

Vermont's Workforce Development Program

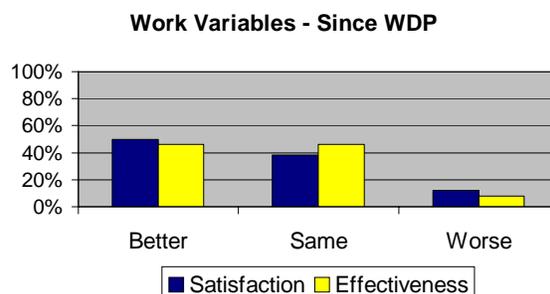
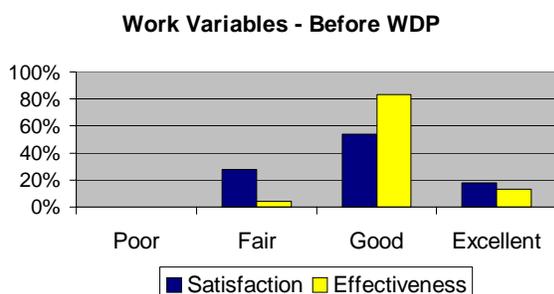
Program Evaluation: Organizational Culture

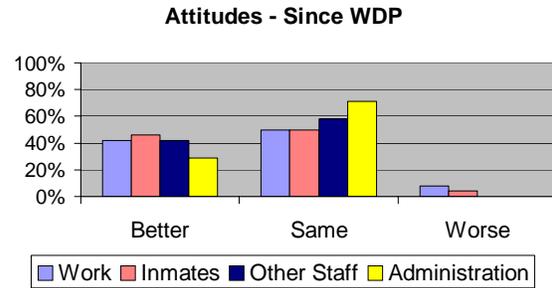
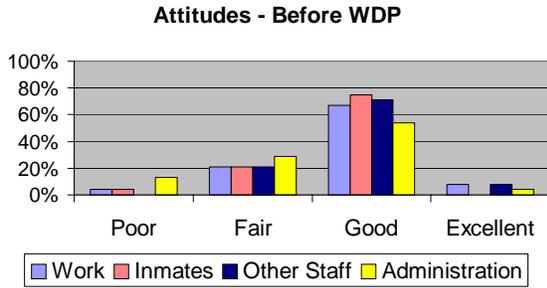
In the fall of 2003, the Community High School of Vermont within the Department of Corrections was awarded a three year federal research/demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop an innovative program designed to teach life skills to offenders as a means to reduce recidivism. The Workforce Development Program sought to teach offenders fundamental life skills using a unique, holistic approach that immersed program participants in educational, work and living unit settings that use a *strength-based approach* that supports offender development. The Program was offered at two sites for males offenders; the Northwest State Correctional Facility and the Northern State Correctional Facility. At those sites, offenders were housed in Program living units. The Program was also offered at one site for female offenders; the Southeast State Correctional Facility.

In addition to offender-specific goals, the Program sought to create at each institution a single organizational culture of shared purpose, values and language across professional disciplines and between staff and participants. It attempted to establish common expectations shared across professional groups so that participants will be successful in their transition to the community. To accomplish this, specialized training in strength-based supportive supervision principles and practices was provided to education faculty, industries foremen, correctional officers, caseworkers and, in some cases, facility management. During the period of the grant, two hundred and nineteen individuals across the three professional groups received, on average, thirty-six hours of training.

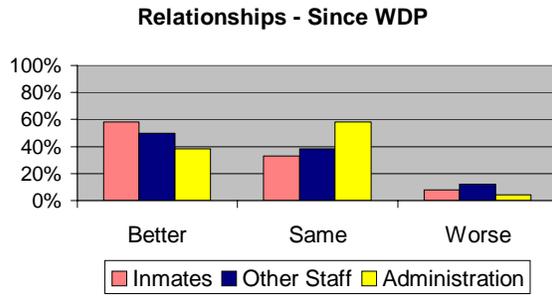
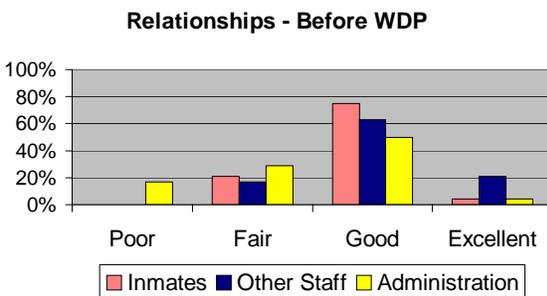
Measurement of the Program's effect on organizational culture was conducted in two ways. First, Program staff completed annual surveys assessing their perceptions of their work, their peers, inmates and administration; rating themselves and their environment prior and subsequent to their involvement in the Program. Second, the principal investigator and grant manager reviewed quarterly facility and central office management support of, and involvement in, the Program.

Program Staff: Work Variables. Staff reported that prior to their involvement in the Program their job satisfaction was fair (28%), good (54%) or excellent (18%), and almost all (96%) perceived effectiveness at their work was good or excellent. As a result of their association with the Program, almost half (46%) reported that their job satisfaction increased. The same percentage (46%) reported being more effective at work.



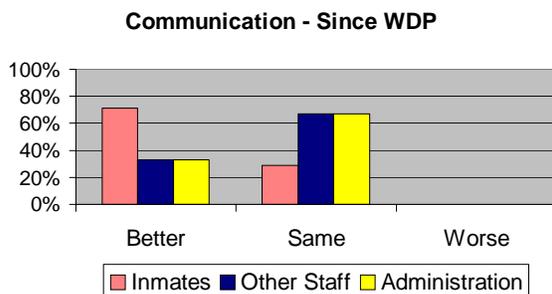
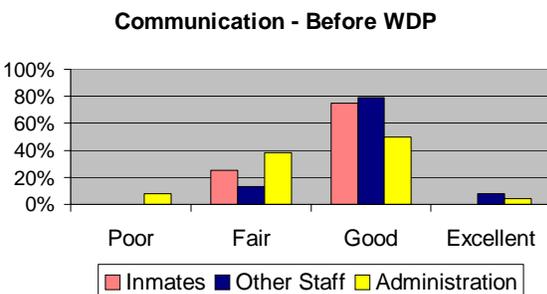


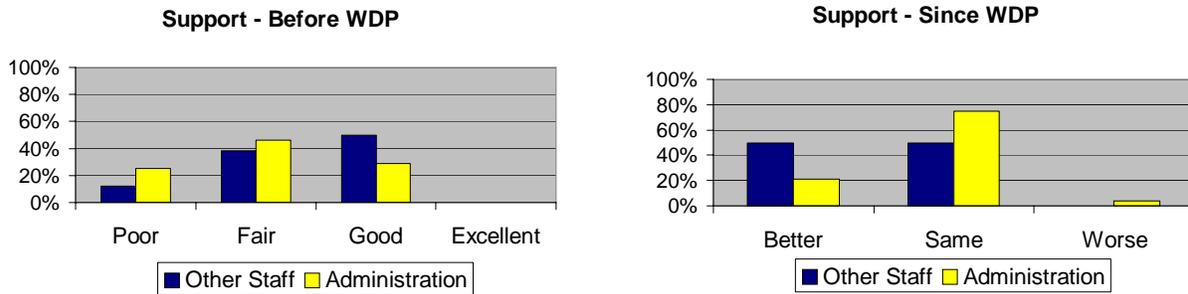
Program Staff: Attitudes. Most staff reported positive attitudes (good to excellent) toward work (75%), inmates (75%), other staff (79%) and administration (58%). Their work through the Program improved the attitudes of 42% toward their work, 46% toward inmates and 42% toward other staff. Comparably less (29%) reported more positive attitudes toward administration.



Program Staff: Relationships. Staff reported that prior to their involvement in the Program their relationships with inmates were fair (21%), good (75%) or excellent (4%). Most staff (83%) reported positive relationships with other staff (attitudes (good to excellent) and administration (58%). More than half (58%) reported their association with the Program made their relationships with inmates better, while half (50%) said the same about their relationships with other staff. Less staff (38%) reported more positive relationships with administration.

Program Staff: Communication. Most staff reported being able to communicate effectively with inmates (75%), other staff (87%) and administration (54%). As a result of their work through the Program, 71% reported being better able to communicate effectively with inmates, while 33% reported better communication with other staff and administration.





Program Staff: Support. Half of the program staff reported that prior to their involvement in the Program they felt supported by other staff. Twenty-nine percent felt supported by administration, while most staff rated support by administration as “fair” (46%) or poor (25%). Half reported that their association with the Program made them feel more supported by other staff, while 21% felt more supported by administration officials.

Program Staff: Summary. Program staff were compassionate, hard-working and effective professionals with positive attitudes. Before working within the Workforce Development Program, staff were strong communicators with others, had good relationships within their institutions, and had positive attitudes toward others and their work, where they felt satisfied and effective. It is compelling that the Program was able to affect so dramatically a group of already highly-functioning professionals. Job satisfaction increased, as did staff’s assessment of their effectiveness at work. Attitudes and relationships became even better. Perceived support from other staff and administration improved somewhat. The largest impact appears to have been staff’s ability to communicate effectively with others, especially inmates.

Management: Program Involvement. In contrast to the Program’s positive effects on direct service staff, the Program was less effective in changing the organizational culture at the management level. Most benchmarks regarding Program involvement by administration officials were not attained. Attendance by facility management at Program scheduled meets and events was inconsistent; central office staff infrequently attended such functions. At times, administration officials attended Program statewide events while at other times one facility administration would attend and the other two would be noticeably absent. Attendance at treatment team meetings was virtually non-existent. When officials did attend Program meetings and events, they typically voiced strong support for the Program. Active support was generally lacking. At the three sites, there were few non-scheduled visits with Program staff. Supportive interaction between facility management and program staff was sometimes strained by the conflict between Program needs and security issues. At the central office level, this was compounded significantly by the conflict between Program needs and population management. At one site, an administration official made openly destructive comments regarding the fate of the program as the grant neared completion. Some administration officials sought information about program activities and performance, while others seemed to place more emphasis on other operational areas. There was very little facilitation of constructive dialogue between Program staff and other staff and programs.

Management: Resource Allocation. Resource allocation was a relative strength of administration

officials. Management at the facility level was able to work on staffing patterns and utilize existing staff training systems to enable the training of more than double the number of staff originally targeted. Staff were generally selected and maintained with the needs of the Program in mind, within the constraints of the collective bargaining agreement. The number of staff assigned was generally sufficient to assure the quality of the program. Administration officials did not supervise subordinates using performance expectations that reflected a valuing of the Program. The process for the allocation of space generally reflected a prioritization of the Program, and allocated space was sufficient at most sites. The one exception being the need to downsize the Program at the Northern State facility from fifty-six beds to thirty-four beds due to problems with overcrowding and population management. Central office staff did request and received from the legislature an additional \$100,000 to ensure continuation of the Program. This is a strong statement of management support.

Conclusion. The Program experienced mixed results with respect to its impact on organizational culture. Most staff from all three professional groups reported greater job satisfaction, better relationships with inmates and other staff, feeling more effective at their jobs, and a greater ability to communicate effectively with inmates. However, changes in the organizational culture were easier to achieve at the direct service level where the impact of the Program could be felt and appreciated almost immediately. Effecting change higher up in the organization was more difficult to realize, and this tended to affect negatively feelings of support by Program staff.

There was considerable instability of the organizational structure especially at the leadership level during the three-year grant period. At each of the institutions the chief institutional manager changed at least twice and the leadership of the Department of Corrections changed over the grant period with the appointment of a new Commissioner and Program Executive. The frequent changes in leadership at the local and central office levels created an unanticipated barrier to the modification of the organizational culture, as each change in leadership brought with it a period of uncertainty for Program participants and staff alike.