The divergent and often incompatible goals of treatment and custody within correctional organizations frequently result in ambiguous role expectations and role conflict among prison personnel. Hypotheses that role conflict is significantly greater among staff in treatment institutions than among staff in custody institutions, is significantly greater among treatment staff than among custody staff, and is significantly related to both job satisfaction and punitive attitudes toward inmates are tested with questionnaire data obtained from 336 treatment and custody personnel within 6 adult correctional facilities. Although the bivariate analyses provide support for each of the hypotheses, subsequent analyses indicate that role conflict is more likely to be the product of the organizational goals of the institution than of the treatment or custody staff positions within those institutions. These findings are related to previous analyses of the treatment-custody dilemma within institutions, and the implications for future research are discussed.

ROLE CONFLICT
IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS
An Empirical Examination
of the Treatment-Custody Dilemma
Among Correctional Staff

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Formal and informal organizational goals direct the role expectations and role performance of personnel, thus providing the criteria against which each member's activity can be assessed. As Kahn et al. (1964: 31) note, "The organizational structure, the

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functional speculation and division of labor, and the formal reward system dictate the major content of a given office.” Furthermore, there is evidence that attitudes will be affected by the position one occupies within an organization (e.g., Lieberman, 1956). A large literature documents the extent to which the organizational goals of American prisons either directly prescribe or indirectly influence the role of correctional personnel.

The goal of custody prisons is to protect the community by maintaining security and control over inmates (Zald, 1962). Since the custody ideology is focused on containment of inmates by means of punitive control techniques, the correctional officer is expected to maintain order and security within a delimited area or among a specified inmate group (Cressey, 1965). Each officer is expected to enforce rules, maintain order, and retain custody, and the officer’s performance of duties is routinized by a set of unambiguous rules and procedures governing the officer’s authority. This emphasis on custody dictates that the principal rule of interaction between officers and inmates is to maintain maximum social distance. If the officer is to retain the authority necessary to exercise coercive power, then informal relationships, affective ties, and discretionary rule-enforcement are not to be tolerated (Leger and Stratton, 1977). The occurrence of partisan staff behavior is minimized by formal lines of communication, directed downward, which provide limited opportunity for the line officer to make decisions or influence policy (Cressey, 1965). Custody goals lend themselves to objective criteria in the measurement of role performance; the officers are doing a “satisfactory” job if there is no disturbance and only minimal exercise of coercive power (Thomas and Petersen, 1977).

The goal of treatment prisons is to protect the community by rehabilitating the inmate (Grusky, 1959). A treatment ideology requires nonpunitive control of inmates (Zald, 1962), relaxed discipline, and technical competencies (Cressey, 1965). Contrary to the demands of custody goals, a treatment milieu demands that staff form affective ties with inmates and exercise discretion based upon individual differences (Leger and Stratton, 1977). Because all staff must be able to respond in a therapeutic manner, communication lines are less formal and less one-directional, and there is a greater decentralization of decision-making (Cressey, 1965). Role performance is more difficult to assess, however, because of the impos-
sibility of measuring an officer's contribution to successful rehabilitation (Piliavin and Vadum, 1968). Furthermore, the criterion of rule enforcement is inoperative when role expectations call for relaxed, passive, informal controls (Cressey, 1959; Thomas and Petersen, 1977).

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND ROLE CONFLICT

Rare is the prison where custody is the only organizational goal and where treatment is nonexistent. And a prison without a modicum of custody is, by definition, impossible. Most correctional facilities today combine elements of custody and treatment, and the major distinction revolves around the degree to which the treatment goal approaches the priority of the custody goal. This dual emphasis on custody and treatment often results in two clearly delineated, mutually antagonistic staff groupings (Clemmer, 1940; Wheeler, 1961). Conflicts between custody and treatment staff arise from their different roles (Weber, 1957), the priorities they assign to organizational goals (Piliavin and Vadum, 1968; Ohlin, 1956; Kassebaum et al., 1964), and the differing views which emanate from role expectations (Hedblom, 1963; Brown et al., 1971; Williams and Thomas, 1976).

A second consequence of divergent and mutually incompatible goals is the absence of clear role expectations or standards by which performance is to be evaluated. As Goode (1960) points out, an individual's attempt to fulfill conflicting role expectations may result in role strain or role conflict. Consequently, the existence of both custody and treatment goals within American prisons is a potential source of staff role conflict (Grusky, 1959; Zald, 1962). Staff whose main responsibility remains that of custody and control must simultaneously use discretion and overlook violations (Cressey, 1960). As Duffee (1974: 157) states, staff find themselves "in the anomic position of working for a goal which is negatively defined as the absence of punishment and is manifested by no acceptably measured results." Line officers are expected to remain socially distant while establishing close, supportive relationships with inmates; they are to maintain the rules while exercising lenient rule enforcement; they must preserve their own authority and simultaneously en-
courage the inmate to make his own decisions. Officers may fall back upon their custody role, not only because the role expectations of custody-treatment are ambiguous and contradictory, but because the custody role can be objectively evaluated (Jacobs and Retsky, 1975).

Treatment staff find themselves facing similar ambiguities and contradictions. They are obliged to establish supportive relationships, loosen constraints, maintain affective ties, and foster inmate decision-making, yet they must also be prepared to exercise firm and decisive coercion, request greater degrees of custody, and manipulate the inmate with thinly veiled threats or promises. Because treatment staff must coexist with custody staff, they may either completely dissociate themselves from the custody staff and function to maintain their distinctive view of inmates (Brown et al., 1971) or drift toward a convergence with custody staff attitudes and the organizational goal of custody (Hedblom, 1963).

Much has been said about the effect of contradictory organizational goals on staff role conflict, but few attempts have been made to ascertain the way in which role conflict affects attitudes toward the organization. Kahn et al. (1964) argue that perceptual and cognitive responses to role conflict include reduced job satisfaction and decreased confidence in the organizational goals. Poole and Monchick (1976), utilizing a small sample of correctional officers from one custodial prison, provide one test of the relation of role conflict to these coping mechanisms. They report that a high level of role conflict is associated with a low level of work motivation, low support for a treatment ideology, and high support for a custody ideology. Since one might expect to find low support for treatment and high support for custody among the custodians of a custody-oriented prison, these findings do not provide convincing support for the assertion that role conflict is related to negative attitudes toward the organization. Nonetheless, these findings do provide for further study.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Most prisons attempt to incorporate, although in varying degrees, the incompatible organizational goals of custody and treatment. To
the extent that the role expectations flowing from these goals are in conflict, individuals who are attempting to perform both roles will experience role conflict. Since the custody goal clearly dominates in maximum security prisons and the treatment goal only begins to approximate the priority of the custody goal in minimum security prisons, existence of competing goals is most likely to occur in less secure prisons. Consequently, it is hypothesized that the level of role conflict will be significantly greater among staff in less secure or treatment prisons than among staff in more secure or custody prisons.

The distinction between custody staff and treatment staff suggests two alternate possibilities. First, custody staff may experience a greater degree of role conflict than treatment staff, because the dual expectations are more apparent and structured for those who must serve daily the custody function while giving lip service to treatment goals. Second, role conflict may be greater, however, among treatment staff regardless of the type of prison, because treatment is secondary to custody as an organizational goal in all prisons. This second alternative is further supported by the fact that treatment staff in custody prisons cannot easily adopt the custody goal, whereas custody staff can retrench to the single goal of custody even in treatment prisons. Consequently, it is hypothesized that, regardless of the formal goals of the prison, the level of role conflict will be significantly greater among treatment staff than among custody staff.

One's role expectations influence one's world view. The ambiguities of contradictory directives lead to an alienation from the organization and one's position therein. As a result, those persons with high levels of role conflict are likely to have a lower level of job satisfaction. Following the logic of Poole and Monchick (1976), it would appear that those staff who experience role conflict will reveal their attitude toward the organization that created this strain by adopting a more punitive attitude toward the inmates under their charge. This relation is expected to hold for both custody and treatment personnel. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the higher the role conflict, the lower the level of job satisfaction and the higher the level of punitiveness.
RESEARCH METHODS

Data were gathered by means of self-administered questionnaires distributed to all treatment and custody staff within each of Missouri's 6 correctional facilities for adult males. Usable instruments were returned by 518 persons, representing 69% of the 751 persons to whom the questionnaires were distributed.

Security Level. Each of the 6 prisons has an officially designated level of security. Questionnaires were returned by 198 of the 325 (60.9%) staff surveyed at the only maximum security prison, a facility with an inmate population of approximately 2340 men. The state's 2 medium security prisons house about 500 and 1000 men respectively, and 201 of the 288 (69.8%) surveyed staff returned usable questionnaires. Finally, the 3 remaining facilities are farms or work camps with a minimum security classification; usable instruments were returned by 79 of the 100 staff surveyed. Since the initial analyses revealed no significant differences in level of role conflict among staff at either the 2 medium security prisons or the 3 minimum security prisons, the questionnaires from the 2 medium security institutions are pooled to represent responses from a medium security level, and the questionnaires from the 3 minimum security institutions are pooled to represent staff responses from minimum security prisons.

Staff Position. Although data were obtained from personnel of various ranks and positions, this analysis focuses on only those individuals who, by the nature of their roles, are most closely aligned with the treatment-custody contradictions in the performance of their role. As a result, responses from second-line correctional officers (Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain) are removed from consideration and custody personnel are defined as those 253 front-line correctional officers responding to the survey. Similarly, treatment personnel are represented by the 83 usable questionnaires returned by staff who are case-workers, special teachers, or parole officers working within the facility.

Role Conflict. A 6-item summated scale is employed to operationalize role conflict. Each respondent indicated his degree of agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale to such
items as: (1) “The rules that we are supposed to follow here never seem to be very clear,” and (2) “One of the major problems here is that it is never really clear as to who is responsible for doing different jobs.” The 6 items significantly ($p < .001$) correlate with one another, and the item-to-total score coefficients range from .56 to .76. This measure of role conflict, in which high scale scores indicate high levels of role conflict, has a mean of 17.73 and a standard deviation of 5.18.

Punitiveness. A 4-item Likert-type scale is used to operationalize the degree to which staff respondents are oriented to the punishment rather than treatment of inmates. Agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale was sought to such items as: (1) “Hard prison life will keep men from committing crimes,” and (2) “A criminal should be punished first, then we can worry about reform.” The items are significantly ($p < .001$) intercorrelated, and the range of item-to-total score correlation coefficients is .68 to .76. The punitiveness scale has a mean value of 11.07 with a standard deviation of 3.67; a high score indicates a punitive attitude.

Job Satisfaction. A 5-item summated scale with significant ($p < .001$) item-to-item correlations and item-to-total coefficients ranging from .62 to .78 is constructed. The staff responded to items such as: (1) “I like the duties I perform in my job at this institution,” and (2) “If I had a chance I would have taken a job in something other than what I am presently doing.” The mean value for the scale is 11.52, the standard deviation is 3.69, and high job satisfaction is reflected by a high scale score.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The previous discussion has established the hypothesized relationship of role conflict among prison staff to both the security level of the prison and the position of the staff within the prison. Data are presented in Table 1 to examine the hypotheses that role conflict will be (1) significantly greater among staff in minimum security prisons than among staff in maximum security prisons and (2) significantly greater among treatment staff than among custody staff.
TABLE 1
Mean Level of Role Conflict, by Security Level and Staff Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security Level</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t-Value</th>
<th>Level of Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>20.294</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>minimum-medium = 3.55</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>17.216</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>medium-maximum = .19</td>
<td>.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>17.329</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>minimum-maximum = 3.80</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff Position

| Treatment | 18.566 | 83  | 1.70 | .045 |
| Custody   | 17.455 | 253 |      |      |

Security Level by Staff Position

| Treatment | Minimum | 20.583 | 12   | minimum-medium = 1.04 | .150 |
| Medium    | 18.791 | 43    | medium-maximum = 1.21 | .120 |
| Maximum   | 17.357 | 28    | minimum-maximum = 2.00 | .027 |
| Custody   | Minimum | 20.205 | 39   | minimum-medium = 3.66 | .001 |
| Medium    | 16.571 | 105   | medium-maximum = 1.07 | .150 |
| Maximum   | 17.321 | 109   | minimum-maximum = 3.21 | .001 |

1. Because the hypotheses are directional in their prediction, a one-tailed test of significance is used in the difference of means test.

Both hypotheses are supported by the data. The mean level of role conflict among staff in minimum security prisons is significantly greater than the mean level of role conflict among staff at either medium or maximum security prisons. It is noteworthy that the level of staff role conflict is not found to differ significantly between medium and maximum security prisons, and, therefore, the relationship between role conflict and security level is not strictly linear. Limitations of the data make it impossible to account for this lack of difference, and one can only speculate that the medium security prisons are qualitatively more similar to the maximum security prison than to the minimum security prisons in such characteristics as architecture, emphasis on custody and control, and regimentation of inmate activities. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the first hypothesis is supported in that those personnel in minimum security prisons have a significantly higher level of role conflict than their counterparts in medium or maximum security prisons. It is also apparent that the mean level of role conflict among treatment staff is significantly greater than the mean level of role conflict among custody staff, and the second hypothesis is supported.²
The remainder of the data presented in Table 1 examine the joint or interaction effects of staff position and security level on role conflict. It has been demonstrated that role conflict is greater among staff at minimum security prisons than at either medium or maximum security prisons. Table 1 also provides evidence that the relationship persists when staff position is controlled. Role conflict is significantly greater among treatment staff in minimum security prisons than in maximum security prisons, but the difference of mean in role conflict for treatment staff is not significantly different between minimum and medium security prisons or between medium and maximum security prisons. The level of role conflict among custody staff is also significantly higher at minimum security prisons than at either medium or maximum security prisons, although once again there is no difference between medium and maximum security levels in custody staff role conflict. In summary, the level of role conflict is significantly greater at minimum security facilities for both treatment and custody staff.

It is also apparent from Table 1 that the higher level of role conflict among treatment staff is not found in either minimum or maximum security prisons. Only within the medium security prison does the role conflict of treatment staff remain significantly greater than the custody staff. This finding may indicate that the major arena of such conflict is within the medium security prison. That is, one may argue that role conflict is reduced equally for both treatment and custody staff in maximum security prisons, where the heavy emphasis on custody and control not only establishes clear priorities for the custody staff but also diminishes the rehabilitative goals of even the most idealistic treatment staff. Similarly, while both treatment and custody staff have high levels of role conflict in minimum security prisons, the absence of a significant difference in role conflict between the two staff groupings may be attributed to a feeling that neither goal is being pursued effectively: Custody staff are affected by a deemphasis on control, and treatment staff are affected by the small number of staff (N = 12) to give credence to the objective of treatment for the 666 inmates in minimum security prisons.

In summary, this analysis of role conflict suggests two distinct conclusions. First, although the treatment staff have a higher level of role conflict than the custody staff, this difference is affected by security level and persists at only the medium security prisons. Second, role conflict is higher among staff at minimum security
prisons than at medium or maximum security prisons, and this relationship is maintained when staff position is controlled. Therefore, it is apparent that role conflict is more likely to be the product of security level than of staff position. With the exception of the staff at medium security facilities, the distinction between treatment and custody staff appears to be of negligible import in discussing the determinants of role conflict. The data suggest, rather, that the prevailing social structure at both minimum and maximum security prisons is so pervasive that it (1) contributes to low role conflict for all staff at maximum security prisons; and (2) contributes to high role conflict for all staff at minimum security prisons.

The final hypothesis to be examined predicts a strong relationship between role conflict and both job satisfaction and punitiveness. A regression analysis, the results of which are summarized in Table 2, is utilized to assess the direct effects of (1) security level and staff position on role conflict; (2) security level, staff position, and role conflict on job satisfaction; and (3) security level, staff position, role conflict, and job satisfaction on punitiveness. As is evident by a cursory examination of Table 2, security level and staff position do not explain a significant amount of variation in role conflict. Thus, while the level of role conflict may vary by security level and staff position (see Table 1), these factors do not directly affect the level of role conflict. What is more, the data reported in Table 2 indicate that security level does not explain a significant amount of variation in either job satisfaction or punitiveness, once role conflict is entered into the equation; staff position explains a significant amount of the variation in punitiveness, but it does not significantly contribute to the explained variation in job satisfaction.

The data suggest that role conflict is a direct cause of both job satisfaction and punitiveness. Role conflict explains 11% of the variation when it is the only variable regressed on job satisfaction; the inclusion of staff position and security level do not substantially increase the amount of explained variation in job satisfaction. Similarly, role conflict and position, not job satisfaction, account for the direct effects on punitiveness. Although all 4 independent variables account for 20% of the total variance in punitiveness, nearly all of this is due to staff position and role conflict. The data lead us to conclude that (1) although role conflict is found to vary by security level and staff position, role conflict is not explained by these two factors; (2) job satisfaction is significantly affected only by role
TABLE 2
Summary of Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficients</th>
<th>F Value</th>
<th>Contribution To R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict with Security Level</td>
<td>-0.1477</td>
<td>7.471</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>-0.0851</td>
<td>2.482</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction with Role Conflict</td>
<td>-.3214</td>
<td>37.660</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>.0843</td>
<td>2.645</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Level</td>
<td>.0138</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitiveness with Role Conflict</td>
<td>.2639</td>
<td>25.016</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Level</td>
<td>-.2759</td>
<td>30.836</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.0922</td>
<td>3.417</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.0623</td>
<td>1.413</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. When role conflict is regressed on security level and position, $F = 5.21$, $p > .001$, $R = .17$, $R^2 = .03$.
b. When job satisfaction is regressed on role conflict, position, and security level, $F = 14.67$, $p < .001$, $R = .34$, $R^2 = .12$.
c. When punitiveness is regressed on role conflict, position, job satisfaction, and security level, $F = 20.34$, $p < .001$, $R = .44$, $R^2 = .20$.

Conflict; (3) punitiveness is significantly affected by both role conflict and staff position; and (4) job satisfaction and punitiveness are independent effects of role conflict.

CONCLUSIONS

Role conflict among correctional personnel has been the subject of much theoretical discussion, but has received comparatively little empirical investigation. Three hypotheses pertaining to role conflict among personnel employed in correctional organizations were tested with data obtained from correctional staff in six prisons. The level of role conflict is found to be significantly higher among staff at the less custodial, minimum security prisons than at the more custodial, maximum security prisons, and treatment staff are found to have a significantly higher level of role conflict than custody staff.

When the level of role conflict is examined by both staff position and security level, the data reveal that role conflict is higher among
staff in minimum security prisons than among staff in maximum security prisons regardless of their staff position. Finally, the difference in the level of role conflict between custody and treatment staff is not significantly different for those employed at either minimum or maximum security prisons. Inasmuch as role conflict among both custody and treatment personnel is found to be greater in less secure prisons than in more secure prisons, and since no significant difference is noted in the level of role conflict among both custody and treatment staff within the same security level, we are led to conclude that role conflict is more a product of the organizational goals of the prison than of different staff positions within the organization.

Conceivably, one might question this interpretation in the absence of data pertaining to organizational goals. Rather than assume that maximum security prisons are more custody-oriented than minimum security prisons and that minimum security prisons are more treatment-oriented than maximum security prisons, it may well be argued that the major difference is in organizational size. Unfortunately, and regretfully, this alternate interpretation cannot be refuted within the limitations of the present data. However, previous analyses (e.g., Thomas, 1959) conclude that there is a positive relationship between role conflict and organizational size, contrary to the findings in this analysis, which suggest that these findings are due to organizational goals rather than organizational size.

The perceptual adjustments to role conflict have been largely ignored in the literature. The association of role conflict with such dimensions as attitudes toward the organization, toward the job, toward fellow personnel, and toward the clients is worthy of further investigation. In this analysis, for example, role conflict is negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively associated with punitive attitudes toward inmates. More specifically, role conflict explains a significant amount of the variation in job satisfaction and punitiveness, and job satisfaction has little direct effect on punitiveness. The data suggest that role conflict is a major source of job dissatisfaction and contributes to punitive staff attitudes.

The failure of many empirical analyses to deal with role conflict among correctional personnel indicates the direction for future research. Not only must the limitations of this analysis be surmounted, but data pertaining to a wide range of cognitive and
perceptual responses to role conflict are needed if meaningful comparisons are to be made between custody and treatment personnel in correctional organizations. Moreover, empirical efforts should draw upon the organizational literature to focus more sharply the issue of role conflict and the factors which specify its impact. Severity of the role conflict and the nature of its impact are hypothesized to be affected by such factors as the intensity of role involvement, the rigor with which expectations are defined, the legitimacy of expectations, the actor's observability, and the actor's needs. The conspicuous absence of data on these and other relevant variables from existing analyses demonstrates the tentativeness of these conclusions and the direction future efforts must take if we are to comprehend more completely role conflict within correctional institutions.

NOTES

1. Administrative staff, clerical staff, and those correctional officers working in areas which preclude routine interaction with inmates (e.g., on the wall or at the front gate) were omitted from the sample.

2. The relationship of role conflict to both security level and staff position is unaffected when length of time employed in "corrections" or length of time employed in this particular prison is introduced as a control variable.

3. Since staff position is a dichotomous variable, it has been treated as an interval level of measurement by assigning values of 1 to treatment staff and 2 to custody staff. Security level is also treated in an interval level of measurement when the values of 1, 2, and 3 are assigned to minimum, medium, and maximum security levels, respectively.

4. Two variations of this linear-multiple regression equation were explored. In one, security level was treated as a curvilinear function; in the other, the interaction of security level and staff position was defined as an independent variable and included in the equation. In neither case, however, did the manipulation increase the amount of explained variation in role conflict.

5. Among the limitations in the present analysis are (1) the small number of treatment personnel in the population sampled; (2) the absence of data on such variables as organizational goals (including their priority, intensity, and so on), the perceived legitimacy of those goals, and the individual's preference for treatment or custody; and (3) a potential bias due to the differential rate with which usable questionnaires were returned by staff from the prisons (60.9% from maximum security, 69.8% from medium security, and 79.0% from minimum security).
REFERENCES


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