in responding to the research questions about psychological safety and ethical and moral perspective among correctional officers.

- RQ1 – Qualitative: What has been your experience working with correctional officers?
- RQ2 – Qualitative: What type of preparation did you have to enter the prison workplace?
- RQ3 – Qualitative: How do corrections officers feel when raising issues about processes and operations in the prison workplace?
- RQ4 – Qualitative: What resources do correctional officers utilize for maintaining ethical and moral behavior in the prison workplace with fellow officers?

### **Thematic Results**

This section breaks out the thematic content that came to light through code analysis of the interview data. This section contains thematic codes and child codes that indicate the presence of psychological safety and ethical and moral perception among correctional officers as they work together in the prison workplace. Psychological safety is indicated by how officers work together as colleagues, how they are able to talk about and deal with issues with various acceptance levels, how they are able to learn together as a team, and how they collaborate with each other with the varied backgrounds that they bring to the prison workplace.

#### ***Theme 1 - Leadership***

Participants presented data about leadership in the workplace with supporting codes that included change management, conflict, influence, and trust. The indications that appeared in the data pointed to how superiors handled these behaviors that are part of leadership when working with subordinates and subordinates with superiors.

**Change management.** The leadership behavior in this instance centered on how superiors and subordinates interacted when workplace processes and procedures were discussed and questioned by subordinates to supervisors and supervisor responses. The responses below indicate that there was some consistency about how leadership responded when the possibility of change was discussed. Responses ranged from resistance including avoidance and denial through diminishment including person and gender. The responses revealed both paternalism toward and exploitation of subordinates. The paternalism demonstrated by superiors was seen in superiors treating officer colleagues as untrustworthy. Superiors chose not to include subordinates in their understanding of the rationale for processes or procedures. This not only communicated a requirement for the subordinate to earn such a request for on-the-job training; it communicated a lack of respect for the colleague and therefore was not worth the time or effort to receive an answer nor the requested training or assistance. One participant suggested that the supervisor may not have known what the rationale was and that not being transparent to the fellow officer was a method for disguising or hiding that ignorance to maintain a superior position. These elements connected with negative influences that work against psychological safety development stages in the Clark definition and in Figure 1 (2020) to maintain the exclusion stage.

According to Participant 1,

...that was almost always met with resistance. You get a lot of, well, this is just the way we've always done it or that's a policy if you suggest changes to lieutenants, captains, or majors as to how things can be different.

Participant 2 indicated some frustration about on-the-job training as her superiors were resistant about helping her when she said,

But for the most part, I felt like it was just kind of instead of really explaining why something's done a particular way, it was just like it's just that way, because it's done that way. You know, just accept it, and move on.

Participant 3 recognized leadership and training inconsistency in observing how young officers would maintain custody security when she said,

All of these young kids will come in that were security, and they say, "well I already know my job." But they were cuffing them from the front and not in the back. So, I would have to tell them and some of them got pissed off. But oh well, I, you know, I could not live with myself if somebody got hurt and I didn't say something to him. So, I would rather they get mad at me than get hurt.

When she asked for assistance from other officers, Participant 4 recognized the lack of quality leadership and member acceptance when she was minimized by male officers in judging her as less than qualified as a team member. She stated,

Most of them...they did not see us as equals, so, there was no competition in their mind. You know, there'd be a lot of times I would call for something and the male (officers) would come running. (They would say,) "Look, we will go in and deal with it." I am like, "No, I will go and deal with it. You just need to stand here and hold the key." So, there are a lot of situations like that: it was never a competition with them.

Participant 5 recognized the lack of quality leadership, training, and accountability. She observed this when officers that did not know how to execute medical care and procedures attempted to do so on their own. As she was skilled and practiced in practical nursing skills, it was a challenge to bring this forward to account. Her response was,

It happened many times and a lot of the conflict was related to medical things. They were not doing the medication part correctly, they weren't counting the pills correctly, they weren't securing things, they were not. So that was pretty much where I was very involved in those processes because I had a lot of experience doing that already. And so, I did meet a lot of opposition. Why do we have to do it that way? Aspirin is not even a medicine. And a lot of education for these people because at that time, the hospital refused to detox their patients.

Whether recognized or not by her colleagues, she had the courage to keep them out of trouble along with herself. Yet her intention was judged an assault rather than help. It was easier to exclude her rather than make a perspective change from within.

**Conflict.** I noticed in the participant responses that they thought that superiors displayed paternalism (low respect – high permission) toward subordinates when they were in the presence of superiors. The participants provided examples that showed the ability of superiors to manipulate situations to dominate or hammer officers with their power or to get offenders to react with anger, fury, and frustration while leaving these offenders in the presence of subordinates. Some of these situations resulted in officers being disciplined or disciplinary action on offenders by proof of body-cam video and written reports. In these examples, power diminished psychological safety in subordinates

while actions against offenders reinforced the construct of power within superiors. An example was given by Participant 1 when he said,

I had another officer that I have had several superior officers that would purposely pick a fight with an inmate or an offender so that the inmate or offender could catch a disciplinary. Situations where we actually lost control of the day hall and next thing you know, I realized I am the only one in there and I feel a hand pulling me out of the cell because one of my buddies realized that I didn't realize that everybody else left.

The data also reflects that a subordinate officer could be punished in some situations by assigning them to less favorable duty even as they were attempting to be proactive about conduct unbecoming a fellow officer. Instead of counseling the bad conduct, the backlash was placed on the reporting officer. Participant 2 relates two incidents like this when she stated,

(1st time) It was a situation where a fellow officer was a little too close to an inmate, so I brought that awareness to my sergeant and the sergeant mentioned it to her lieutenant. And I ended up getting reprimanded for it, that I wasn't being a team player or that I was causing conflicts, so I ended up getting sent out to tower duty to keep me out of the housing unit.

(2nd time)...it was a couple officers that I felt like were becoming and doing favors and things for inmates and also allowing them to look on their computers and stuff. And I brought that to the attention of a lieutenant. And as far as I know, nothing was done about it except keeping me out of working at that (cell) house.

Personnel actions like these were never broadcast; they are known by superiors making the personnel moves that are never public. Such actions would only be made public by those who are being moved or “disciplined,” which activates the rumor mill in such a small community microcosm.

Participant 4 related her experience of calling a fellow officer to account because of fraternizing with an offender. She stated,

So, less than a year in, someone was fired that I went to middle school with. She ended up developing a relationship with an inmate. She told me about it because we went to middle school together. She assumed we were friends and that I would keep her secret. I went straight to my sergeant, I had to go into the investigation room, get questioned. He had me be like an undercover mole for a little while. She was trying to pass notes to this inmate through me. They never went to the inmate, they went straight to my sergeant. And she ended up being given an ultimatum to either quit or resign, which a lot of other officers did not appreciate that I did. They felt like they could not trust me. with their, you know, secrets, personal lives. But in my opinion, I definitely did the right thing because she was putting everyone at risk.

Being ethical and moral with regard to fellow officers was difficult. She demonstrated that her psychological safety was strong enough to weather the difficulty.

Participant 5 provided data about the conflictual relationship that existed between herself and the training officer. The subordinate demonstrated the interior resources of

psychological safety and ethical and moral perspective to challenge the situation rather than maintain the status quo. She stated,

It was my training officer and she was extremely antagonistic towards the inmates. It was actually kind of a good example to work with her because I knew that I did not want to be that way. And I had a lot fewer behavioral issues and compliance issues with the inmates when I interacted with them as opposed to her. So. Yes, there was a conflict when she worked there.

Similar to this was how Participant 3 was verbally abused over the phone and threatened with being reported. She said, "One time a lieutenant said something to me, and then he called me on the phone and he started screaming at me, So, I hung up, and he threatened to write me up." These conflicts did not appear to be resolved in any kind of amicable manner. This would be an addition to any stress present or anticipated in the workplace.

**Influence.** I observed the subtheme of influence from leadership in the data. This revealed how the superior officers impacted colleague behavior and attitude in the workplace experience and interaction with colleagues, both superiors and subordinates. This influence reflected both positive and negative outcomes. Subordinate officers demonstrated a positive work ethic reflecting a positive influence in the workplace. Participant responses indicated that if individual officers took more initiative in demonstrating diligence and being intentional about personal encouragement of each other, the positive influence would be advanced. Participant 2 responded about her experience when she stated,

And I think first, some officers that I worked with, I mean, it maybe rubbed off on

a couple where if we were working within the same pod that it was like, OK, well, let's get this stuff taken care of first and then we can relax a little bit instead of relaxing first. And then because I think sometimes whenever I worked with. You know, a few different ones. I felt like I would see different work habits based on just whenever I would visit the pod if I were working in a different pod and seeing how they were so.

When Participant 3 retired and the warden shared recollections of herself in the citation letter in relation to the bearing of the officer, the Participant stated,

“...and she pulled it off, so, I (the warden) was mocked. There is a sort of catch; it comes with breaking the mold. Was she mocked? You bet. Misunderstood? Count on it; called an outcast? More than life and all of it. Was it worth it? Absolutely. When she had to be true to herself against all odds? Yes.”

Participant 5 noted how co-workers and supervisors influenced her own outlook and behavior when she stated, “I would say that the supervisors, most of the supervisors that I had that were like mid-level management, not upper management, like the undersheriff, but most of the most of my supervisors that I worked with were very calm.” The negative influence involved various displays: 1) an officer participant was able to identify self-behaviors that made changes so distinct that others noticed and referenced them in conversation; 2) a participant identified that self-anxiety was advanced by the prison workplace experience, adding more individual concern; 3) a participant identified a training experience incident when a superior took advantage of the situation to make the young officer look bad among the security workforce members. In this last display,

whether or not it was a serious mistake, this incident crossed with the perception that facility security was serious business and not an area to use for personnel embarrassment or diminishment. This supervisory behavior was not the best influence for the staff at large even when some found it amusing. This was contrary to supervisors and trainers having good perception about their choices and being conscientious about what they teach (Labrecque et al., 2022; Labrecque & Viglione, 2021). Superiors would have been helpful to fellow officers if they would choose to demonstrate what was positive and negative in the training content. Negative practice sets a precedent that bad example and modeling is acceptable among superiors and subordinates making ethical and moral perception a more distant goal from safe, secure workplace.

**Trust.** Trust as a subtheme of leadership would have a high priority and importance within the prison workplace. A lack of trust among fellow professionals in the organization is foundational to more problems when working together in the prison environment. One participant noted their experience of maintaining trust with superiors and the chain of command. With an officer, it is a must because of the trust needed in situations when the unit or facility is out of control. As Participant 2 stated,

Whenever I would go to talk to, you know, a sergeant or lieutenant and just not seeing many results from it...that either you do it with your fellow officers and you have issues through the chain of command that way. There were issues that I saw and even on an inmate; you file reports and they get thrown out...But it did not keep me from not being able to communicate with them and get along with them because again, I mean, those are the people that you need to rely on to have your back if things go south.

If there were multiple instances when trust seemed broken, it became that much more difficult to build and maintain trust within the security force. Dirks and de Jong (2022) considered the value of trust relationally in the workplace as they refer to Mayer et al. (1995) and Rousseau et al. (1998) because of the vulnerability involved in the prison workplace. Participants in their responses refer to the division between officers and offenders and the division between supervisors and subordinates. These participants felt that division in their attempts to be accountable and their intention to serve honorably. Participant 5 referred to the blue wall when she stated,

It was a big internal struggle, because I know you've heard the term, the term blue wall and it is us against them, that is a mentality for some of the folks that work there and I had no law enforcement background either, I think that that probably had a lot to do with it too. I was kind of learning new.

There were some instances when they attempted to trust their chain of command, that trust was weakened. They trusted the perception and behavior of superiors and subordinates for safety sake while dismissing their vulnerability. The supervisor experienced that same vulnerability from previous history so the subordinate can just do the same. Hence, subordinates were treated less than honorably by their supervisors. This is congruent with the prison officer code (Kauffman, 1988) about not reporting mistakes or incursions against another officer. Reporting officer misconduct and then being quietly punished for the action became a code teaching method without making the code known outright. Another code norm of not making an officer look bad in presence of an offender is connected with trust. When Participant 1 experienced being admonished about locking procedures in the education area, it took place over the radio system. He stated,

And it was like my first week and I was doing the rounds in the facility and part of my

rounds was to do a walk-through of the school, which at that time was closed for the day. So, I got the key from control... I returned the key to control but a sergeant actually got on the radio, which goes over everybody's radio and the whole prison.... And he said my name and he said, "Did you lock the school when you came back out?" And I had to say, "No." Actually, I didn't realize that it needed to be locked back up. I saw it locked myself in. And so, he got on the radio and said, "Well, you know, this is a prison and we have locked doors." Oh boy.

This would be out of earshot of offenders but could be clearly heard by the officers on duty. The method may have been embarrassing, but it did little to build trust with the subordinate.

When participants reported risks they took within the workplace, their willingness to trust themselves spoke volumes about their strength of character without identifying such internal resources. They demonstrated their own psychological safety even though the organizational environment may not have encouraged development of the construct. Participant 3 related how she called a medical staff member to account about her behavior when she stated,

We've had nurses that, oh my gosh, did so many terrible things. We had a terrible nurse and she got mad at me and wrote me up for being prejudiced. So, I was sent to another unit until they investigated and I got sent to the warden's office and everything. But then they found out how bad she was, and the next day she was fired. But they sent me to another unit as punishment, but I took it in pride (stride). And then, you know what happened came around. Karma hit her and she was fired.

Participant 4 trusted herself in one situation when she had the challenge of notifying an offender about a death in the family. She stated,

Parents would call in to let us know that, like a family member had recently passed. We were not allowed to let the juveniles know that. That had to go through our mental health employee who we only had one. And if she was on vacation, they did not find out until who knows when. So, for like that one, I did end up telling one. Obviously, he made sure he was OK, I did get a hold of the mental health professional we had on call. So, even though I was not supposed to, I did because I just felt wrong, not telling him.

As an individual that experienced training delay, she was able to step out and trust that she was doing the best practice rather than withholding information.

### ***Theme 2 - Maturity***

Beyond preparation for their service, correctional officer professionals build their own maturity through the experiences and knowledge that each accumulates and integrates in their own internal profile. Learning and observing how people are managed in the workplace provides a large amount of wisdom to reflect on and share with each other.

**Adaptability and Confidence.** Participant officers provided responses that were reflections of what they experienced when they adapted and became more confident in and with the workplace. Part of that experience was their growing mindfulness of priorities in their professional context. They exhibited the reflexivity to integrate the ethical codes established by the corrections institutions, the corrections association that make visits to confirm compliance with established standards, and the ethics codes

established by their own professional organizations. Participant responses displayed self-awareness based on their own maturity: there was a growing confidence that bolstered their psychological safety in speaking and acting from a strong base of support. These former officers displayed a reflexivity that supported their commitment to the profession: each one had an openness to personal change, to learning about what their task as officers in the workplace environment, and they had the courage to adapt to what was required of them. Participant 1 displayed personal openness to learn and engage when he stated,

But I think that if you go into this profession with an open mind not going into it like you already know everything and then you can't learn anything, as long as you're open and you listen and you try to fit in and you take direction and you ask questions.

Participant 2 expressed this similar insight and how she was able to step up and lead when she stated,

As I got more comfortable with the pods and cell houses that I was working in, it helped me just to be more confident within, you know, within my job. And then I could be more confident because I got to the point where if I was running shifts for the pods or cell houses, if there wasn't a sergeant to put in there at the time, you know, yes, I did get more confident with that. And that just happens over time now.

Participant 5 stated how comfortable she was in the workplace environment and asking questions about how best to operate when she stated, "I felt totally comfortable asking

questions, especially because I did not have a law enforcement background, so there was a lot that I did not know and I had to ask questions and I felt very comfortable with that.” They each demonstrated the character of service that they possessed and were willing to give when they recognized the resulting consequences involved in making these adjustments and having confidence that such changes would serve them well in their follow-through. The facility warden where Participant 3 served provided a citation at the time of retirement that reflected the adaptability and confidence demonstrated by the officer. The Participant relayed part of the statement from the warden,

“There are people that need and depend on her to be true to herself. The last thing the world needs is one more stereotype, especially negative stereotypes: yes, negative burnt-out persons in an already negative environment. And her optimism kept us going on the worst days.” Yeah, So, don't be afraid to color outside the lines so much that you never pick up your crayon. Yeah, yeah. So, I was not afraid to share it.

The conditions that they each endured in their following through made their presence that much more a testament to how they were able to speak to needs within the prison workplace based on their insight (Lyn, 2022). Their adaptability supported their intent to find out how they could contribute to fellow officer health and welfare as their confidence increased with experience.

Integrity to self was an anchor for each of them. Participant 4 was challenged to change her circle of friends after she became an officer because of their chosen behaviors and habits.

A big one would be a lot of my friends smoke pot. I wanted nothing to do with them, I wanted nothing to do with that. I made that very clear and I lost a lot of friends over that. I don't regret that. Seeing where those people are now. I definitely do not regret that, but it was a tough time to lose so many people because of the job I chose.

Other colleagues may have been resistant to this intention to grow and change thereby revealing a push and pull effect that may have added to stress in the workplace experience. The participants did model professional service for those that served with them. Participant data indicated that they had developed psychological safety within themselves and attempted to generate the construct in and around themselves when they served in the prison workplace.

**Modeling.** The participant responses indicated that they were able to provide modeling in how they themselves learned, contributed, and challenged some of the accountability deficits that they encountered (Clark, 2022). They did this by simply living the code of ethics that they swore to uphold while in the workplace. One research effort (Okros & Virga, 2022) focused on using workplace safety as a method to support thriving in the workplace founded on resource conservation and job demands-resources. This reflects the mindset that correctional officers would be intent on growing and changing beyond survival alone. Participant 2 made honest efforts to model behavior for other officers to make her example stand and stick. She recalls,

I guess (I modeled) with my mannerisms or the way that I carried myself as an

officer. That was. I used to where I tried to be more of a positive influence around, you know, staff and the inmates were shown hard work. I don't know if it was necessarily hard work, but it was work before relaxing, I guess, where I could always find ways to stay busy because I was at work.

Another participant mentions the poverty of good models among leadership; choosing who and what to model becomes an important process for officers trying to thrive and to do so safely. As Participant 1 stated,

Where they learned ethics and they did not have good role models, then a lot of times they modeled themselves after whatever sergeant or higher-ranking officer they're placed with, and some or many of those higher-ranking officers that really are very bad examples of how you should be in a correctional setting.

Participant 3 recalled the experience of “being thrown under the bus,” suggesting that superiors assumed that newly trained recruits knew their business and had the license to reprimand each one that did not know. As she recalled,

So, if you went into a cell to shake it down, I remember this when I first started. When I went into a cell to shake it down, I more or less got thrown under the bus because the inmates personal paperwork was not supposed to be touched or gone through. So, instead of that officer telling me that I did something wrong, she went to my sergeant and told her.

This discounted the responsibility of the superior as an experienced officer to model how to do the work for other officers rather than constantly and consistently assuming that they did not need to continue training and teaching in the workplace context. This lack of

intentional modeling continued to diminish the profession and could drive those trying to succeed to cease seeking growth and progression.

Participant 5 recalled her training officer and the modeling that she did not want to maintain. She stated,

It was actually kind of a good example to work with her because I knew that I did not want to be that way. And I had a lot fewer behavioral issues and compliance issues with the inmates when I interacted with them as opposed to her.

Participant 5 also noted some of the modeling by other supervisors that she recalled seeing in the workplace: “I would say that the supervisors, most of the supervisors that I had that were like mid-level management, not upper management, like the undersheriff, but most of my supervisors that I worked with were very calm.”

**Work ethic.** Adults display a level of maturity when they acquire and maintain a work ethic that supports the individual and the team in their own situation (Rafi Afsouran et al., 2022). One identifying element with the participants in the study was their intention to show a strong work ethic to themselves and to those with whom they worked in the prison facility. Participant 5 provided a good example when she stated,

I think just being willing to jump in where work needed to be done, If we did not have a trustee that did the cooking, then we had to cook, we had to do the laundry. And honestly, you are running doors for other staff. It is a huge trust thing. So, I think that. Not necessarily a commonality of background, although I did work with some folks that were in the military prior, so I think the prior service guys, that was sort of a way to find your commonality with your coworkers. But I know

how to talk to people, and I feel like my willingness to learn and admit when I did not know something and ask a lot of questions and be willing to work as a team member helped.

Another example was seen in Participant 2 in speaking about how colleagues viewed her workplace mindset when she said,

Many of them knew that once I came on to shift and entered the pod or Control Center, it was go-time for work. And so...but just they're communicating on just like a friendly basis to getting to know them, asking questions. So, it was a maturity level that it was like, OK, well, you know, I am not...I did feel like I was more mature than the majority of the officers I worked with. So that's where I had a stronger work ethic. And just one, if I knew things needed to be cleaned or tests done, then I was going after them to do that instead of just sitting back going, Oh, I can do that in another hour or so.

Participant 3 was very determined to make it in corrections even as many of the officers around her provided little in the way of encouragement. She recalled that the warden was experiencing some of the same negativism when she said,

Other people thought that she (the warden) would not make it. But she would never give up. She said, "Do not ever give up." Our work ethic was to work hard...you have to work hard...everybody kept saying I would not make it. But see, I am kind of stubborn that way. In any job I have ever taken if they say, "You cannot do it," you cannot say that to me because guess what? I am a hard worker.

Participant 1 may have remembered some previous negative supervisory methods when he referenced the potential for doing fraternal correction to get up to standards when he stated,

But if it is an officer being sloppy just because they do not know better, maybe they are not securing a door, or maybe they are not doing the paperwork right. If it is something that you know enough and you are in a position to coach them on, then it is always better just to coach them on it. If there is no immediate danger.

So that is how I deal with that.

Participant 4 noted earlier that her follow-through with the sergeant about her colleague passing notes to an inmate indicated her intention to maintain integrity in her work ethic. As some of the other officers in her workplace took exception to her actions when they eventually found out, she chose to take the ethical high ground by being transparent.

The work ethic displayed in the participant data was inclusive, intentionally inviting co-workers to participate. There would have been little or no engagement with their colleagues in their work responsibilities to care for and see to the well-being of each other and the offenders in their unit without that invite. The participants demonstrated their willingness to follow through with tedious and routine processes, i.e., door security teamwork, safety during medication distribution, meal preparation and distribution.

Previous studies (Lambert et al., 2022a, 2022b; Mikkelsen, 2022) have noted the tedium complaint from officers because they are doing work that is scheduled and consistent.

However, the lack of variety and quality supervision may add to the tedium and stress in this case. Participants indicated that they trusted that if they are working their schedule-

maintained security inside the wall, the staff personnel and resident inmates would be safe. Participants had interior assurance that doing their duty would make the prison facility a place where people could thrive and prosper to develop and change without being harassed. This may not be the case all the time because of incidents of violence and upheaval as described by Anderson et al. (2019) and Gross (2008) that put that environment at risk. Participants did not mention specific incidents that introduced violent actions or angry outbursts by individuals in the workplace. Participant 1 and 5 both remarked about supervisor calm in management.

### ***Theme 3 – Moral Foundation***

Ethical and moral perception reflects psychological safety as respect and permission suggest that supervisor and subordinate would together maintain a code of ethics and consistent moral behavior in an actualized manner rather than by aspiration. The executives in the corrections industry integrated certifying agency visits much like education institutions use accrediting agencies to certify their credibility in mission accomplishment. Checking goals achievement aspirations against reality became a part of the corrections industry to check accountability.

**Accountability.** Study participants noted some interesting issues with regard to accountability. The participant data does not mention anything specific about fraternal or sororal correction occurring in the workplace, but that does not mean it did not take place. Participant 1 was a proponent of praising in public and counseling in private. When he recalled the shaming sergeant, he stated,

I think it's important to be open to taking guidance from the other officers to being helpful and not have the attitude that something is not your job and to more importantly than anything else to just watch out for the people that you're working with... I believe that you should praise publicly and coach in private, you know, correct in private. And that's something I learned before corrections, you know, and sometimes they're like, you know, the sergeant, this is something that he started doing right out of high school. So, this is just his only way, and he modeled somebody else's behavior.

When speaking about discretion with officers, Participant 1 went on to say,

...there are regulations and there are policies for everything but just because you (are) see(ing) a fellow officer doing something wrong does not mean you run and write a confidential report on him. If it is something that is going to cause an immediate danger like if you see that officer is bringing in contraband, or if you see that the officer is having relations with an offender, or if you see them stealing from a facility or something like that, then that is something that I would report.

All participants recognized that there was danger in doing things that would be a hazard to people in the workplace such as trafficking contraband into the facility or showing favoritism to colleague officers or offenders. Compliance with the prison officer code was operative among participants in thinking first as a priority and being judicious about writing up a colleague officer for misconduct. Participant 3 was not afraid to call another officer to account when she stated,

And there are a few people that will say something. I mean, sergeants. I mean, I have seen sergeants do things wrong and I have called them out on it. “You know, you cannot. You cannot do that. Why are you doing that? Can you explain that to me?”

Participant 4 was consistent from her baseline integrity when she stated,

So, he broke a couple of rules there now. And again, I was the bad guy who went and told on him. He was new and I had trained him. And I think that is one of the reasons that I was really irritated with him. He knew better then, but he did it anyway.

Another issue that surfaced was that participants noticed that there were different managerial behaviors observed in different facilities or units. This added to the challenge among officers of mixing and matching processes rather than having some consistency in how to proceed. Participant 2 made reference to this when she stated,

It is a frustration and challenge, too. This is because you are also in the academy, you are told one thing and then when you are actually in the facility, things operate differently. And it would also probably be a world that if you went from one facility and transferred to another facility that they wouldn't have a different way of working. Because to me, in D.O.C. (Department of Corrections), if you have 50 state prisons, all 50 of them should do count the same way. They should, you know, all their procedures should operate essentially the same, but they are vastly different among the facilities.

The differences would allow for possible conflicts among officers that may have needed to work conflicts out with each other. However, the social exchange among fellow officers allows for different priorities that would be more personal in character while compliant with the organization. The study participants were concerned about accountability while trying to balance it with discretion among colleagues. Balancing this with everything else on the officer agenda adds more stress (Suliman & Einat, 2018) that could lead to conditions like emotional burnout (Jin et al., 2018; Lambert et al., 2018) and instability both personally and in the prison workplace. Participant 5 responded to this area with some patience with self when she stated,

I have a very strong moral compass and I relayed that when I was interviewed by the board before I got hired. I have a very strong sense of right and wrong, and most of the people that I worked with at my facility also did.

**Respect.** Respect is another subtheme of maturity. Participant 1 recognized the desire to respect superiors that respect their subordinates enough to cover for them in situations that warrant such actions. He stated,

There are times when officers make mistakes and when you have their captain or your major cover for you, and I have even seen them take responsibility because. Unless it is really bad, a captain or a major isn't going to get in much trouble. But officers come and go and. I have respect for those kinds of people, and I have a great deal of disrespect for the opposite. And I've worked with both. But, you know, direct supervisors that maintain a cool head were my biggest inspiration. And that is the kind of officer I wanted to be.

In effect, this is a method for the superior to protect themselves along with their subordinates in these situations. However, this assumes that the superior has the training beyond experience alone to help the subordinate understand circumstantial gravity so as to recognize the morals, ethics, and values involved in each situation rather than just forget about or disregard each one. This also demonstrates a level of psychological safety especially when subordinates ask about how and why with regard to discretion (Clark, 2022; Edmondson, 1999); the superior has opportunity to build respect and team build at the same time in these interchanges.

Participant 2 recognized that it became more difficult to respect the superior when accountability was taken seriously by the subordinate, but not by the superior when she stated,

And it just really makes you feel like, you know, what is the point in doing your job? You start to kind of question yourself like, am I, you know, do I need to continue doing the job? That is, you know, within my scope and beliefs, or do I just kind of fall into this lazy mentality like some of the other officers?

Participant 3 recalled her experience with one of the sergeants in how he physically treated her. This left a bad memory with her as she stated,

Oh yeah. Well, that one sergeant I did years later, because any time he shook my hand, he squeezed so hard, when I was working in his unit and I, it was a year when I went in there and I said, "Why were you so mean to me?" He said, "Well, I wanted to make you strong." And I said, "You don't need to be strong to work here. You just need to know how to trust the people." And I said, "I quit shaking

hands with you because you were hurting me.” And I said, “You are a jerk.” It has been a while, a few years. And then I did not know where he was. I just said it like it was.

When respect continues to decrease because there is little or no understanding between superior and subordinate, exploitation and paternalism continued to diminish trust and collaboration from within, specifically the prison workplace. This also undermined the safety and security along with the trust and confidence needed to support the mission. Participant 4 experienced this from a gender perspective with superiors and other officers when she stated,

As I mentioned before, a lot of the other officers I worked with, especially in the beginning, were older. They had no problem, being condescending to me. Male officers would just look at me, and they would just assume I couldn't do the job. And it did take a really negative toll. Anyone who knew me before and still knows me now.

Participant 5 was intent on communicating the practice of respecting colleagues and inmates to the point of recognizing that prison was not the place for being rude in action and language when she said,

And I felt like having raised children, that actually was a good basis for how I did not treat inmates as if I was their mother, but I was firm and didn't allow a whole lot of nonsense. And I believe that they respected that...I was very polite to them. There's no reason to be rude.

The life experience veterans were more suited to the development of psychological safety within the prison workplace because it was their practice before they arrived. In some ways, these practitioners were able to prosper in their practice. They found it difficult to maintain because colleagues presented resistance to their practice, that colleague resistance that pulled such ethical and moral perception and practice down.

#### ***Theme 4 - Preparedness***

Correctional officers noted that there were preparedness issues when they left basic training and entered the prison facility to go to work (Oberholtzer, 2023). Participants provided data that confirmed that they were no exceptions to the feeling of being overwhelmed when they entered the workplace. Participants referenced dealing with situations that the officer trainee may not have been prepared to handle based on basic or on-the-job training. The trainers recognized that trainees knew what they knew on paper but had little preparation in the way of role playing or table top exercises to understand more fully what they were walking into in the workplace.

**Anxiety.** Trainees learned situational scenarios later while attempting to manage their anxiety. They found themselves asking questions that they did not have until they were in the job. As noted by Participant 2,

And it just really makes you feel like, you know, what is the point in doing your job? You start to kind of question yourself like, am I, you know, do I need to continue doing the job? That is, you know, within my scope and beliefs, or do I just kind of fall into this lazy mentality like some of the other officers?

Well, I am not anywhere long enough that I can really figure out how this is supposed to run. And then if you are there for like a week or two consistently, well, then you get switched over to another pod or a cell house. They go by the rules and everything's so different. And then you're like, well, you're kind of really have to figure out how to chart your own course. And it is...I do not think they prepare you enough for that kind of mind-boggling experience that it is.

That insecurity led to self-questioning about why she even entertained the idea of working in a prison facility. Later, she felt like she was trying to handle doing the job without the tools to do so. Participant 4 recalled her on anxiety when she said,

I am a very anxious person as it is. So, getting put in those positions, my anxiety skyrockets. And like I said, it's not just because of how it affects me personally. I am taking about a million things into consideration when I am making these decisions.

Participant 3 stated, "I was not that prepared when I walked in when I started my career. I wasn't really scared of anything or anybody. I did my hard work with my boys. I just worked hard all my life."

The participants did not talk about their experience of violence within the workplace although many research studies have taken this professional aspect into account as others have noted such experiences (Lerman et al., 2022). Some officers in other research have noted their inability to manage all the negative exposure from their experience memory (Higgins et al., 2022b). Participant 1 saw anxiety in the younger officers because of their lack of experience as he stated,

That is just life experience, really. And that's something that I am, and then I'm afraid and I see a lot of the younger officers just don't have, and especially now that they are taking officers straight out of high school. At 18 years old now, which is how it was in Arkansas, this is for some of these individuals, basically their first job ever. And if they did not have a good family unit like I had, where they learned ethics and they didn't have good role models,

There were indications in the data that participants experienced organizational support as a way to manage anxiety. Colleagues indicated support through teamwork and team building activities. There was also the challenge of superiors carrying their own bias list into the workplace. Participant 5 saw anxiety in superiors when discomfort with gender was involved. She recalled,

I feel like the undersheriff kind of had a problem with females, and we did not agree on how to do some medical stuff, and he did not have a medical background and I did, but he had a law enforcement background and I didn't. And he was ultimately the boss. And I do not think that he felt confident in my abilities, or he felt challenged, I think, by my area of expertise. And I think that that made him uncomfortable. He did not like a female that did not have a law enforcement background bringing things up that needed to be done correctly in the medical aspect of the jail. I would never question them about law enforcement, but I knew medicine,

Exclusion anxiety wears on the employee in and outside the workplace; this was in addition to the anticipation levels mentioned above that continuously place the officer on edge.

**Background.** An important part of the data from each participant was how their background helped them to adapt to the prison workplace. Their background helped them to be mentors as they demonstrated more competency and confidence than other colleagues. Participant 1 was working in information technology and realty that provided some valuable experience as he stated,

I came from a different background then the majority of the correctional officers when I started. You know, I went into it from having a background in I.T. and real estate. And they went into corrections where the majority of the people that I worked were either doing this just out of high school or they had military experience. There is a lot of ex-military in corrections.....So really, I did not have very much in common with most of the people (officers) I worked with. I did not have any military experience. I did not hunt or fish. I did not follow sports. So just the background and things outside of work. I just I just really did not have anything in common with most of them.

This may have caused jealousy and insecurity, driving some negative attitudes to behaviors that would have placed them at odds with each other. Such conflict may have made it difficult to recognize the resource that an officer knowledgeable about specific aspects of the profession could be for the staff. Participant 5 was experienced in the military and in medical matters as a licensed practical nurse as she responded,

So, I would say that with my background in the military as well as my background as a nurse, I already had kind of strong moral feelings. I already had a very strong sense of right and wrong. So, I think that having both of those in my background as opposed to a law enforcement background really did help me be effective with my colleagues, but also, I always made it a point to behave as if I was always on camera, whether I was or not and I also felt very strongly about treating the inmates firm, but fair; firmly, but fairly. That was my motto.

Participant 2 brought strong job skills in administration helping to be and stay organized as she stated,

So, I think my history with administrative duties helped a lot as far as with report writing and log-keeping that sort of stuff.... I think it is wise to have that mindset that you can always learn because you don't ever want to be an expert where you are like, "Oh, yeah, I already know," that because that comes off a little bit conceited, but I think there is always something to learn within corrections. But definitely, as I got more comfortable with the pods and cell houses that I was working in, it helped me just to be more confident within, you know, within my job.

Participant 3 also had her work experience background to help in fitting into the workplace. These participants used their skills and knowledge to help in the workplace and to provide support rather than add to the paternalism and overbearance toward colleagues.

**Balance.** What became a negative experience for one participant was caused by unstable managerial practice by prison administration. The description of being held over because of inaccurate counts and security issues was a constant threat to any kind of work-life balance. Changes and upheaval during the shift led to being on the shift longer than expected. This made life at home and then back at work very difficult. Self-care in the profession became near to impossible because of the organizational advantage over officers in these situations. Individual officers in the middle of the swing-and-sway of shift work and the instances when difficulties during their workday impacted their personal life experienced increased stress and burnout symptoms (Ferdik & Smith, 2017; Useche et al., 2019). As participants struggled, they depended on their own resources to get them through their workday and to manage their home-life as well. Their resources meshed with colleague support was important to their individual and team balance (Brandhorst & Compton, 2022). The intention to have a balanced work-life suggests that the participants wanted that social exchange to balance rather than add more instability to their life. As Participant 1 responded,

Do not let corrections be your whole life. They tell you to make sure and decompress at the end of the day. But in practice? You never could. It got to the point where every night you never knew whether or not you were going to go home on time. It was not conducive to having any kind of balance outside of work. If you needed personal time to do things. A lot of times all you could do is sleep when you can, because if you were getting held over for a double or an extra four hours, even that really impacted your next day. How are you going to make

an eight o'clock doctor's appointment when you just stay at the facility till two o'clock in the morning? Yeah, you know, and then, you know, you can try to catch some sleep, but sometimes you got held over until six o'clock in the morning news and the story varies per shift, but you just never knew before I left.

The officer participants displayed some of the frustration that they experienced in dealing with the situational management in difficult incidents in the workplace. Some refer to these occurrences as “flying blind,” when unexpected or unanticipated behaviors happen in a facility unit. In these cases, the profession overshadowed the predictable and took away what was consistent in the social exchange that defined the job. The recognition of resilience by Luthans et al. (2010) as part of psychological capital (includes optimism, hope, and self-efficacy) would be important to administrative and supervisory staff when situations took so much out of the security staff that there was a risk of compromise of safety and security. Participant 1 provided data that was an effort to challenge processes that could be harmful to security staff. In previous times, the practice of declaring officers as heroes shielded the lost accountability that would be on the shoulders of those making decisions that place officers in difficulty. It would be easy to have an officer take two shifts when it would be wiser for the officer to go home to rest from the shift just worked. Operational risk management was not mentioned in the data suggesting that proper discernment about such decisions would be appropriate in taking care of the security workforce.

Participant 1 mentioned being intentional about having good continuity with officers coming into the shift. This adds to the functional well-being of staff members

assisting in building psychological safety and ethical and moral perspective. He recalled when shift change took place that departing officers were conscious of what needed to be done to do a smooth change-over. This intentionality led to good balance in the facility and in the lives of the officers. As he responded,

It is kind of like when I first started there six years ago where you went in for a certain amount of time, you went in as a group. You went to your to your post as a group, you know, the four to six or whatever of you. You did a nice walk through with the shift that was leaving. There was a good hand off. You all work together. You got things done. You had very little conflicts. And if there was conflict, you handled it as a team and at the end of the day. You were there in the front lobby until you saw the last unit had done their acceptance, and then you all left and went home on time. That's the way it should be.

**Camaraderie.** Psychological safety has the potential to support workers both superior and subordinate when there is the intent to develop esprit de corps in the prison workplace. Because the first participant looked for “that brotherhood,” he was better disposed to find and develop camaraderie and build psychological safety within himself when he said,

But overall, the camaraderie with my officers, my fellow officers, and my co-workers was something that I was actually lacking prior to working in corrections. You know, I did not really have that brotherhood. And I know there are females, too, but I did not really have that brotherhood in any other professional or in my personal life, even before going into the workforce.

If it was not for the management instability that he experienced later in his service, that “brotherhood” might have developed into something more substantial as he departed the profession.

There was no difficulty in participant 5 with psychological safety especially with finding colleague brotherhood and identifying positive attributes, particularly in the on-the-job training. Her response was,

And my teammates that I worked with really helped because they were great. I worked with a bunch of guys. I worked with a couple of females, but I enjoyed working more with the guys because they there was a lot less emotion and a lot more patience on their part. Oh well, we have to do it this way. So, they were very good at explaining things. When I ask questions, why do we have to do this? And then they would explain it.

The camaraderie did not stop after their leaving the workplace. Having that kind of community support and friendship was vital to their own health and well-being. Miller et al. (2022) provided quantitative research from almost 30 different studies to see how officers experienced well-being while serving on the frontline in corrections. They distinguished well-being as both a positive feeling (hedonistic) and positive functioning (eudemonistic) (Dodge et al., 2012). Positive functioning is also named psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) with its six components (self-acceptance, environmental mastery, autonomy, personal growth, positive relationships, and purpose in life). Recognizing a brotherhood in the workplace suggests that individuals would know self-acceptance and autonomy within and with each other. With the absence of self-acceptance and autonomy,

it would be difficult to know psychological well-being and difficult for psychological safety to be known in the prison workplace. Choosing to encourage such well-being would help to establish and maintain camaraderie and would help to build more strength and courage in individuals and the team working in the facility. **Customer service.**

Customer service as a basic training element may not make sense initially to those in the prison workplace. Prison culture can harden or numb individuals serving in the prison workplace when trust becomes a questionable factor. However, psychological safety would connect with customer service when respect and permission are part of common courtesy. The choice to interact with offenders and staff with civility, i.e., requesting something or some service in a polite manner, being respectful to all persons rather than being selective, and being polite in looking out for another person (Apaydin et al., 2022), would support psychological safety. Participant 1 noted that training in customer service was helpful in this environment when he responded,

Yes, just, you know, the biggest thing, and I think a lot of people don't realize there is (a fact) that in corrections really to be a good correctional officer or an employee, having a background in customer service is very important. Since I had worked in customer service-related fields, computer tech support and having a real estate background before going into corrections, we studied customer service quite a bit.

Choosing to behave counter to the prison culture helped in breaking down the behavior of those diminishing others in word and action. Showing patience with colleagues and staff

would be a way to introduce something like customer service in the prison workplace especially in superior-subordinate interactions. Participant 5 responded,

I was very polite to them (offenders). There is no reason to be rude. You know, I want I mean, I have to go into the pods without weapons or being...sometimes I would have to be unaccompanied and I needed them to listen to what I was telling them to do. So, a lot of times I used humor. If there was some sort of a confrontation or something, you know, to try and diffuse the situation. So, conflict resolution, having those skills, I felt, was very beneficial.

Participant 5 in responding about not being rude may suggest that she experienced situations when officers were rude to offenders and possibly to officers in the workplace.

Participant 3 recalled her previous work experience as a resource for her own customer service practice as she stated,

I (had) worked in a manufacturing factory over twenty-seven years. So, safety was the number one thing, and I could not get too close. I think people know that I have had through the years waiting tables and writing training lessons or working at a fast-food place. Like, what it was (I forgot the name of it), just working in the workforce on the outside was what I brought with me.

This push to choose psychological safety calls for utilizing resources that may not be readily present to include being accountable to self. This would help morale as well if there was little or no esprit de corps among officers. Lambert et al. (2022) pointed out that correctional officer workforce health in all its facets is important for maintaining vigilance and being a watchful security staff. An officer that is healthy physically,

psychologically, and emotionally would have a more positive approach to colleagues and offenders in the facility. A healthy security staff would therefore support personnel safety and workplace security. Officers suffering from ill-health, negative attitude, or poor self-care may have some motivation to bring a negative influence on personnel. Having customer service skills would be paramount to establishing, developing, and maintaining psychological safety and ethical and moral perception.

**Team Building.** The responses to team building may be comparable to camaraderie. However, being intent on team building within and without the prison workplace was indicated as a needed process rather than being an organic occurrence. For some of the participants, it was not clear what team building was about, i.e., socializing, what is my job, and what is yours, or how we can get along better with each other. The assumption in the prison workplace was that team building happened when there was a crisis, and “we have each other’s back.” An officer’s learning from basic and every day work experience may have left out the concept of continual learning. Learning together on a regular basis was not mentioned as part of the officer’s formation throughout the career. There was only time to do the job and nothing else. Participant 1 recognized the importance of team building in helping new officers through mentoring. He responded,

I think it is important to look out for the newer officers. And as a newer officer, I think it is important to be open to taking guidance from the other officers to being helpful and not have the attitude that something is not your job and to more importantly than anything else to. Just watch out for the people that you are working with, if you are ever in a situation where something goes down in a cell

house and you run away from the incident instead of toward it or toward helping another officer, that is never forgotten.

Having a law enforcement background was not meant as being one up from another but something to mentor about continually. In the same way, an officer with background in medical care would be another mentoring resource for the officers. The team builds rather than competes with each other to become “mutually beneficial.” Officers eating and enjoying time together helped them gain some human perspective about each other.

Participant 4 recalled officer gatherings as she responded,

It did make it very difficult to build relationships. However, we did do a lot of like shift meal parties, especially for the holidays. When we work the holidays, we would have an afternoon shift Thanksgiving and everyone would bring something in. So, we did try team building activities like that. Once my shift started hiring more people in my age range, we went out after work, went bowling things like that. And I actually still talk to some of those people. I actually currently work with one.

Participant 2 recognized the challenge of being a team in her response. She noted that security staff members were assigned to different units with little or no continuity for various reasons, for example, being short staffed or personnel challenges.

So, the time that I guess if there was team building, it was if you were socializing in the pod or the cell house. So, you were either in one pod for a month at a time, then you would go somewhere else or you were scheduled to work like one pod for one shift and then you were at a different pod, the next shift. So, there was a

lot of (officers) moving around to where you couldn't really get too comfortable with the way each cell house or pod worked or, you know, consistently, especially whenever you're new. I mean, you are new to the prison life altogether, and as an officer, you are bouncing between one pod or cell house to another, and they each...the sergeants have their different ways of running those pods and cell houses that you have to get yourself accustomed to. And you know, you are a new person, going in between all the different pods, there's the sergeant and some of the other staff that is kind of permanently assigned to those pods.

**Teamwork.** The team working together does not guarantee the construct strength and presence of psychological safety in the prison workplace. However, this kind of training and practice helped provide the mindset for using this kind of awareness more by default rather than by happenstance. Participant 1 responded about teamwork that showed the officer bond to protect each other in the workplace. He stated,

Yes, when it was done correctly, it had to be a team experience. You're almost... You're always, I'm not even saying almost, you're always outnumbered. In (the) prison, so if you don't work well as a team, you don't have a chance in corrections. So, if I've seen the people that come in and put off the other officers, either by their attitude or their actions or just being unsafe because nobody wants to be around an unsafe officer. Those people are...those workers are shunned and it's dangerous to be on your own in this business. If you disengage from a different, difficult, dangerous situation, you better be doing it as a group and not as your own, and there's times to do that. I've been in a lot of situations where it's time to

do that. And there... I've been in some situations where we actually lost control of the day hall and next thing you know, I realized I'm the only one in there and I feel a hand and pulling me out of the cell because one of my buddies realized that I didn't realize that everybody else left. So, you're really putting your life in the hands of your co-workers and. And it's important to know that.

Participant 1 presented a perspective that clearly identified a mentor with psychological safety in mind while being ethically and morally perceptive. Participant 4 was intent on operating as a team but also experienced situations when it was not possible. She stated,

So, there were times I was left alone until other people could arrive in the middle of something because my partner or the person who first arrived wasn't capable of intervening. And that is not a good position to be put in.

Officers that decided to work as a team as observed in the data shows that individuals did take it upon themselves to work out processes to help support the workplace rather than have it occur by accident. This was especially true when Participant 5 took responsibility for correcting bad practice regarding health and medical issues in the facility, better known as fraternal correction. This has been problematic in other facilities to the point that medical contractors have been called to account for mistakes and malpractice within prison facilities (Pellow & Montague, 2022). Her teamwork perspective reflected her intent.

Every time, we're a team. I really enjoyed the corrections setting because it was very similar to when I was in the military, I performed very well on a team, and I worked with a lot of people that felt the same way that I did. I think that a lot of it

was you have to rely on that other officer to have your back in case something goes wrong, and so you always want to have a good working relationship with those people because you are expected to have their back just like they're expected to have yours. So, I think that was a big part of it.

Participant 3 was able to engage a colleague to help in dealing with an offender that was in difficulty. Her response was,

We had to have teamwork because we worked with a lot of mental (health) inmates. And you really have to learn how to talk with them. I mean, I have a co-worker who I was close to her and I developed a good relationship where if there was any inmate in the back that I was down with him and couldn't even talk with him because he frustrated me, I would walk away (step back) and she would take over.

Fraternal correction was also seen in other data from Participant 3 when a staff nurse practitioner was not safe while at the same time being rude to offenders. The data reflected that the officer challenged the nurse's medication practice as unsafe while the behavior of the staff nurse placed the offender in danger as well. The officer was proven correct in calling the practice and behavior of the nurse to account. Utilizing resources in this way helped to keep the profession on track by being responsible in providing good, founded practices.

**Training.** Responses reflecting the training subtheme in preparedness indicated that there was deficiency in how superior officers trained and mentored subordinates in their profession. Supervisors reflected deficient maturity as their behavior indicated

resistance to the training role. It may be the case that a supervisor experienced such behaviors when the supervisor went through early training. Still, this should not absolve the supervisor from being responsible for modeling positive practice. Training would be a way to unlock and empower the trainee or journeyman officer to ultimately help the organization. If the subordinate experienced shaming as a training method, the organization and the individual would not experience an uplift as described by Bashir et al. (2023). Participant 1 recalled his own training experience when he said, “Yeah, there I had a sergeant, probably in my first year in corrections. That I mean, basically, he was just a jerk, and he liked to train through public shaming.” It was possible that this trainer had only one experience of training experience and it was by shaming only.

The data reflected heroic insight into how the prison workplace could be a learning platform for skills and maturity especially when many officers were much younger than the majority of the participants. The study participants as subordinates sought to learn their craft to advance the profession as Participant 2 was open to learning something daily to solidify internal confidence.

I think it's wise to have that mindset that you can always learn because you don't ever want to be an expert where you're like, Oh, yeah, I already know that because that comes off a little bit conceited, but I think there's always something to learn within corrections. But definitely, as I got more comfortable with the pods and cell houses that I was working in, it helped me just to be more confident within, you know, within my job.

However, the training methods did not always reflect a professional attitude. When correctional officers had accrued significant experience in other professions and specialties and brought that with them to the prison workplace, it became apparent that supervisors were not as practiced or trained as trainers themselves (Andoh, Mensah & Awusu, 2022). Training became important because of workday situations when manpower was not optimal for maintaining safety and security. It would have been a great help to the officers if there was more trust development through training rather than only assuming that such trust would be present. It was also apparent that some officers brought other professions and specialties with them to the prison workplace. Building trust through training among the officers would have been a benefit to the profession. Rationalizations as not enough time or not having professional trainers cannot support mission accomplishment in safety and security, a high priority in such a workplace as prison.

There were other concerns about training among the study participants. For example, Participant 4 experienced training delay that may have placed the individual in unsafe circumstances. She stated,

Entering corrections was definitely a huge career change. And because of the training not taking place until after we were on the floor already in terms of ethical and decision making and all of that, none of that. They didn't prepare you for any of that. It was on the fly thing, you had to make decisions and kind of hope it was right.

Participant 3 had her own training experience when she stated, “I noticed the training on-the-job wasn't great. Nobody...they kind of just threw you in there and you just did what you thought you were doing was right.” The training experience of Participant 5 was more positive. Her response was,

There were, there were I don't...I didn't have a law enforcement background. So yes, that was all new training for me. Yes, I did feel that my training was helpful to prepare me to go in and work in the jail. They were very patient when I was learning how to do things like run the doors, what to do during booking, how to book them on the computer. Pretty much every aspect of my training that I did with mid-level supervisors, they were excellent. I was very fortunate: I had really, really good management at the time that I worked there. Direct supervisors, I would say direct supervisors.

The variance in training experiences provides subject matter for reflection as to how safe these professionals are in walking into the prison workplace. There is more dependence upon the baseline of knowledge and ethical and moral foundation than what basic training can provide. The study participants were gifted with experience outside the corrections community that brought benefit to their facilities and personnel. The concern becomes what the team complement brings to the facility.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I presented study results carrying over from methodology in Chapter 3. The results began with the research setting including the outreach methods (social media flyer, and snowball sampling), and the data collections events known as open-

ended interviews with consenting participants. The participant demographics followed with a table filled with their information to compare the different participant officers in the study. The data collection method itself references the protocol instrument used for each interview (Appendix A) and figure with sample interview questions. The data analysis involved the use of NVivo software to identify codes that came from participants. This allowed for separating codes that led to thematic elements that became consistent within the data. The data was measured for trustworthiness as a method to prove validity and reliability including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The process results included recalling the research questions, and then establishing the four themes (leadership, maturity, moral foundation, and preparedness) and their subthemes and how they connected with the research questions, and the psychological safety and ethical and moral perception in officer interaction. The majority of the subthemes were supported by the participant data. In some instances, specific subthemes were not a participant priority.

Chapter 5 will provide discussion about the results, study limitations, and possible recommendations that would enhance officer professional development including psychological safety and ethical and moral perception.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of correctional officers regarding their psychological safety and ethical and moral perspective as they interacted with each other in the prison workplace. The interaction quality that correctional officers experience with each other impacts the quality of their workplace morale and attitude indicating how they experience psychological safety in the workplace (Maculan & Ridelli, 2022; Ryan et al., 2022). Participants provided their experiences and reflections about the workplace and what represented the most influential aspects in their experience of the profession. This chapter includes discussion of the study results, some of the conclusions, and the recommendations based on what took place in the study context. I will provide a section titled “Data Journey” that is a synopsis of the adjustments needed to follow through with the study based on situational circumstances. This synopsis recalls the situation that led to my changing the methodology for the study. The corrections industry displayed itself as being a closed system thereby making it difficult to engage corrections officers on active-duty in the study. Ultimately, this led to my changing the methodology from quantitative to qualitative. I will also provide chapter sections for interpretation of findings, identifying recommendations, enumerating implications regarding positive social change, identifying methodological and theoretical perspectives, and the conclusions founded on the observations and findings.

I found that the interview data for analysis from the semi-structured interviews revealed four themes with supporting themes relating to the research questions in the project. Those four themes included leadership (child codes: change management, conflict, influence, and trust), maturity (child codes: adaptability, confidence, modeling, and work ethic), moral foundation (child codes: accountability, and respect), and preparedness (child codes: anxiety, background, balance, camaraderie, customer service, team building, team work, and training). Teamwork and team building relate directly to psychological safety while accountability and respect relate directly to moral foundation. The other themes operated as supportive factors in both psychological safety and ethical and moral perception. The participants did not identify specific training deficits; instead, they focused on the attitude, mindset, and modeling projected by those that trained subordinates. However, there were instances in the data that indicated that participants did not feel prepared for immersion in the workplace when training was completed. The assumption that finishing basic training meant that they no longer needed to ask questions about their duties was nullified upon entering the workplace. The data indicated their initial confidence levels warranted answers to more questions about their duties. The participants were consistent about identifying the deficits within new officers because their youthful age and having less life experience. The participants provided their own suggestions for a more helpful training curriculum to strengthen confidence and flexibility.

### **Data Journey**

I had to adjust my original plan of doing a quantitative study that involved engaging the Colorado Department of Corrections. Initially, the Colorado department was very open to participating in the research process as indicated in their email (see Appendix E). The Colorado department later refused to support the study by way of a signed letter from the associate director of their office of planning and analysis (see Appendix E). There was significant time for the office to end support of the study prior to the pandemic but that decision was not forthcoming until numerous negative indicators appeared when I tried to follow-through with the research section. The notification letter that proved that the office had garnered department executive team support itself contained information that was less than truthful. For example, the associate director claimed that the survey was too long and that officers would be under a completion time constraint. In truth, there was no indication from the Office of Planning and Analysis at the initial approval that the survey was too long. There was no time constraint involved because there was never a completion time limit attached to the survey; this may have been an assumption of the corrections department. The assistant to the associate director via phone conversations offered the use of the list-serve to send out invites to participate to department correctional officers. I asked if this was actually possible and the response was in the affirmative prior to the refusal. The letter of the associate director mentioned that there was an issue with survey distribution and access neither of which seemed to be an issue with the assistant to the associate. The letter also mentioned that there was a problem with survey saturation with the correctional officer staff, that they had

experienced a high number of surveys in the past two months. After questioning the concerns by return email, the associate director made it clear that he wanted officers not to be distracted from their duty as the facilities were experiencing staff shortages. The department was experiencing staff shortages, but the condition has been present for many years. There was a clear intention to avoid external involvements that could place officers in a distracted mode when their attention to the mission was critical. This could also indicate executive management anxiety and fear that external research could negatively influence the staff precipitating even more difficulties (Barnert, Ahalt & Williams, 2020).

I presented the invitation to participate in the study to other state corrections departments for the opportunity to engage in the exploratory quantitative study but each department provided various rationales for choosing not to participate. The Ohio Department of Corrections refused because they had chosen to place a hold on staff involvement in research (Appendix E). The California Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections gave the rationale that they refused to engage in a study that involved a third-party agency that was party to handling the data collection (Appendix E). The message was clear that these agencies did not want to disturb whatever balance that was in place among their employed correctional officers to maintain the status quo in their departments especially during the pandemic and its aftermath. The refusal letters are found in the appendices.

After these refusals, I engaged social media to gain participants to review and complete the online survey in place. Seven individuals completed the survey while more than 140 individuals reviewed the survey but did not complete it. With this response, it

was imperative to change the study methodology and operate from a qualitative direction focused on a phenomenological approach. I reasoned that interviews would reveal themes and subthemes that would focus on areas that could relate to and connect with the two areas of emphasis, correctional officer psychological safety and their ethical and moral perception in the prison workplace. Those themes did surface and displayed their impact on the social exchange in the relational aspect of the participant officers that previously worked in corrections.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

My intent in using the first research question to explore participant experience in the prison workplace. The participant officers reported experiences and behaviors that showed live psychological safety stages that progressed beyond inclusion safety (see Figure 1). Participant 1 noted that his workplace experience enabled him to feel camaraderie with fellow officers. This was something that he had not ever had before in his life experience and really enjoyed it. The motivation to leave the officer position with the department was the administration removing respect for the officer by habitually holding the officer overtime and demanding the officer to stay beyond the established work day. The officer noted:

Well, in a job, you know, they tell you that in the academy to make sure and have a good work life balance. Do not let corrections be your whole life. They tell you to make sure and decompress at the end of the day. But in practice? You never could. It got to the point where every night you never knew whether or not you were going to go home on time. It was not conducive to having any kind of

balance outside of work. If you needed personal time to do things. A lot of times all you could do is sleep when you can, because if you were getting held over for a double or an extra four hours, even that really impacted your next day. How are you going to make an eight o'clock doctor appointment when you just stayed at the facility (un)til two o'clock in the morning?

The leadership experience in the prison workplace suggested that individuals that were promoted to lead lacked healthy skills to develop leadership within the workplace. As noted above, Participant 1 described his experience of being treated to public shaming facilitated by higher ranking officers. The incident suggested that shaming a fellow officer about a security issue would be the best training for him. Participant 1 was able to work through this experience. He later recognized that he was working with a superior with skills in his possession from the beginning of his career.

The second research question dealt with the officer preparation experience. This is an aspect that was from much earlier and did not hold as much value for the participants as found in their responses. One participant noted:

I was not prepared for (the) being surrounded by inmates, not knowing or offenders or whatever they are called, being so close to me when my expectation was they were all going to be behind bars and I was going to be out here. (I assumed that) we were not going to be so close and intermingled. I wasn't prepared for that. I was not prepared. For the yelling and obscenities and the kind of things that you get from offenders when they are just trying to get into your

head when they know you are new. I was not prepared for the kind of (the) shock and awe that they throw at you.

And another noted:

About 50% prepared. I mean, there is only so much the academy...I feel like... that they can teach you in the short amount of time that it is and I think you do have to have a little bit more mental preparedness for it. And then, but I guess to mean, the academy is only going to teach you so much...

In my third research question, I ask about the corrections officer experience of raising questions and issues about processes and operations in the prison workplace. It was clear that attempting to question or query fellow officers whether superior, subordinate, or colleague level would meet with different values of resistance. Officers asking about operations and processes indicated they were resisted many times and welcomed sometimes by fellow workers. The message was strong that an officer that was asking questions about things somehow was not accepting the present and obvious in the workplace. That officer was not up-to-date or was not part of the in-crowd. This would make it more difficult to have a workforce that was about welcoming help and support and more intent on putting off others that would think and behave otherwise.

As one participant responded:

That was always met with resistance. You get a lot of, well, this is just the way we have always done it or that is a policy if you suggest changes to lieutenants, captains, or majors as to how things can be different. Most of the time. You just really get the impression that you are being a pain in the ass

because they just want the place not to burn down at the end of the day and not have problems. They are not really looking to make too many corrections. So, yeah, I would have to say it is always met with resistance.

And another stated:

Most of the time whenever I asked questions, because I asked a lot of questions, I would say the majority of the times, it felt just like I was getting blown off, or, you know, not really taken too seriously. Or maybe the person I was asking did not know the answer. So, it was just kind of pushed off or it was referred to an AR (administrative regulation), you know, “read up on it.” But for the most part, I felt like it was just kind of instead of really explaining why something's done a particular way, it was just like it is just that way, because it is done that way. You know, just accept it, and move on. There were a couple sergeants that I felt like I did a really good job of explaining things. when asked.

In my fourth research question, I asked about the resources that officers used to maintain ethical and moral behavior in the prison workplace with fellow officers. Much of participant response centered on personal resources that they had when they came inside the wall. Some of those resources came from family upbringing, some from past job experience, and some from life experience in general. One participant cited the following:

...you know, the biggest thing, and I think a lot of people do not realize there is that corrections really, to be a good correctional officer or an employee, having a background in customer service is very important...once you realize that those

courses on dealing with a difficult customer and negotiation concepts and techniques, that is all very important in corrections and I do not think that is really taught.

And another noted:

I guess I would say it was my own personal moral ground. Just my own life experiences... I mean, I know that we were told to go up the chain of command if we needed to discuss matters, but I felt like that was a flawed.... The chain of command was flawed... Whenever I would go to talk to, you know, a sergeant or lieutenant. And just not seeing many results from it.

Depending upon leadership in the prison workplace provided more questions at times than answers. It pushed the individual officer to develop personal confidence even as it was difficult to chart their own course. As noted by Participant 1:

I learned quite a bit of confidence. And I learned some things that I was not really good at before I learned how to say no, which is something that I was not very good at growing up. But you have to learn how to say no and do it constructively. I learned how to get along with a whole other level of person that you usually would cross the street to avoid. So, it was really a great growing experience, and I would not have traded the experience for anything. But even though I am glad not to be in it anymore.

### **Limitation of Study**

This study was limited by the experience and insight of those who participated and provided their own viewpoint. The courage and valor involved in being able to share these experiences indicate that there are many others that have their own story to tell and would bear the intent to bring change and growth to this honorable profession. What is also seen is that there are individuals that are serving and have served that have brought their own maturity, psychological safety, and ethical and moral perspective to the prison workplace. In doing so, they have challenged others to raise the bar of their core values and then raise it again in witnessing security and safety within the confines of the wall.

### **Recommendations**

In reviewing this study, I discerned that the findings called for recommendations for future study and for change management in corrections operations. Correctional officer resistance to reveal their workplace experience with those outside the wall is important and will be accounted for when law enforcement is considered for future research. Quantitative online research surveys even when confidentiality was assured have not superseded the fear and anxiety generated by the influence of present corrections administrations and professionals possibly generated by the guard subculture that some would deny. The rationale may be that any disturbance to the status quo would be untenable or may be destructive to the over-arching control in place of the present organization.

The organizational culture in corrections departments specifically within the corrections officer profession will make it difficult to break through however it may be

professionally defined. This may be due to the fact that corrections officers are the only ones that society requires to do what they do daily. The officer intention or non-intention to live by an unheard subcultural code strengthens their resolve to maintain their own control even though such a code may not be publicly specified. The parochialism that pervades statehood may provide small hope against social exchange defining commerce in corrections as departments manage inmates for profit. That parochialism would be affirmative to interstate but may prevent intrastate participation in correctional officer research due to the challenge of getting research and analysis sections to agree on conditions for such endeavors. The current study revealed leadership, maturity, moral foundation, and preparedness strengths and deficits.

### **Supervision Training**

The current study revealed preparedness and maturity deficits. The decision to provide leadership formation that would incorporate supervisory skills can support a maturing workforce beyond creative stativity. Multidisciplinary engagement with staff and services personnel has been shown to provide positive progress within the corrections industry (Appelbaum et al., 2001; Loving, 2021). The present stativity warrants stepping beyond elemental inclusion of officers in the culture to become learners and contributors to the facility programs. The movement toward creativity may help stem high turnover rates in a diminished workforce (Tretyakov, 2021).

It would be important for those at the executive level and their immediate subordinates to look at the possibility of integrating formation processes to develop supervision skills in officers fit to serve with greater responsibility. Regular review

boards with advancing officers would help them set goals for personal advancement and help subordinate officers to develop themselves to progress in the profession. Granted it would take time that many officers of earlier tradition believe they do not have (Dehart & Iachini, 2019; Eide & Westrheim, 2020). It is indicated in the data that supervisory leadership would be a skill that would bring stronger ethical and moral perspective and model perception within the prison workplace. This would help raise the bar about personal and team integrity (Asencio, 2019; Le Texier, 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2021) and respect (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2018). As one participant shared his experience of being publicly humiliated by a higher-ranking officer over the public address system, a more mature realization, “there has to be a better way to do this,” arises. To move beyond training by embarrassment or by shame is a move toward maturity within the profession. Maturity is a challenge when the age and experience of colleagues in the prison workplace demonstrate a significant gap. That gap makes it difficult to build psychological safety from inclusion to creativity. Those with less experience are required to bring a higher level of ethical and moral perception and to think beyond self to working among people that find it difficult to perceive and understand this core value level. Every officer has a modeling challenge for the workplace: to bring a lived value image that colleagues as well as staff and offenders are motivated to both reflect about and model themselves. Individuals and teams can voluntarily choose to do this rather than doing so by mandatory requirement.

Another supervisory skill is being able to facilitate learning and training by becoming a mentor beyond the supervisor. Another participant revelation recognized the

fruitless and frustrating experience of asking questions to find out more about doing the job to best of their knowledge and ability. It would be helpful for superiors to become formation mentors because the training provided prior to entering the workplace is very brief. There may be a tendency for those basic trainers to step back too early in the process and placing all the mentoring responsibility (Zohar, 2005) on those in the field and simply say “blame it on on-the-job training deficits.” That kind of absolution would be more dangerous than helpful because of predicaments that are not foreseen by neophyte professionals. What is expected is that a sworn professional can work with others to handle difficult situations with help and has the ability to ask for help and counsel when it is clear that such a discernment is the wisest choice.

Officers from different states and countries would possibly gain a different perspective about each other if they had the opportunity for cross-cultural training. In addition, training academies in the United States have been operating to provide formation for international officers to help in training officers in their own countries. Officer trainers interacting with officers from other nations provides the opportunity to do formation together and for trainers to gain a wider perspective, more knowledge, and positive practice that can be asserted to those in their own cadre. This may bring improvement through supervision to advance workforce maturity.

In reviewing psychological safety stage progression as visioned by Clark (2020), supervisors would help themselves and their own subordinates if they could learn and recognize the safety levels within their own workforce (Popovych et al., 2020) in their facility. In observing their subordinates and how they interact with each other,

recognition of exclusionary behavior can help in managing individuals by helping them recognize their own workplace behaviors as suggested by Popovych et al. (2020) in social interaction. Showing the effects and influence of behavioral blindness in the workplace can help influence officer habitus toward more healthy behavior.

### **Socialization and Communication Skills**

There are assumptions about officer candidates as they enter into training and formation to become professional corrections officers. Candidates indicate their desire to serve, submit to clearance investigation through a background check, and complete (pass) basic training with other individuals. Corrections executives in administration assume that these candidates have socialization and communication skills to operate within the prison workplace. Other members of the security force in the prison workplace expect that new trainee officer will have the ability to work with and manage people that include colleagues, staff, and offenders. There is an assumption that candidates will fulfill the requirement to draft and complete reports that provide clear communication of facts while keeping in mind a list of requirements and basic grammar rules to forward the information accurately. The intention to maintain a viable and skilled workforce may require remedial training to advance the abilities of the officer workforce. The encouragement to provide cognitive and psycho-social challenges toward career growth and development addressed by Tretyakov (2021) would help fuel officer development and help them in their career along with supporting supervisory skill expansion. Park et al. (2022) noted the value of doing supervisory training to help the workforce develop their own vision for career development. The assumption that officers would gain

wisdom and skill just by their very presence and engagement in the workplace does not vote in the direction of workforce stability, development, and avoidance of staff shortages.

### **Implications**

It is an important consideration that the bureaucracy of executive leaders that have influence over the corrections industry at their level of government make the choice to adjust the organizational culture to support their security force with more advanced formation and training. Leaders have it in their scope of influence to recognize what could be adjusted if they are open to change and are willing to engage to manage such change. This study was an attempt to explore how correctional officers interact with each other through their own psychological safety with their own baseline of ethical and moral perception so that the security force can grow and develop through actualizing their profession. Change in organizational culture among correctional officers would require building a vision and developing that vision toward reality through change direction and management. As mentioned above, conditions exist that would make such adjustments difficult because of gravitation toward status quo as it has been maintained throughout the history of the correctional industry. Granted, those in leadership positions have agreed that the culture needs to change in the safety of their chair of authority, but few if any would agree to step forward to address and move to formulate and actualize these adjustments. Officers would need to challenge their own stability and willingness to move in these directions by being more vulnerable as they may not have attempted this before now. Supervisors may have anxiety and fear about more than infectious disease

being present in the workplace as pointed out by Hartley et al. (2013). Hartley et al. pointed toward Cheek and Wilson (2013) as they recognized other sources of fear and anxiety to include insecurity about their role in the workplace, lack of support from their chain of command, and little or no autonomy with regard to decision-making. Hartley et al. recognized that officers that experienced powerlessness and lack of administrative support had experienced lost position and prestige as this type of work involved autonomy and constant decision making. The corrections organizational culture would avoid this kind of vulnerability. This concerns organizational change and all the personnel that comprise this type of organization: everyone has to be committed to such change. The lack of autonomy and supporting officers in the workplace could lead officers to think and feel like they were less valued than offenders as Hartley et al. (2013) found out. If officers felt these conditions, it may make it difficult to maintain stability in the prison workplace.

### **Positive Social Change**

Correctional officers throughout the industry experience many challenges in the workplace that make the profession a difficult environment (Vickovic et al., 2022; Higgins et al., 2022b). Administrative short sightedness about these challenges due to their selective distance compounds the exposed position of correctional officers in the workplace (Higgins et al., 2022b). This study affirms the importance of psychological safety within the prison workplace among correctional officers along with their own ethical and moral perception. The themes that precipitated from the participant data affirms that growth. Stronger preparedness through expanded basic training and

leadership and maturity advancement through intentional continuing formation beyond the basics would help bring about positive social change in the prison workplace (Maculan & Rodelli, 2022; Ryan et al., 2022). These efforts can seek to ramp up officer creativity and teamwork to support their collaboration with staff and personnel. The prison officers code supporting the officer subculture (Higgins et al., 2022a; Kauffman, 1988; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022) has assured status quo among officers preventing the challenge of present conditions and circumstances beyond their own comfort. Officers can cover for each other but not at the cost of their own integrity and the integrity of the profession. As noted above, when I asked a chief officer in a training academy about doing leadership formation for positive social change, i.e., Total Quality Management (Lim et al., 2022), or together with corrections staff, the answer was simply there was not enough time to do so. Positive social change among officers is possible as noted in present research (Maculan et al., 2022; O'Connell et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2022). Those in the field that would use a rationale to maintain their own methods throughout their career to resist change or adjustment at this or any point in the present or future are being challenged to see and vision a different path (Ryan et al., 2022; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2022). Personal integrity deficits occurring when misconduct toward each other is present within the system from correctional officer through staff and administrative personnel contributes to diminishing positive social change that could reflect the rehabilitative spirit that can contribute to reform.

Offender abuse inside the wall is something that officers experience and deal with as routine. However, officers are challenged to maintain respect for and supporting each

other in their service when it is easy or difficult. It would be important for superiors to recognize the significance of that respect in being open and honest about supporting balance in the lives of their workforce. It would be easy for superiors to treat their officer staff the same way they were treated when they were held overtime and to justify that behavior just because it happened to them in their earlier days. It would take leadership decisions to do planning and strategy to manage personnel in a way that respects the workforce as a team: a team that affirms ethical and moral perception; a team that supports the ethical code that governs and overarches themselves and their workforce. Added to this kind of managerial practice is the intention to provide intentional supervisory formation beyond the assumption that such formation is subsumed and integrated through their work day experience. Another addition includes the honest officer evaluation that proves growth and development reflecting integrity in progression over patronage.

The potential for change would benefit from a monitoring context as has been encouraged by present research (O'Connell & Rogan, 2022). Monitoring efforts in Europe to prevent torture and heinous treatment met with difficulty as monitoring baseline was not established. The clash of this possibility with status quo practice in North American facilities would perturb those in the profession. Those in the field would do what might be necessary from their perspective to prevent such accountability even though they are bounded by security and body cameras.

## **Methodological and Theoretical**

Correctional officers choose to serve as they are internally moved and feel that commitment within themselves while compensated for that service in similarity with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). This study utilized the social exchange theory in that correctional officers like other employees expect to gain compensation and benefits from serving in the prison workplace. The emotional and behavioral choices made through each day have effect on the individual, colleagues, and all those around the individual or group within and outside the workplace just as a system is influenced by the choices, social mechanisms, and adjustments (Casteleiro & Mendes, 2022; Senge, 1990). Officers make choices that support or diminish the social exchange; this becomes motivation to invest in or to pull out of the endeavor (Chen & Sriphon, 2022). Even the micro-incursions that low skilled supervisors impose on their subordinates mount up to junk trust disproving competence and credibility in relationships and in morale. The working conditions that are found, maintained, and improved to their best standard in the prison workplace are part of that exchange including the safety and security that officer colleagues work individually and together to prosper and maintain. This would add to the psycho-social and cognitive push in developing quality within the prison workplace (Tretyakov, 2022); there is no motivation toward quality unless a standard is established among employees themselves beyond executive imposition (Casteleiro & Mendes, 2022). After meeting resistance from potential participants to utilize a quantitative methodology, I changed course to use a qualitative method with phenomenological approach to surface what officers experienced

while serving in comparison to the policies, procedures, and regulations that governed the prison workplace and how psychologically safe and how consistent the environment was to their ethical and moral perception.

The study participants each had a significant experience advantage as they each came to the prison workplace with prior experience from different job situations. The knowledge they had accumulated and integrated for and within themselves gave them a stronger advantage than many of their colleagues, especially those that were much younger than themselves (Mubarak et al., 2022; Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022). This advantage sometimes placed the study participants at odds with the less experienced officers. This would have been due to their developing greater confidence, psychological safety, and stronger ethical and moral perception within themselves from their previous experiences (Mubarak et al., 2022; Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022). For example, it was easier to do customer service with offenders and officer colleagues because it was part of the habit and practice of the participants, i.e., being polite, using the chain of command, and following policy and procedure; the study participants had the training and knowledge to execute that skill as opposed to assuming the officer colleagues had such experience or knowledge. Another example comes from the participant officers that were able to challenge other officers and staff about medical practice compliance: the participant officers were recognized for being true to self, demonstrating an advanced level of integrity in the prison workplace. This placed these participant officers at odds with colleague officers because they found it difficult to accept that one of their own had such confidence and awareness within themselves. This also challenged colleague

officers to make the choice to change regarding their own operation and procedure methods. It was easier for other officers to ridicule and belittle the officer that knew better than to change themselves from within. The social exchange involved in the prison workplace placed a higher perceived cost on the colleague officer to change than what the individual was willing to give. Another example was seen in multiple situations in the data when participant officers held themselves personally accountable to report bad conduct among their own, i.e., fraternization between offenders and officers, that had the potential to place all in the workplace at risk. The management method for handling such situations reported in the data demonstrated the lack of integrity among superiors in administration and resistance to follow through in maintaining safety and security. The high standard for these facilities and the officer code of ethics demanded deemed it necessary for a disciplinary response. Instead, the participant officer became the disciplinary object. It was not clear why the management team proceeded in this way; one might suggest that the prison officer code may have played a role without any direct reference to such a code.

The study participants experienced significant stress (physical, emotional, and psychological) while serving in the prison workplace. The participant data indicated that the stress types came from varied sources. They included both internal sources, i.e., imposition of personal expectations, conditions stemming from health concerns, and team inclusion deficits; and external sources, i.e., unpredictable working conditions (administrative and management expectations), low coworker accountability, negative gender bias among coworkers, and decreasing coworker census. The study participants

moved on from the profession because of the negative stress effects. One terminated because physical stress effects led to the determination that the officer would put fellow officers at risk by remaining employed at the prison. Another terminated due to physical stress because of the onset of frequently occurring emergency health incidents while in the workplace. Another terminated due to persistent lack of accountability present staff ignored health practice compliance: the officer had previous experience in health practice but was ridiculed rather than treated as a resource for the workplace. The message is clear that the lack of foresight, planning, and respect tends to drive good help away rather than utilize skills and knowledge that is front and center in their midst.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In the interpretation of this study, one would consider the construct of psychological safety and the elements of ethical and moral perception as important among individual correctional officers and officer teams in the prison workplace. The findings here should be interpreted with caution as the sample size was minimal. However, their priority would stand when considering the morale and wellness of the correctional officer workforce, their continued learning and development, and how the workforce utilizes the talents and experience among them. Lip-service to advanced training would be integral to learning about why the workforce has at times dwindled to the point of taking advantage of skilled professionals and not respecting them as persons within the profession. Lambert et al. (2022) and other studies showed that correctional officers indicated that co-worker support rendered negative association with depressive symptoms. However, it was the opposite when measuring from supervisory support. If

administrative leadership does not want to learn about why officers fear reprimand by superiors per the prison officer code, then they should take up the challenge that former executive director Raemisch (2019) took on when he experienced being imprisoned just to learn about solitary confinement for himself. This is a way to see the correctional officer profession from a different perspective. Diminishing requirements for leadership officers would be a disservice to those professionals coming up through the ranks.

Training in communications skills and mental health awareness would be of paramount importance for correctional officers. Assuming that these skills are found in every officer candidate is a disservice to the department and a disservice to each one of them.

It would be important to recognize the impact that administrative supervision has on correctional officers. Johnston et al. (2022) recognized how positive regard of officers by supervisors and administration showed how officers displayed less impact of mental health disorders within their workforce. This positive regard would assist in dispersing the negative impact present between subordinates and superiors in the management context. Increasing the sense of supervisor responsibility in workforce development, especially in maturity would help them grow in skills to model and instruct from their management abilities and experience. Supervision of lead officers along with advanced training in supervision can further support the workforce. The assumption that training once while dismissing continuing training would denigrate the organizational environment. This is a point of resistance that needs to be addressed; blocking or resisting continuing formation among those with greater experience would do well by transitioning veterans into trainers.

Mindful of the small sample in this study (four females to one male), it would be helpful to study the psychological safety and ethical and moral perspective of female officers compared to male officers. In addition, all the participants were Caucasian suggesting that further study of psychological safety in non-Caucasian officers would be important to this research area. A quantitative approach would provide an opportunity to gain more cultural awareness in the attempt to move beyond the influence of the guard subculture.

If officers want to strive to break the comfort of the officer code, they may need to generate internal accountability and motivation with each other to change the culture. Officers that display psychological safety to the level of challenging the lack of accountability and the status quo as observed in this study take on the role of Sisyphus in being true to themselves. Officer impact on each other would be an important direction of research if the officers themselves felt comfortable moving in this direction. Culture change would have to be proven within themselves along with administrative leadership. Imposing such a change would render the workforce more frozen than it is presently. This is the position that administrators fear the most: having no flexibility or working relationship with those that are closest to their main customer, the offender.

### **Conclusion**

Officers working to actualize psychological safety and ethical and moral perspective are integral to the workplace, specifically in the prison workplace. Whatever efforts officers do to foster and develop both of these elements have a positive influence on fellow officers whether subordinate or superior. Those officers that have served and

continue to serve in corrections may find it difficult to see the value of these elements. Yet each officer serving inside the wall benefits from them both if colleagues are willing to maintain these elements as part of the organizational culture and environment in the prison workplace. The aspects that tear at and diminish these elements in the modeling and management among team members make it difficult to move forward in an industry that appears to be marking time in history while those in leadership strive to provide a brave face from within. Kauffman (1988) and Farkas (1997) were courageous in identifying the officer code because of what it would mean if those in leadership would believe it. Denial of this identification may have buried such recognition in one sense because it has not moved those in supervisory positions to question if these norms are still present; they are simply accepted by everyone. Correctional officers have been vested with authority and power to the point that their own organizational culture (Di Stefano et al., 2019) allows them to advance or block change. It would be easy for the officer to continue to live in his/her own officer habitus until something happens that challenges or changes the officer perspective from where the individual or group has been to a different perspective: it may not be new or different to others but may very well be new and different for this officer or this team. It may be that the officer or officer team had their own sense of organizational justice (procedural, distributive, or integrative). Each correctional officer has to step up to their duty (Tretyakov, 2022) in the present when it would be easier to stay in the shadows and do nothing. Even when such professionals are in the shadows, the spotlight is still on them. Being inside the wall places them in a position where and when choices are different than before.

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## Appendix A: Data Collection Interview Form

## Semi-Structured Interview Form

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/2023      Interview Completed By: Gary R. Breig

Participant ID #:

## Pre-Interview Check-in

Explanation of study purpose and implications.       Any questions before beginning.

## Demographic Questions:

1. What is your present employment status?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your gender identity?
5. How long did you hold or have you held your position with the corrections department?

## Participant Semi-structured Interview Questions:

1. How prepared did you feel when you entered the prison workplace after basic training?
2. What personal resources did you have when dealing with ethical or moral situations and decisions with other correctional officers? How did you use them in the workplace?
3. How did you build relationship with fellow officers in the prison workplace?
4. How would you describe your work experience with fellow officers in the prison workplace?
5. Would you call your work with fellow officers a team experience? Why or why not?
6. What correctional officer behaviors and interactions influenced or have influenced you the most during your professional service?

7. How have/did you personally manage or deal with other correctional officers breaking regulations in the prison workplace?
8. What comments did you receive from friends and family that suggested that you were different after you started working with other correctional officers?
9. What challenges and successes did you have in connecting with or relating with other correctional officers?
10. How did you feel about asking questions or voicing concerns about operations or processes in the prison workplace?
11. What led or moved you to leave your position at the prison workplace?
12. If you had a picture in your mind of how the correctional officer profession could be different from how you experienced it, what would that picture look like?

#### Post Interview Check-in

- Close interview by thanking participant.
- Check-in with participant in the event a referral is needed.
- Remind participant of requirement to maintain confidentiality of participation information until study is complete.
- Post-interview statement: If you so desire, you can invite other officers that you may know who have served or are serving presently to participate in this study. However, I have to clarify that it is not allowed to share the invitation at your workplace, i.e., correctional facility. In that case, it would be necessary for the organization to provide permission and approval. It would be very acceptable to share the invitation with others or those in your personal network.
- Schedule follow-up (member check) interview with participant.

#### Member Check Interview:

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2023 Time: \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirm contact information, follow-up date and time, and THANK YOU

## Appendix B: CITI Training Certificate

		Completion Date 23-Apr-2021 Expiration Date N/A Record ID 42208488
This is to certify that:		
<b>Gary Breig</b>		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		
<b>Student's</b> <small>(Curriculum Group)</small> <b>Doctoral Student Researchers</b> <small>(Course Learner Group)</small> <b>1 - Basic Course</b> <small>(Stage)</small>		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
Under requirements set by:		
<b>Walden University</b>		
		
Verify at <a href="http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w15a77b9a-2f6b-4522-8c92-a641d0898adc-42208488">www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w15a77b9a-2f6b-4522-8c92-a641d0898adc-42208488</a>		

## Appendix C: Previous Permissions

Edmondson 1999 Permission

Re: Permission to use the Team Learning and Psychological Safety Survey

Sent: Sun 4/14/2019 5:48 PM

To: Ms. Edmondson,

Thanks very much. I will provide source citation as required.

G. R. Breig

From: Edmondson, A.

Sent: Sunday, April 7, 2019, 12:56:38 PM

To: G. Breig

Subject: Re: Permission to use the Team Learning and Psychological Safety Survey

you are welcome to use it - just cite the source. No cost for most academic measures, just proper citation of the source. best of luck!

On Apr 7, 2019, at 11:37 AM,

Form Submittal From an anonymous user

Ms. Edmondson, I'm working on doctoral research while working in correctional environment, specifically with correctional officers. I was looking in MIDSS and reading your 1999 article about TLPSS and wondered if I could obtain permission to use the survey in my dissertation process working with correctional officers. I would also be interested in what costs are involved in survey permission and use. Thanks very much.

G. R. Breig

Wolfe Permission

RE: Permission Request

Thu 6/6/2019 6:54 AM

To: G. Breig

Cc: D. A. Horton

Mr. Breig,

Congratulations on your work so far toward your doctoral degree.

On behalf of my co-authors, I am pleased to grant you permission to use the survey elements from our Corrections Officers Perceptions Survey from the May 2003 issue of Corrections Compendium. Please be sure to cite the survey where appropriate as found on this NCJRS website:

[https://www.ncj\[2,gQYi8pp/Publications/abstract.asP-x?I0=200325](https://www.ncj[2,gQYi8pp/Publications/abstract.asP-x?I0=200325)

I hope that you will consider sharing your findings with us.

Sincerely, Ross

R. Wolf, Ed.D., M.P.A., CHPP

Please note: Florida has a very broad open records law (F.S. 119). Emails may be subject to public disclosure.

From: G. Breig

Sent: Wednesday, June 5, 2019, 11:34 PM

To: R. Wolf

Cc: D. A. Horton

Subject: Permission Request

Dear Dr. Wolf,

I am Gary Breig, pre-doctoral intern with the Colorado Department of Corrections, studying clinical psychology with a specialty in Industrial/Organizational Psychology with Walden University. I am working on a study to see if there is a correlation between ethical and moral attitudes of correctional officers and psychological safety and team learning as put forth by Dr. A. Edmondson, Harvard School of Business. As is mentioned in the article, the code of silence is one element that connects with Dr. Edmondson's perceptions of how organizations can be self- destructive as communication can become less integrity driven and more diminished in substance. I would like to use the survey elements (Corrections Officers Perceptions Survey) mentioned in the Mesloh et al (2003) article in Corrections Compendium. I have a rendition of the survey elements that Dr. William Hanna developed for his study in 2012 if I would be permitted to use them. I can provide a copy if that would be helpful.

Thanks for your assistance.

G. R. Breig

Hanna Permission

From: G. Breig

Sent: Sunday, November 15, 2020, 12:27 AM

To: W. Hanna

Cc: D. Horton

Subject: Re: Survey permission

Dr. Hanna,

Thanks so much.

I was afraid I would not be able to catch up with you. But thankfully I have.

I appreciate the permission and hope that things are going well in your career.

I just finished internship in the Colorado Department of Corrections. The last week of internship, the facility where I was working went to Phase 3 (offenders locked down). We had been in Phase 2 for a long time (everyone wearing masks, self-declared assessment, and temps for staff upon entry). I have been careful along the way. I hope you and yours are safe and well. Thanks again and All the Best.

G. R. Breig

From: W. Hanna

Sent: Wednesday, November 11, 2020, 4:34 PM

To: G. Breig

Subject: Survey permission

Hi Gary,

I received your call initially, but I was at a conference that weekend and I returned just recently. I did not have a chance to respond till now. With that...permission granted on the use of the survey. Have fun using it and I hope it helps with your study.

Dr. W. Hanna

Dr. Clark and LeaderFactor Permission for Use of Figure

Re: LeaderFactor Support

Date: Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at 04:37 PM MST

Hi Gary,

Thank you for your patience in our reply. We are excited to let you know that you have been granted permission to use the framework in your dissertation. We genuinely appreciate your thoughtfulness to ask in advance and we wish you the very best as you progress with your research.

If you don't have any further questions, we'll go ahead and close out this email. Best,

LF Support

On Thu, Feb 23, 2023, at 12:43 PM, LeaderFactor wrote:

Hey Tim

Wanted to make you aware of a clinical psychology doctoral dissertation student who would like to include your framework in their dissertation! I was planning on granting them permission, let me know if you think otherwise.

Alex

From: Gary Breig

Date: Wednesday, February 22, 2023, 1:49:41 PM -0700 Subject: Re: LeaderFactor Support

To: LeaderFactor

To Dr Clark or the Permissions Coordinator

Thanks for responding to my email.

I am writing to request permission to use the psychological safety figure on page 6 of Dr Clark's text, "The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety." My dissertation is a qualitative study about correctional officer psychological safety and ethical and moral perception in the prison workplace. The figure clearly illustrates psychological safety progression through officer training in the classroom and awareness in the workplace. I did my internship in corrections and thought that psychological safety would be helpful in strengthening the corrections industry especially in retaining members of their workforce. It would be helpful to have permission to use this figure in the project to affirm the training necessity for this construct for these industry professionals

My email address is blank or blank. My phone number is blank. I am a doctoral student in clinical psychology with the School of Psychology in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Walden University. My chair is Dr \_\_\_\_\_ and second committee member is Dr \_\_\_\_\_.

v/r

G. R. Breig, M.Ed.

On Wednesday, February 22, 2023, 9:33 AM, LeaderFactor wrote:

Hi Gary,

Thank you for reaching out to LeaderFactor Support! How can we help you today?

Best,

LF Support

## Appendix D: Original Psychological Safety and Ethics Quantitative Survey

## Module 1

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. It is safe to take a risk on this team.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. Problems and errors in this team are always communicated to the appropriate people (whether team members or others) so that action can be taken.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. We often take time to figure out ways to improve our team's work processes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. In this team, people talk about mistakes and ways to prevent and learn from them.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. This team tends to handle conflicts and differences of opinion privately or off-line, rather than addressing them directly as a group.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. This team frequently obtains new information that leads us to make important changes in our plans or work processes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. Members of this team often raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. This team constantly encounters unexpected hurdles and gets stuck.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. We try to discover assumptions or basic beliefs about issues under discussion.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. People in this team frequently coordinate with other teams to meet organization objectives.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. People in this team cooperate effectively with other teams or shifts to meet corporate objectives or satisfy customer needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. This team is not very good at keeping everyone informed who needs to buy in to what the team is planning and accomplishing.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19. This team goes out and gets all the information it possibly can from a lot of different sources.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. We don't have time to communicate information about our team's work to others outside the team.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

21. We invite people from outside the team to present information or have discussions with us.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

#### Module 2

22. Do you think your commitment to your state correctional facility has increased, decreased, or remained the same since you started employment as a corrections officer?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Remained the same

23. Do you feel your decision to work for a state correctional facility was a mistake?

- Yes
- No

24. Does this state correctional facility inspire the very best in job performance?

- Yes
- No

25. Are you glad that you chose this state correctional facility to work for rather than other correctional facilities you may have considered?

- Yes
- No

26. During the **LAST 12 MONTHS**, have **YOU** been a focus of more than two official complaints?

- Yes
- No

27. During the last **THREE YEARS**, have **YOU** been the focus of more than three official complaints?

- Yes
- No

28. With the responses to the above questions, do you feel your morality working as a correction officer has increased, decreased, or remained the same?

- Increased
  - Somewhat increased
  - Remained the Same
  - Somewhat decreased
  - Decreased
- 

**PLEASE INDICATE HOW STRONGLY YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:**

29. Corrections officers are not allowed to use as much force as may be necessary.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

30. It is sometimes acceptable to use more force than is allowed to control someone who physically assaults a corrections officer.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

31. Corrections officers in your state correctional facility sometimes use more force than is necessary.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

32. Corrections officers in your state correctional facility sometimes do not act with enough force to de-escalate a situation.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

33. A corrections officer who reports another corrections officer's misconduct is likely to be given the cold shoulder by his or her fellow corrections officers.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

34. Corrections officers always report violations involving abuse of authority by fellow corrections officers.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

35. Unfair or incompetent administration contributes to corrections officers misconduct.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

36. It is not unusual for a corrections officer to turn a "blind eye" to improper conduct by other corrections officers.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

37. If an administrator takes a strong position against abuses of authority, he or she can make a big difference in preventing corrections officers from abusing authority.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

38. Good front line supervision can help prevent corrections officers from abusing his or her authority.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

39. Corrections officers in this state correctional facility report violations by staff when they are aware of them.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

40. Training in human diversity or cultural awareness would be effective in preventing abuse of authority.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

41. At this state correctional facility, corrections officer misconduct is a real problem.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

42. A good means of regulating corrections officers' conduct is developing professional (ethical/moral) standards.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

43. A good means of improving corrections officers' conduct is better training.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

44. After answering the recent set of questions, do you feel additional training would increase an awareness of morality in this area for corrections officers?

- Increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Decreased

**45. FOR THE FOLLOWING HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS, PLEASE CHECK THE ANSWER THAT BEST REFLECTS YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONDITIONS AT YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY:** How often would a corrections officer in your state correctional facility report another corrections officer for sleeping on duty?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

46. How often would a corrections officer in your state correctional facility report another corrections officer for excessive force?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

47. How often would a corrections officer in your state correctional facility report another corrections officer for sex with an INMATE?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

48. How often would a corrections officer in your state correctional facility report another corrections officer for not accurately documenting an incident?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

49. How often would a corrections officer in your state correctional facility report another corrections officer for drinking before duty?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

50. After answering the recent set of questions, do you feel additional training would increase an awareness of morality in this area for corrections officers?

- Increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Decreased

---

**51. PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING THREE SCENARIOS AND MARK THE RESPONSE THAT APPLIES MOST: SCENARIO #1: A corrections officer routinely takes supplies home from work (e.g., pens, paper, coffee, toilet paper, etc).**

How serious do YOU consider this behavior to be?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

52. How serious do **MOST CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY** consider this behavior to be?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

53. Would this behavior be regarded as a violation of official policy in your state correctional facility?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

54. If a corrections officer in your state correctional facility engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do YOU think SHOULD follow?

- None
- Verbal reprimand
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion in rank
- Dismissal

55. If a corrections officer in your state correctional facility engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do YOU think WOULD follow?

- None
- Verbal reprimand
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion in rank
- Dismissal

56. Do you think YOU would report a fellow correctional facility who engaged in this behavior?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

57. Do you think **MOST CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY** would report a fellow correctional officer who engaged in this behavior?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

58. After answering the recent set of questions, do you feel additional training would increase an awareness of morality in this area for corrections officers?

- Increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Decreased

59. **SCENARIO #2: A corrections officer routinely accepts gifts of small value from inmates (e.g., food, candy, drinks). The corrections officer does not ask for these gifts and does not give special treatment to the gift givers.** How serious do YOU consider this behavior to be?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

60. How serious do **MOST CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY** consider this behavior to be?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

61. Would this behavior be regarded as a violation of official policy in your state correctional facility?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

62. If a corrections officer in your state correctional facility engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do **YOU** think **SHOULD** follow?

- None
- Verbal reprimand
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion in rank
- Dismissal

63. If a corrections officer in your state correctional facility engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do **YOU** think **WOULD** follow?

- None
- Verbal reprimand
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion in rank
- Dismissal

64. Do you think **YOU** would report a fellow corrections officer who engaged in this behavior?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

65. Do you think **MOST CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY** would report a fellow corrections officer who engaged in this behavior?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

66. After answering the recent set of questions, do you feel additional training would increase an awareness of morality in this area for corrections officers?

- Increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Decreased

67. **SCENARIO #3: A corrections officer has engaged in inappropriate sexual relations with an inmate. You have overheard their conversation about having sexual relations in another room/area.** How serious do **YOU** consider this behavior to be?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

68. How serious do **MOST CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY** consider this behavior to be?

- Very serious
- Serious
- Somewhat serious
- Might be serious
- Not at all serious

69. Would this behavior be regarded as a violation of official policy in your state correctional facility?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

70. If a corrections officer in your state correctional facility engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do **YOU** think **SHOULD** follow?

- None
- Verbal reprimand
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion in rank
- Dismissal

71. If a corrections officer in your state correctional facility engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do **YOU** think **WOULD** follow?

- None
- Verbal reprimand
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion in rank
- Dismissal

72. Do you think **YOU** would report a fellow corrections officer who engaged in this behavior?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

73. Do you think **MOST CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN YOUR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY** would report a fellow corrections officer who engaged in this behavior?

- Definitely yes
- Yes
- Neither yes nor no
- No
- Definitely no

74. After answering the recent set of questions, do you feel additional training would increase an awareness of morality in this area for corrections officers?

- Increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Decreased

---

75. **PLEASE INDICATE HOW STRONGLY YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:** I am satisfied with my current work schedule.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

76. The current system of evaluations for corrections officers is fair.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

77. I am satisfied with my level of pay (**SALARY & BENEFITS**).

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

78. I fully understand the written policies and procedures for my state correctional facility.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

79. Do you feel your morality is higher, lower, or remains the same inside your work environment compared to outside of the prison unit?

- Increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Decreased

80. Do you feel you adhere more to moral standards outside of the prison unit or inside the prison unit or do they remain the same after completing both surveys?

- More outside of the prison unit than inside the prison unit
- More inside the prison unit than outside of the prison unit
- Remains the same in both areas

81. At this state correctional facility, corrections officers often treat whites better than Black people or other minorities (staff and/or inmates).

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

82. Racism is present in this state correctional facility where I work.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

83. I perform my duties in accordance with the state correctional facility's mission statement.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

84. Do you think the training provided by the department has adequately prepared you to handle assaults from inmates?

Yes

No

85. After answering the recent set of questions, do you feel additional training would increase an awareness of morality in this area for corrections officers?

Increased

Somewhat increased

Remained the same

Somewhat decreased

Decreased

86. After answering all the questions, do you feel your morality awareness is higher, lower or the same working in a prison unit compared to your life outside of the prison unit?

Higher

Lower

Remained the same

**87. PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:** What is the level of security in the state correctional facility you work in?

Minimum

Minimum-Restricted

Medium

Close

Mixed

Not sure of level of security

88. What is your gender?

Female

Male

Transgender

No preference

89. How old are you?

18-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60+

90. How much education have you completed?

- High school graduate (or G.E.D.)
- Some college classes/credit
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Advanced Degree (Master's degree or beyond)

91. What rank do you presently hold?

- Officer
- Sergeant
- Lieutenant
- Captain
- Major

92. On average, how many hours do you work each week

- less than 40 hours per week
- 40-50 hours per week
- 50-60 hours per week
- 60-70+ hours per week

93. How many years have you been working in corrections overall?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years

94. How many years have you worked at the current prison unit you are assigned to?

- Less than 1 years
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years

95. Have you answered all of these questions as honestly as possible?

- Yes
- No

## Appendix E: Department Acceptance/Refusal Letters

Initial permission from Colorado Department of Corrections

From: Breig - Gary

Date: Wed, Dec 11, 2019, at 10:54 AM

Subject: Re: Approval Timeline

To: Kluckow, Richard

Mr. Klukow,

That's great news! Thanks very much. I'll be in touch with my dissertation committee to let them know. I also will ask some initial review questions of the IRB prior to full submission to the process. In the meantime, I'll follow through with the agreement form as soon as possible. Good day to you sir.

Kind regards,

On Wed, Dec 11, 2019, at 9:02 AM Kluckow, Richard wrote:

Hi Gary - great news, your research request has been approved! Contingent on IRB approval of course. Please sign and date the attached form and send it to me and our associate director will do the same. If you have any questions please let me know.

On Thu, Dec 5, 2019, at 11:54 AM Kluckow, Richard wrote:

Hi Mr. Breig,

At this stage it goes to Executive staff for their review; the time it takes ranges from a week to over a month depending on schedules. Will keep you posted. Thanks!

On Thu, Dec 5, 2019, at 11:22 AM Breig, Gary wrote:

Mr. Kluckow,

I was wondering if you could share the approval timeline that you follow for these projects. The reason I ask is that I need to inform my program director where we are with this process so that I can move on to the proposal process on the academic side.

Your help is much appreciated. Kind regards,

Gary R. Breig

## Refusal from Colorado Department of Corrections



Gary R. Breig

January 10, 2022

RE: Quantitative Assessment of Ethics and Psychological Safety in State Correctional Officer (CO) Teams

Dear Gary,

This letter is to inform you that the research advisory panel has completed a review of your proposal. The panel has decided that we cannot support this research effort. To ensure a thorough examination has been conducted, this project has also been reviewed by the executive team of the Colorado Department of Corrections who are in agreement with our decision. The following concerns were discussed regarding your project:

Internet access is limited to correctional staff; issues with survey distribution and access. Survey saturation; this would have been different two years ago when the project was initially approved.

Sensitive nature of the survey and survey length; the survey is comprised of 95 questions and participants are only given 90 minutes to complete it.

We sincerely appreciate you considering the department for your research, but unfortunately we cannot accommodate your needs at this time.

Sincerely,



Richard Vyncke, Associate Director Office of Planning and Analysis

Jared Polis, Governor | Dean Williams, Executive Director



Refusal from Ohio Department of Corrections



Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Dear Mr. Breig,

At this time, the Human Subjects Research Review Committee is unable to approve your proposal, "Quantitative Assessment of Psychological Safety and Ethics in Corrections Officers." Due to Covid- 19, all studies involving correctional staff are currently on hold. You are welcome to submit your proposal at a later date; if you wish to do so, please feel free to contact me to determine if the hold has been removed for staff-related studies. The committee has also heard from several other researchers that they have had success in conducting this type of research in county jails during Covid-19, that may be a potential avenue of research for this study as well.

Sincerely,

*Margaret Hardy*

Margaret Hardy

Human Subjects Research Review Committee Chair

Refusal from California Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections

STATE OF CALIFORNIA — DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND  
REHABILITATION

GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

DIVISION OF CORRECTIONAL POLICY RESEARCH AND INTERNAL  
OVERSIGHT

July 6, 2022

Gary Breig, Ph.D. Candidate Walden University

ROC# 2205-022-ROC: QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SAFETY AND ETHICS IN CORRECTIONS OFFICERS

Dear Gary Breig:

Thank you for submitting your research application to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The CDCR Research Oversight Committee completed its review of your research application. Unfortunately, the ROC made the decision to deny your application.

The third-party internet host, QuestionPro, will not be permitted access to CDCR data. Informal implied consent is not permissible. It is problematic that a statically viable sample can be obtained from this study.

Should you decide to address the above concerns, the Research Oversight Committee Administration Team (ROCAT) would encourage you to submit a new application.

Future communications with the ROC/ROCAT regarding this application must reference ROC# 2205-022-ROC and be direct to blank.

Sincerely,

Brittany Johns

Administrator, Research Oversight Committee Administration Team Research &  
Evaluation Branch, Office of Research

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations

cc: L. J. Carr, Ph.D.