

PROBATION OFFICERS AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT:  
COPING WELL WITH CHANGE

by

VIVIAN DZEDZORA

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1990  
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 2003

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## ABSTRACT

This was a qualitative, exploratory study that focused on three research questions: 1) what is the lived experience of experienced probation officers who are coping well with change, 2) what are the self-sustaining strategies probation officers use to cope well with on-going change in their work life, what hindered them from doing well, and were there things that would have been helpful but were unavailable, and 3) whether the research interview itself had an impact on probation officers' sense of well being. This study used a descriptive phenomenological approach to gather information about probation officers' experiences of career and change, and the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954) to elicit helping and hindering incidents and wish list items. A quantitative component was embedded in the form of a pre-and-post scaling question to determine if the interview process itself had an impact on the participants. Data from the phenomenological portion of the study elicited major themes for each of the relevant questions and established the contextual framework for the CIT component of the study. Data from the CIT portion of the study elicited ten helping, hindering and wish list categories. These ten categories represent the strategies that probation officers utilize in order to cope well with change. Data from the quantitative component of the study indicated that the research interview had minimal impact on participants. Implications for further research and theory development along with suggestions for workers, organizations, and counsellors are discussed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Overview of Chapter One.....	1
Background for the Study.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Situating the Researcher.....	9
Underlying Assumptions of the Study.....	10
Overview of the Dissertation.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Overview of Chapter Two.....	13
Business Literature.....	14
Social Psychology Literature.....	21
Burn-out and Depression Literature.....	27
Stress and Coping Literature.....	31
Positive Psychology Literature.....	35
Career Literature.....	40
Probation and Correctional Work Environment Literature.....	49
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	58
Overview of the Study Design.....	58
The Phenomenological Research Method.....	59
The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) Research Method.....	61
The Qualitative Pre-and-Post Test Design.....	63
Participant and Sampling Procedures.....	64
Data Collection Procedures.....	65
Assumptions of the Interview.....	65
Data Analysis Procedures.....	71
Phenomenological Explication of the Data.....	72
Critical Incident Data Analysis.....	73
Phenomenological Trustworthiness/Credibility Checks.....	73
CIT Trustworthiness/Credibility Checks.....	75

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	81
Overview of Chapter Four .....	81
Phenomenology Results.....	81
The Experience of Being a Probation Officer.....	81
What Being a Probation Officer Means.....	98
What Coping Well Means.....	102
Experience of Change .....	107
Meaning Attributed to Change Experience.....	116
Have Participants Always Coped Well With Change?.....	123
Critical Incident Results.....	125
Scaling Question Results .....	150
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	155
Research Questions .....	155
Phenomenology Results.....	156
Critical Incident Results.....	165
Comparison of Categories to Relevant Scholarly Literature .....	165
Impact of Interviews .....	185
Limitations of the Study.....	190
Implications.....	191
REFERENCES .....	197
APPENDICES .....	226
Appendix I: Introductory Letter.....	226
Appendix II: Recruitment Letter.....	228
Appendix III: Informed Consent.....	229
Appendix IV: Ethics Approval .....	231
Appendix V: Interview Guide.....	232

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1:	What is Your Experience of Being a Probation Officer? .....	83
Table 2:	What Does Being a Probation Officer Mean to You? .....	99
Table 3:	What Does Coping Well Mean to You? .....	103
Table 4:	What is Your Experience of Change?.....	108
Table 5:	Meaning Attributed to Change Experiences .....	118
Table 6:	Critical Incident and Wish List Categories .....	127
Table 7:	Scaling Question Results .....	152

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*In nova fert animus mutatis  
Dicere formas corpora...*  
My intention is to tell  
Of bodies changed  
To different forms...

The heavens and all below them,  
Earth and her creatures,  
All change,  
And we, part of creation,  
Also must suffer change.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview of Chapter One**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information about the issues and events that inform the current study. It also discusses the problem to be studied, states the purpose of the study, and outlines the underlying assumptions of the study. Finally, it situates the study within the stress and coping, thriving, and career literature, and concludes with an overview of the research proposal.

### **Background of the Study**

Much has been written about stress and burnout amongst correctional officers and police officers with little attention paid to probation officer stress. Consequently, examinations into stress levels, and coping abilities of probation officers have tended to rely on the research from these other occupations (Brown, 1987; Lambert et al., 2002; Slate, 2000; Wells et al., 2006). The studies that have examined probation officer occupational stress primarily focus on individual characteristics such as personality, education, and gender, and how they impact the organization, rather than the role that organizational stressors play in the employee coping process.

This lack of focus on the impact of organizational stressors on probation officers' coping abilities is a significant oversight, especially when one considers the state of change that British Columbia Probation Services appears to have operated in since its inception in 1942. The organization has experienced significant ideological changes beginning with a focus on rehabilitation in 1950, reintegration in 1970, reparation in 1980, risk management in 1990, and finally, the era of directing change from 1997 to the



present time (Braithwaite, 1968; Cohen, 1985; Culhane, 1975; Forbes, 1950; Gendreau, 1987; Hartman, 1982; Lambert & Madden, 1976; Mason, 2003; Oliver, 1984; Palmer, 1975; Pearce, 1969; Woodhams & Philips, 1961). Even the title by which the service has identified its officers has undergone an ideological evolution commencing with social service officer in 1942, to the more enforcement-oriented probation officer/officer of the Court in the present day (Andrews, 1989; Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Andrews et al., 1990; Bahr, 1981; Bonta, 1997; Braithwaite, 1968; Cohen, 1985; Culhane, 1975; Forbes, 1950; Gendreau, 1987; Hartman, 1982; Lambert & Madden, 1976; Mason, 2003; Oliver, 1984; Palmer, 1975; Pearce, 1969; Woodhams & Philips, 1961). It makes sense then, that these sweeping organizational and ideological changes would not only impact the way in which probation officers cope with change in their work environment, but how they find meaning in their career (Denney & O'Beirne, 2003).

A review of the organizational literature (Amabile & Conti, 1999; Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana & Barry, 2000; Neal, 1999; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) appears to confirm that change in the work environment is a phenomenon that is not just occurring in correctional agencies, but is also a fact of life in the modern work environments of organizations and their employees the world over. The impact of economic globalization resulting from the opening up of new markets, deregulation, and developments in information technology has required established companies and organizations to respond not only to the turbulence within their own particular industry, and even country, but to routinely institute changes that require a much broader, global economic change strategy, and a quicker pace of response (Amabile & Conti, 1999; Kanter, 1999; Leana & Barry; 2000; Neal, 1999; Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

In fact, in many leading industries around the world, the notion of the traditional, stable job is becoming an antiquated concept (Howard, 1995). Many modern work environments have become project based, where work is often outsourced, and increasing numbers of employees are contractors who work at home (Leana & Barry, 2000). Those employees who continue to maintain a presence at the workplace are often required to work beyond fixed job descriptions, and are expected to be able to cope with a greater, more rapid pace of change than ever before (Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Over the past two decades the vast research literature on organizational change (Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana & Barry, 2000; Lee, 2001; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) has documented the struggle associated with this change and the cost, both at the organizational and individual level. The picture is a fairly pessimistic one. At the organizational level, change strategies such as downsizing, while they may initially result in cost-savings, can also cost the organization through employee absenteeism, reduced employee organizational commitment, and retraining costs due to turnover.

At the employee level, effects of change can also be significant. The literature on stress and coping in the work environment reads like a testimonial to the struggle that employees experience. Studies (Amundson et al., 2004; Bauer, 2000; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007) inform us that survivors of the reorganization process often feel uncertainty and anger, and the challenges they face as they readjust to a changed work environment can result in increased levels of job stress, depression, and symptoms of burn-out.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The criminal justice literature (Alverson, 2002; Deal & Kenney, 1982; Louis & Sutton, 1991; Reino et al., 2007; Schein, 1985; Silvester et al., 1999) and social psychology literature (Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002; Bliese & Britt, 2001; Cullen et al., 1985; Lowery & Stokes, 2005; Martin et al., 2005; Stephens & Long, 1999) suggest that organizational culture and social support are two aspects of the correctional work environment that help to moderate the negative impact of organizational change on employee coping. However, the relationship among these variables is complex. In both instances, it would appear that either resistance to, or acceptance of change is dependent upon not only the nature of the change itself, but also the meaning attributed to it by the employees. For example, whether or not the change process is perceived to be fair, appropriate, or congruent with professional or personal ideologies determines to a great extent, how the employee will cope. Again, little is known about how probation officers assign meaning to their careers and further, how they perceive their organization and the strategies that are put in place to support them.

The research literature on stress and coping has accumulated a significant body of studies that have examined the relationship between an encounter of stress, and the process of coping (Briner et al., 2004; Dewe & Trenberth, 2004; Fox et al., 2001; Lazarus, 1993; Newton & Keenan, 1985; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999). Theoretical models of coping such as Lazarus' transactional model (Lazarus, 1968; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) have contributed to our knowledge about the coping process. However, they have almost exclusively focused on the negative outcomes of the coping experience.

Although the literature attesting to the negative consequences of the coping process (Briner et al., 2004; Dewe & Trenberth, 2004; Fox et al., 2001; Lazarus, 1968; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Newton & Keenan, 1985; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999) paints an accurate picture, it does not paint the whole picture. What about the workers who are managing to cope well with change? A number of researchers (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 1998; Tedeschi et al., 1998) have begun to examine positive outcomes of the coping process. They suggest that when individuals are under stress, they can create and sustain positive affect, which in turn reduces the distressing psychological outcomes traditionally associated with threatening experiences such as change in the work environment.

The career and vocational research literature has, in the past, offered sound theoretical models and strategies for understanding occupational choice and transition. However, these approaches were developed according to the prevailing ideologies of the industrial era, where large organizations dominated the economic landscape (Savickas, 2003). In this era, the organization in which the individual worked was not seen as a factor that played a role in career choice and management (Collin, 1997).

The realities of the contemporary work world require that organizations be prepared to deal with the demands of a global, rapidly-changing world economy, and in an effort to meet these challenges, organizations routinely implement change oriented strategies such as downsizing and reorganization (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Leana & Barry, 2000). As a result, the modern work environment is characterized by rapid and continuous change and instability (Kanter, 1999; Neal, 1999; Wangberg & Banas, 2000).

Traditional career management strategies, developed in a time of career stability and career predictability now appear out of step with the current work environment. In order to meet the needs of this dynamic workforce, a number of career scholars have called for new definitions and strategies of career management (Borgen, 1997; Bridges, 1994, 1995; Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 2000; Hall, 1996; Harris-Bowlsby, 2003; Inkson & Amundson, 2002; Marshall & Bonner, 2003; Nicholson, 1996; Savickas, 2003; Young & Collin, 1992).

In an article that discussed the strengths, weaknesses, future opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing the career counselling profession, Savickas (2003) put forth a challenge to career scholars, calling on them to consider the need for change in key areas of the field. For example, he suggested that career development theories be renovated to accommodate the realities of working and living in postindustrial societies, that they incorporate greater awareness of, and sensitivity to race, sex, and culture. And finally, that they address the turbulence in the modern work world in order to help soothe the stress and upset experienced by workers.

However, it would appear that the field of career research has been slow to answer this challenge. Few studies were found in the career and organizational change literature that addressed the influence of the work environment on employee coping, or offered new theoretical frameworks that accounted for its impact on the individual. Some studies offered new conceptualizations of career, such as a “boundaryless career”, or the “protean career” (Arthur, 1994; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Sullivan, 1999). Others discussed obstacles to career advancement such as plateauing (Applebaum & Finestone, 1994; Bardwick,

1988; Feldman & Weitz, 1986; Goldman, 1986), and career anchoring (Marshall & Bonner, 2003; Schein, 1974, 1996).

The current study is designed to continue a research focus that has been developed and conducted over a number of years in the Counselling Psychology Program at the University of British Columbia (Alfonso, 1997; Amundson et al., 2004; Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Amundson & Morley, 2002; Borgen et al., 2002; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; Borgen & Maglio, 2004; Butterfield, 2001; Butterfield, 2006; Butterfield & Borgen, 2005; McCormick, 1994; Morley, 2003). This research examines the factors that help workers cope well in the face of continuous and rapid change in the work environment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Overall, probation officers have been neglected in the research literature. It is time for more detailed research into the unique dynamics of probation officer careers. How do they experience their role as a probation officer? How do they assign meaning to their career? How does this meaning influence their ability to cope well at work? How do individual officers manage to cope well despite what the research tells us about the negative aspects inherent in their job? What helps some officers cope well, when others are faltering? What hinders them from coping well? What resources would help them cope better if they were available to them? How can what we learn from officers who are coping well can be used to help those who are not coping well?

The purpose of the current study was focused on three research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of experienced probation officers who are coping well with change?, 2) What are the self-sustaining strategies probation officers use to cope well with on-

going change in their work life, what hindered them from doing well, and were there things that would have been helpful but were unavailable, and 3) To understand whether the research interview itself had an impact on probation officers' sense of well being.

It was hoped that the qualitative, exploratory nature of this study would result in rich, detailed information that would not only shed a light on the unique aspects of probation officer careers, but could also contribute to the development of tools or resources that could assist other probation officers who are struggling to cope with change in their work environment. This is important, because there is general agreement in the organizational change literature that change, and the rapid pace by which it occurs, will continue into the foreseeable future (Herr, 2003).

The results of this study could also have implications for the field of career and vocational counselling, as awareness of positive probation officer coping strategies could contribute to the development of more relevant and effective career management techniques. Given that individuals spend a significant part of their adult life dedicated to the pursuit of a meaningful and successful career, there is clearly a need to focus on the aspects of positive coping that allow individuals to not only cope well in the face of change, but to thrive. An examination of the tools and resources that probation officers use to cope well may also contribute to the broader organizational change literature by expanding knowledge about the complexity of work environments in which modern workers have to cope. Finally, the current study also hoped to contribute to the stress and

coping literature by illuminating the positive side of coping, and thus, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the coping process.

### **Situating the Researcher**

Like most human activities, this research started in the midst of life experiences and events. For more than two decades, I have worked in a correctional setting, and for a significant number of these years, as a federal parole officer. I was initially drawn to the profession of parole work because of the strong “social work” ideology that informed decision-making practices in relation to the supervision of offenders. At the time I joined Federal Corrections the focus was on the rehabilitation of offenders, and thus, policy and practice were geared towards changing offenders’ behaviour through supportive interventions. Given that this philosophy closely mirrored my own personal ideology about helping people, I was able to enjoy a meaningful career for many years.

The Correctional Service of Canada, like any government agency, is operationally responsive to the prevailing ideology of the government of the day. So when governments change, it is expected that policy and procedural changes will follow, often resulting in operational change for staff at the line level. In the early 1990’s, the parole service underwent a region wide reorganization and introduced technological changes that stripped away many of the key duties that informed the meaning that I experienced in my career. I found it difficult from a professional and ideological perspective to adjust to these changes, and ultimately left the parole service.

Although I no longer worked for Federal Corrections, I continued to work in a correctional environment. In my role as a contract therapist with Probation services, I was regularly exposed to the work environment of probation officers. I observed at first



hand the frequency with which they encountered change in their work environment, and the various ways in which individual officers coped with change. A number of differences do exist between the duties that probation officers perform compared to parole officers. For example, probation officers supervise provincial offenders who receive short-term sentences (the maximum being two years less a day), or offenders who serve their sentences in the community (probation) while parole officers only supervise federally sentenced offenders who have all served periods of incarceration for more than two years. However, because of my own experience as a parole officer, I was particularly interested in those officers who appeared to be coping well. Thus, my past experience as a parole officer and my interest in probation officer coping informed the purpose of the current study.

### **Underlying Assumptions of the Study**

The fundamental assumptions underlying the current study are as follows: (1) that the contemporary work environment is characterized by the permanency of on-going, rapid change, (2) that the unstable nature of the work environment influences employees' ability to cope with change, (3) that an individual's ability to cope with change depends on the nature and meaning attributed to the change, and (4) that traditional strategies for managing career no longer appear to be applicable. Evidence for the support for all four assumptions can be found in the organizational change, stress and coping, social support, resilience and thriving, burn-out and depression, criminal justice, and career literature, all of which are discussed in some detail in corresponding chapters of this dissertation.

The purpose of articulating these fundamental assumptions is: (1) to organize the current study in such a way as to be able to draw on the research literature from the

various fields such as business, social psychology, criminal justice, career, stress and coping, positive psychology, and psychological thriving, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that impact probation officers and their ability to cope well with change, and (2) to be able to situate the current study within the resilience and thriving, stress and coping, and career literature with the hope that the results obtained by investigating the work experience of probation officers might inform a deeper understanding of coping and career development issues. This in turn could contribute to current research efforts that are dedicated to the development of effective resources and counselling approaches in each.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter one introduced the current study by providing background information that offers not only an explanation for my interest in the research topic, but also the rationale and purpose of the project.

In Chapter two, I review the relevant research literature with a focus on studies that inform the issues that pertain to the current study, and support the need for the study by highlighting the gaps in the existing literature. I commence my review with a focus on the business literature, examining why organizations pursue change, and the impact of these changes at both the organizational and employee levels. I then review the social psychology, burn-out and depression, stress and coping, and positive psychology literature in order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes that explain coping ability, and the factors that lead to the development of various psychological outcomes. I then turn to the career literature for an understanding of career development, and how career theories contribute to our understanding of career choice and the ability of workers

to cope with the turbulence found in modern day work environments. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a focus on probation officers, highlighting the gaps in the literature that pertain to probation officer career and coping issues, and tying them in with the current research question.

Chapter three provides an overview of the purpose of the study and the research design. The Phenomenological and Critical Incident Technique (CIT) research methods are described in detail, as well as the sampling procedures, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness and credibility issues.

Chapter four presents the results of the study; first discussing the phenomenological results including: the experience of being a probation officer and what being a probation officer means, what coping well means, the changes affecting probation officers' work lives, and the impact of the changes. The CIT results are discussed next, followed by the scaling question results.

Chapter five discusses the phenomenological and CIT results and the support in the literature for the derived themes and categories, the impact of the interviews, and a summary of the results. It then discusses the implications for workers, practitioners, and future research and theory. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview of Chapter Two**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the scholarly literature that informs this study. It begins with an overview of the business literature, with a specific focus on the origins of organizational change, and the impact of change at the organizational and individual level. The social psychological literature offers a deeper understanding of individual coping through moderating factors such as personality, organizational culture, and social support. The burn-out and depression literature is then reviewed, with a focus on the factors that lead to burnout and depression. The stress and coping literature informs the present study by illuminating the process of coping, and by clarifying the relationship between coping and the work environment. Much of the focus in the stress and coping literature is on the negative psychological outcomes of coping, and the problems that create resistance to change. The positive psychology literature also informs the current study by highlighting the factors that contribute to positive human functioning. The literature on thriving and resilience further extends this positive focus by offering an overview of the characteristics that help people to remain resilient in the face of change. The career literature discusses the current understandings of career development issues, and thereby gives rise to some of the gaps identified in the current study. Finally, the probation and correctional literature offers an appreciation of the current state of research pertaining to probation officer careers, and the factors that contribute to their job stress. The chapter concludes by identifying the gaps in the

relevant literature, and how the current research question intends to begin addressing them.

## **Business Literature**

### Why Organizations Pursue Change

In order to keep abreast of the demands of the global economy, and in many cases maintain a competitive edge, organizations routinely institute change strategies that include reorganization, downsizing, and the implementation of new technologies (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). The prevailing ideology appears to be that the fewer core processes and workers an organization has the easier it will be for the organization to respond to changes in market demands or preferences.

Although the multitude of variables associated with the decision to implement a change strategy varies among organizations and agencies, a review of a number of studies in the organizational change literature (Davis, 2003; Leana & Barry, 2000; Neal, 1999; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), suggests that there a number of core factors that consistently play a role in influencing an organization's beliefs about the need for change.

- (1) Environmental Adaptability As organizational work environments become increasingly influenced by global markets and therefore, become increasingly unpredictable, organizations believe that change strategies will provide a semblance of control, and that performance will improve when the company reaches a certain size; i.e. lean and mean (Davis, 2003; Leana & Barry, 2000).
- (2) Cost Savings Continuous change is also motivated by cost savings, particularly in the area of human resources. Some estimates have placed the cost of human resources at approximately 41 per cent of expenses in service

industries (Cappelli,1999). Organizations therefore believe that the reduction of personnel through strategies such as downsizing will result in significant savings.

- (3) Capital Markets Financial capital can be time sensitive, where investors are demanding more immediate returns from their investments that are held for shorter periods of times. Organizations believe that the implementation of change strategies gives them the flexibility to adapt quickly to the changing demands of their investors (Leana & Barry, 2000; Leana & Rousseau, 2000).
- (4) Competitive Advantage Organizations believe that the ability to quickly change form, employee numbers, and work processes in response to changing market demands allows them to gain a competitive advantage over other industries (Leana & Barry, 2000).

#### Change at the Employee Level

A review of the organizational change and occupational health literature suggests that coping with change in the work environment can be a difficult process for many individuals (Amundson et al., 2004; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; Borgen et al., 2002; Davis, 2003; Hopkins & Weathington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana and Barry; 2000; Lee, 2001; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). A survey conducted by the United States Bureau of National Affairs (1996) indicated that organizational change was a significant concern for employees in more than a third of the 396 agencies and organizations it polled.

Because organizational change strategies can dramatically impact the ability of employees to cope in the work environment, and because the research literature suggests

that organizational downsizing is one of the most popular change strategies used by organizations, (Leana and Barry, 2000; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007), it was thought that a review of the research literature on downsizing, with a focus on the consequences to employees might be helpful for understanding how probation officers cope with organizational change.

The following comments are based on a review of 14 studies that addressed this issue.

Downsizing The vast literature on organizational downsizing (Amabile & Conti, 1999; Amundson et al., 2004; Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Brockener, 1988; Davis, 2003; Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana & Barry, 2000; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) suggests that downsizing is one of the most frequently implemented change strategies used by organizations in an effort to survive and compete in the new world economy.

Spreitzer and Mishra (2002) define organizational downsizing as the “purposeful reduction in the size of an organization’s workforce” (p. 707). Thus, by its very nature, organizational downsizing has the potential to be a disruptive process for both the organization and its employees. In fact, a persistent finding among many of the studies I examined (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Brockener, 1988; Davis, 2003; Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana and Barry, 2000; Lee, 2006; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007) was that downsizing does result in a number of negative outcomes for survivors. Some of which include the loss of communication with fellow employees, and with management, the erosion of trust and morale as survivors are faced with workload increases, a need to

develop new skills, and the uncertainty of their continued employment, resulting for many, in increased levels of job stress.

Positive outcomes; although they were fewer in number and less frequently reported, were also documented. Survivors indicated feeling a new sense of efficiency, effectiveness, or a new sense of relief because they remained. Some survivors also reported feeling energized and excited at the prospect of personal growth following change in their work environment (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Davis, 2003; Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana and Barry; 2000; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Susskind, 2007).

The determination of whether or not surviving employees of the downsizing process developed positive or negative attitudes appeared to be related to the following factors: (a) how fairly they felt the layoffs were handled, (b) their perceptions of co-workers' reactions to the layoffs, and (c) the gain or loss of connections to network resources that were viewed as valuable (Brockener, 1988; Henkoff, 1990; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998).

It would appear therefore, that the implementation of downsizing as a strategy for change can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it may generate expected performance gains. However, on the other hand it can produce unexpected performance loss based on employee reactions. Negative perceptions on the part of the employee, such as perceived unfair treatment often lead to increased levels of stress (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997).

### The Cost of Organizational Change

As I reviewed the studies on downsizing, it struck me that the outcome results of absenteeism and reduced organizational commitment were mentioned repeatedly as being



significant cost factors to both the organization and surviving employees. For this reason, I have addressed them in detail as follows:

Absenteeism Absenteeism stood out as the most frequently reported negative outcome of the downsizing process (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Davis, 2003; Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Kanter, 1999; Leana and Barry, 2000; Mintzbert, 2007; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Shah, 2000; Susskind, 2007). Results of the Canadian National Population Health Survey (1996) appear to confirm this finding. According to Statistics Canada (1996), the national incidence of absence from work was 7.8% for women and 4.4% for men. The rate in the health and social services sector was 9.0% for women and 5.2% for men. Psychosocial reasons for absences, primarily stress-related conditions, accounted for about one third of this total. Bauer (2000), in an effort to explain these high rates of absences, suggested that they are the result of “forces” within organizations themselves, and identified consistent change within organizations as one of the primary causes of stress and absenteeism.

Organizational Commitment Reduced organizational commitment on the part of employees was another frequently reported consequence of the downsizing process (Allen et al., 2001; Armstrong-Strassen, 2004; Jalajas & Bommer, 1996; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Luthans & Sommer, 1999; Worrall et al., 2000). Given the relationship between employee perceptions of downsizing and outcomes, it made sense that organizational commitment would be impacted by the process of downsizing.

A study by Armstrong-Strassen (2004) examined the role of organizational commitment in survivors assessed prior to the implementation of organizational downsizing, as well as their response during and following the process. The study looked

at two dimensions of organizational commitment: affective commitment (based on identification and attachment to the organization) and continuance commitment (based on costs associated with leaving).

The results of the study indicated that prior affective organizational commitment was associated with greater use of control-oriented coping, and with higher levels of job satisfaction, increased desire to remain with the organization, lower perceived job insecurity, and lower levels of job alienation. Prior continuance commitment was associated with greater use of avoidance coping, with higher levels of perceived job insecurity and health symptoms, and with lower levels of job satisfaction following downsizing (Armstrong-Strassen, 2004).

Other studies on organizational commitment (Havlovic et al., 1998; Terry et al., 1996) demonstrated that perceived organizational commitment by employees was associated with greater use of control-oriented coping and less use of avoidance coping, lower levels of perceived job insecurity, burnout, and job alienation, and higher levels of job satisfaction.

These combined findings appear to suggest that when employers demonstrate that they value their employees and care about their well being, employees respond less negatively when downsizing occurs, and are therefore better able to cope with change. Thus, employees' prior commitment serves as a coping resource protecting individuals from the negative effects of stressful change strategies such as downsizing.

### Healthy Work Environments

As this is a study concerned with examining positive coping in the work environment, it was felt that it would be important, before leaving this section on organizational change, to discuss the elements that make-up a healthy work environment.

The National Quality Institute (NQI) in Canada (Health Canada, 2004) undertook a number of initiatives dedicated to discovering the components of a healthy workplace. Their findings suggest that a healthy environment should include physical, social, personal, and developmental organizational support.

In the American context, the American Psychological Association (1999) undertook a similar initiative. Their findings suggest that organizational workplaces are healthy when they incorporate health promotion activities, offer employee assistance programs, have flexible benefits and working conditions, treat employees fairly, and offer programs for employee development, health and safety, and the prevention of work stress.

Similar findings from other studies on workplace health (Allen, 2005; Connolly & Myers, 2003; Kelloway & Day, 2005; Lambert et al., 2002) suggest that the designation of a healthy workplace should not just be based upon the absence of job stressors, but rather, the presence of organizational resources that help employees handle job and life stress. Adopting a holistic perspective, I would suggest that a healthy workplace must encompass the physical, psychological, and social contributing factors that allow individuals not just to cope, but rather, to thrive. I will address the concept of thriving in more detail in the section on positive psychology later in this dissertation.

### **Social Psychology Literature**

In reviewing the workplace change and criminal justice literature, it became evident that many of the studies examined the impact of change at the organizational level. Very few studies addressed the impact of change at the individual, employee level. This oversight is significant in my opinion because the individual's experience of change influences coping ability, and therefore, the successful outcome of change strategies (Bauer, 2000; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002). A focus on the individual experience of change may therefore, offer a greater understanding of why some employees experience high levels of absenteeism and burnout and low levels of productivity, compared to others.

Although the studies that addressed change at the individual level were few, those that I did discover provided important insight for my study. One study (Kruglanski et al., 2007) offered an interesting perspective by suggesting that individuals, in an attempt to achieve satisfaction in their occupational lives, seek both stability and fluidity in their work environment. Stability in the sense that the social systems and day-to day experiences they are required to manage in their work environments are free from the anxieties of change and upheaval, and fluidity in the sense that their job offers stimulation, and the potential for professional achievement. The authors suggested that the degree to which individuals are able to successfully navigate the tension between preferences for stability and change is dependent upon the influence of factors such as personality traits, organizational culture, and social support. My intention in this section is to examine what the research has to say about each of these three factors, beginning with personality.

## Personality

Change in any form has the capacity to elicit different reactions from different people. Persons who require permanence and stability for example, are likely to dread change. On the other hand, individuals who dislike the rut of everyday monotony may welcome change and relish the psychological mobility it allows. It makes sense then, that personality factors such as the need for achievement, the ability to self-monitor, dynamic motives, dispositional traits, and work-related attitudes, will have a significant influence on how some people react to the threat that comes with change.

The studies that I compiled in relation to personality and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McRae, 1994; Goldberg, 1990; John, 1990; Leana & Barry, 2000; McRae & Costa, 1990; McRae & John, 1992; Soldz & Vaillant, 1999) appear to support the notion that personality traits do in fact reflect individuals' predictable tendencies to engage in particular cognitive or behavioral coping strategies. Indeed, there appears to be an agreement amongst researchers who examine individual differences that the structure of the personality trait domain is encompassed by the five super-ordinate (Big Five) dimensions of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, and that these dimensions are predictive of behavior. For example, conscientiousness has been found to be predictive of job performance across a wide range of occupations, while extraversion is predictive of positive performance for jobs that involve social interaction.

Hardiness is a concept that arose from the research on individual differences in stress reactions and is comprised of the inter-related attitudes of control, commitment, and challenge (Maddi 2002, 2005). Hardy attitudes contribute to tendencies such as courage

and motivation, which are necessary in the ability to face stressors accurately. For example, courage and motivation lead to coping by problem-solving rather than by giving and getting assistance. Thus, “personality hardiness” is emerging as a pattern of attitudes and actions that help in transforming stressors from negative situations and experiences into opportunities for growth. Hardiness then, is thought to be one pathway to resilience (Maddi, 2005) and is believed to positively influence the way in which people interact with their environment.

However, not all researchers were in agreement about the absoluteness of personality trait/behavior associations. A number of researchers (Goldberg, 1993; Judge et al., 1999; Leana & Barry, 2000; Kruglanski et al., 2007) who examined the role of individual differences in the coping process argued that these relatively clear-cut findings do not necessarily apply when considering individual differences that are designed to measure an individual’s propensity to cope with instability, and their capacity to exhibit flexibility. They noted the existence of a tension between instability and flexibility, where some of the constructs that were tapped indicated underlying behavioral tendencies for stability, while others were indicators of behavioral tendencies for a capacity to manage uncertainty or cope with change. They suggested that change, and resistance to it, flexibility and stability, are simultaneous forces that make the study of change at the individual level complicated, and in need of further investigation.

### Organizational Culture

As I began to review a number of studies pertaining to organizational culture, it struck me that the relationship between organizational culture and change is also a complex one. On the one hand, organizational culture appears to be the glue that keeps the organization

together. However; on the other hand, the culture, because of its stable nature can become a barrier to innovation processes (Alvesson, 2002; Deal and Kenney, 1982; Denison, 1996; Heider, 1958; Louis & Sutton, 1991; Reino et al., 2007; Silvester et al., 1999).

Some researchers (Reino et al., 2007; Trice and Beyer, 1993) suggested that in order to understand the influence of organizational culture, one must begin at the ideological level of the organization. For example, the way in which organizational leaders interpret and process influences from outside social and physical forces (e.g. global trends, policy, economics, politics), determines the daily operational strategies of the organization. These practical work strategies lead to the formation of the organizational identity, which in turn, leads to the development of an organizational culture.

This shaping of cultural identity based upon an organization's unique interpretation of external influences, may explain why a universally shared construct for "work culture" has remained elusive. Schein's (1985) definition of work culture as being "a set of basic assumptions shared by members of a group in their attempts to understand and interact successfully with their environment" (p. 17) appears at present, to be the most frequently recited definition.

Heider's (1958) socio-cognitive theory of culture formation was particularly helpful for understanding the relationship between culture and individual coping in the work environment (Reino et al., 2007; Silvester et al., 1999). According to this theory, people make sense of work events in terms of cause and effect relationships. By understanding why events occur in the first place, individual employees can then predict when they might occur again and thus, render their environment more controllable. This perceived cause and effect process eventually leads to the development of causal attributions.

When events are not experienced first hand, individuals look to others in their work environment to explain events. This process of shared causal attributions is a method by which individuals generate a common understanding of the causes of events in their work environment.

A number of studies (Crank, 1996; Reino et al., 2007; Silvester et al., 1999) suggested that resistance to organizational change occurs because of the organization members' response to new ways of doing and thinking about things, and their struggle with assimilation of that which is new. Simply put, how an organizational culture responds to change will depend on the nature of the change, and the shared meanings and values carried by its membership

### Social Support

In order to understand the significance of the association between social support and work related outcomes, I began by reviewing the literature in the occupational health psychology, and organizational behavior journals. As I have come to understand it, the goal of occupational stress research is to identify ways in which stress and strain can be reduced in order to enhance performance in the workplace. Therefore, it was thought that a considerable amount of research would be devoted to identifying potential buffers, such as social support, that would reduce the negative impact of workplace stressors.

The majority of articles that I examined supported the notion that social support is an important buffer for a number of work-related outcomes including burn-out, job satisfaction, and absenteeism. However, the association between these variables is very complex (Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002; Bliese & Britt, 2001; Cullen et al., 1985;



Kudielka et al., 2005; Lowery & Stokes, 2005; Martin et al., 2005; Stephens & Long, 1999).

One study (Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002) suggested that the size and nature of the association of social support to workplace outcomes goes beyond the traditional notion of the supervisor-employee relationship to include the source of the support (i.e. family and friends, coworkers and supervisors), the individual's perception of the support, and the subjective nature of the outcome measure (burn-out vs. productivity). Other researchers (Bliese & Britt, 2001) suggested that work stressors have a weaker relationship with stress outcomes (depression and morale) when individuals are members of a cohesive group (strong organizational culture). The authors suggested that from a social influence perspective, groups who are characterized by high consensus are presumed to be well-functioning and to have low levels of internal conflict and stress. Social support in this sense then was expected to help individuals cope with stressors because of the belief that the social environment provides confirmation of social identity, and instrumental and other forms of support such as emotional, informational and feedback to group members. It is the social environment then that moderates the workplace/stress relationship.

I also found a study (Harvey et al., 2003) that suggested trust in management is another variable that moderates the impact of work overload on stress and personal strain that often results in burnout, or other forms of psychological strain. Trust in management was referred to as the employee's perception of management's "good intentions" in assigning additional work and therefore; lessened the negative appraisal of the work overload stressor. The study suggested that employees who express a higher level of trust in their management tend to report lower levels of burnout.

Martin et al. (2005) suggested that the perceived availability of social support from colleagues and superiors is another important aspect of the psychological climate in an organization. An employees' appraisal of these relationships as being positive is significantly associated with the employees' ability to positively adjust during organizational change. Thus, employees who rate the social climate of their work environment more positively feel less distressed by organizational change and more confident and in control of how the change will affect them.

In sum, there appears to be a consensus in the social psychology and organizational psychology literature that personality, organizational culture, and the quality of workplace social support moderate the effect of stress on workplace outcomes such as burn-out, job satisfaction, performance ratings, and ability to adjust to change. However, it is recognized that the relationships are complex and thus, require additional research attention.

### **Burn-out and Depression Literature**

Although the purpose of this study is to investigate probation officers who are coping well with change, the studies that do exist on probation officers and their work environment primarily address issues of job stress and burnout. Therefore, it was thought that an understanding of the factors that lead to burn-out and depression could be relevant to one of the objectives of my study which is; identifying the factors that hinder probation officers in their ability to cope well with change in their work environment.

#### **Burn-out**

A review of the occupational health psychology and criminal justice literature revealed that the study of burn-out amongst employees in all occupations is quite

expansive. There appears to be considerable agreement among researchers that the construct of burn-out is best understood through the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion appears to play the most significant role in the process of burn-out, and is explained by a feeling of being emotionally drained, a loss of feeling and concern, a loss of trust, and a loss of spirit (Bakker et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2005; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Shinn et al., 1984).

Although emotional exhaustion appears to be a key characteristic of burn-out, it is not in and of itself sufficient to warrant a determination of burn-out. Depersonalization and reduced accomplishment are also important factors. Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or marked detached response to others; for example, a lack of consideration for one's clients. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work (Bakker et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2005; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Shinn et al., 1984).

A number of theoretical models have attempted to explain the process of burn-out. However, for the purpose of this study I discuss only two of the most frequently cited models. The first model, The Job Demands-Resources Model (JDR, Bakker et al., 2003) posits that job demands and job resources exist in all work environments. However, that the interaction of certain job demands and the lack of certain job resources leads to the psychological outcomes of stress or burn-out. These authors contend that several different job resources are therefore necessary in order to buffer the effects of different

job stressors. The job demands and resources that play a role in this process are dependent upon the organization, and are therefore outside of the control of the employee.

The second model, the Demand-Control Model (Karasek, 1979, 1998) is similar to the JDR in that it suggests that when control over the execution of tasks is limited, job stress occurs. However, it differs in its focus on autonomy over control of tasks as being the buffer to stress, rather than the interaction of job demands and job resources. Both models appear to be in agreement, however; that buffering variables can reduce job stress. For example, properties of the work situation such as social support, constructive feed back, fairness, autonomy, and role consistency can reduce the tendency of organization factors to generate stressors.

An article by Leiter and Maslach (2001) further adds to an understanding of the causes of burn-out. These authors suggest that the structure and processes of organizations and the overall pace of change within them play a significant role in the process. They argue that highly centralized and formalized organizations can result in significant worker alienation, which is similar in its effect to burn-out. The research on burn-out, therefore; appears to suggest that a focus on the work environment as well as the person in it, is necessary in order to understand the process of burn-out.

### Depression

A review of the occupational health psychology literature revealed that a number of theories have been used to conceptualize the relationship between work stress and depression. The person-environment (P-E) fit theory (Edwards, 1996; Edwards & Cooper, 1990) posits that stress develops when there is a lack of congruence between an

individual's characteristics (e.g., abilities, values) and the work environment (demands, supplies). A lack of fit can lead to depressive symptoms (Wang & Patten, 2001).

Karasek's (1979) demand-control model posits that depression results from situations where the employee's control over their work is low, and the psychological demands imposed by the job are high. Karasek and Theorell (1990) later extended this model to also include the negative effects of job insecurity (threat of unemployment) and lack of social support from supervisors and coworkers as contributors to stress (Stansfeld et al., 1997; Stansfeld et al., 1999; Wang et al., 2004; Wilkins & Beaudet, 1998).

Studies (Kessler & Frank, 1997; Wang & Patten, 2001) that used Karasek's (1979) model to examine the association between work stress and major depression across different occupations affirmed that participants who reported high stress in decision authority, job insecurity, and lack of social support from coworkers and supervisors, were more likely to experience major depression, and less overall work hours and participation at work.

In terms of the prevalence of depression among workers, Elinson et al. (2004) used the National Health Interview Survey Disability Supplement (Zwerling et al., 2002) to identify persons with depression in the United States. Of the 2.9 million persons who reported having major depression, nearly one half were in the work force, resulting in an impaired ability to work, reduced productivity on the job, disability, and absenteeism. They suggested the economic burden of depression resulted in losses in the United States equaling between \$30 billion and \$44 billion in direct medical, mortality, and productivity costs each year (Elinson et al., 2004; Greenberg et al., 1993; Rice & Miller, 1998; Stewart et al., 2003).

In the Canadian context, data were collected on the prevalence of depression in the general population. According to the Canadian National Population Health Survey (NPHS, 1996-1997), 4.2 % of the Canadian population had experienced at least one major depressive episode in the previous year. Also, unstable employment was associated with depression. Only 3.2% of the people who had not reported a depressive episode in 1994/95 and were employed, reported an episode in 1996/97. Comparatively, the rate of depression was 5.8% among those who were working at the time of the 1994/95 interview, but were employed only intermittently before their 1996/97 interview. According to Health Canada, 48% of long-term disability claims in the workplace have depression as a component, with the cost of corporate mental health in Canada estimated at \$33 billion per year (Brown et al., 2005).

The implications of these findings appear to be two-fold. First, the cost of depression to both the employee in terms of emotional disability, and to the employer in terms of loss of productivity, work loss days, and cost of long-term disability is substantial. Second, organizational and administrative factors and at-work social support help to buffer and dramatically reduce the damaging effects of work related stress.

### **Stress and Coping Literature**

As the focus of the current study is to examine how probation officers cope well with change in the work environment, it was thought that an examination of the research literature pertaining to coping would offer an appreciation of the factors that influence the relationship between coping and the work environment. As I began to review the stress and coping literature it struck me that although there has been a prodigious amount of research conducted on the topic of coping over the past two decades (Folkman, 1992;

Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sommerfield & McCrae, 2000), it has almost exclusively focused on the negative outcomes of coping. In other words on what is going wrong, and the problems and stressors that create resistance to change. Few researchers have engaged in research that seeks to understand the processes involved in positive coping.

Researchers in the field of stress and coping (Briner et al., 2004; Dewe & Trenberth, 2004; Newton & Keenan, 1985; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999) suggest that coping has two primary functions, 1) regulating stressful emotions (emotion-focused coping), and 2) altering the troubled person-environment relationship causing the distress (problem-solving coping). Problem-solving forms of coping are more frequently used in situations where an individual determines that something can be done to change the negative situation, thus providing some sense of control over the situation. Emotion-focused coping occurs when individuals determine that they have no means to change the situation, and that the stressor must be accepted. Emotion-focused coping efforts include distancing and escape/avoidance of the stressor (Dewe & Trenberth, 2004; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999).

One widely accepted theoretical framework that explains the process of coping is the transactional model of stress put forward by Lazarus (Lazarus, 1968; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A fundamental principle of the Lazarus (1968) model is the notion that stress is comprised of an interaction between the person and the occurrence of an event in the environment. Stress arises when this interaction leads to a threat appraisal. Two processes, a cognitive appraisal and coping then occur. A cognitive appraisal is concerned with both a primary and secondary appraisal. A primary appraisal is

concerned with whether or not there is any personal stake in the encounter, and a secondary appraisal focuses on available coping options for altering the perceived threat, so that a more positive environment is formed.

Ultimately though, it is neither the event nor the environment that cause the individual to experience stress. Rather, it is his or her perceptions of personal control (belief in the ability to affect change) over the stressful situation that determines the level of stress experienced. Coping behavior then, partially depends on the goodness of fit between appraisal and coping (Lazarus, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1992).

Despite the impressive amount of research in the area of coping, it must be noted that the quality of the research itself has drawn a number of strong criticisms (Coyne & Racioppo, 2000; Folkman, 1997; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, 2000; Moos & Schaefer, 1993; Sommerfield & McCrae, 2000). I mention these criticisms in order to make the point that by focusing on only one side of the coping process (negative psychological outcomes), coping researchers have failed to gain a holistic understanding of the coping process, and that this oversight may be part of the reason why effective therapeutic interventions have not been forthcoming. Some of the criticisms are as follows:

- (1) Coping research has failed to deliver on the basic question of how coping processes operate, and even whether they have an appreciable influence on reactions to stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, 2000; Somerfield & McCrae, 2000).
- (2) Coping research has failed to bridge the gap between theory and clinical practice by not producing break-through interventions for managing stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, 2000; Somerfield & McCrae, 2000).



- (3) There are serious methodological issues. Most coping research has relied on between-person, cross-sectional designs that do not capture the dynamic nature of adaptational efforts. Longitudinal research designs that include detailed, in-depth interviews and observations are needed (Lazarus, 2000; Somerfield & McCrae, 2000).
- (4) By focusing on coping processes that help manage aversive states, coping research have failed to examine the positive outcomes of stress and therefore; has only addressed one side of the coping process (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, 2000; Somerfield & McCrae (2000).

### Positive Coping

Despite the overwhelming focus on negative outcome states in the coping research literature, I was able to discover some studies that discussed the role of positive affective states in the coping process (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 1998; Tedeschi et al., 1998). Although these studies were few, their findings serve to underscore the need for further research in this area of coping.

In a study of AIDS-related care-giving, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) explored the role of positive affect in the prevention of clinical depression. Their findings offer a perspective on coping that helps to explain how some individuals under chronic stress can sustain, and even create positive affect. They suggest that this occurs through the implementation of three meaning-based coping processes: (1) positive reappraisal, (2) problem-focused coping, and (3) the infusion of ordinary life events with positive meaning.

Other studies (Fredrickson, 1998) suggest that positive emotions can broaden the individual's attentional focus and behavioral repertoire and consequently build social, intellectual, and physical resources. Still other researchers (Isen et al. 1985; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998) found that positive affect promotes creativity and flexibility in thinking and problem solving, and that positive affect can serve as a buffer against the adverse physiological consequences of stress. Reicherts and Schneider (1990) found that positive life events (and the positive affect associated with them) were related to decreased distress, as well as increased positive affect in individuals experiencing the chronic stress of disability.

Prominent researchers in the field of coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, 2000, Somerfield & McCrae, 2000) are calling for further studies that examine the adaptational significance of positive psychological states to coping in the midst of stressful circumstances, and for the use of qualitative research designs. By conducting a qualitative, exploratory study that focuses on the positive aspects of probation officers' coping experience my research will begin to address these gaps.

### **Positive Psychology Literature**

The field or movement of positive psychology is about the study of positive emotion, positive character, and positive institutions (Tan, 2006). It is an attempt to adopt a more appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities (Sheldon & King, 2001). Pointon (2006) defines positive psychology as the science of optimal functioning and suggests that it is about rebalancing our approach to psychopathology by highlighting the fact that we also need to study the plus side of the equation, what is right as well as what is wrong, performance as well as vulnerability. Seligman and

Csikszentmihalyi (2000) enrich this definition of positive psychology by articulating its focus on the positive virtues of well-being, contentment, and satisfaction; hope and optimism, and flow and happiness.

The relevance of positive psychology to coping ability is particularly important in relation to preventing negative psychological outcomes (Seligman, 2002). In positive prevention, human strengths such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for flow and insight, act as buffers against negative psychological outcomes. The role of positive psychology in positive prevention therefore, is to learn to develop and strengthen these virtues in individuals. Seligman (2002) posits that a positive psychology approach to prevention will measure, understand, and build the positive human characteristics that make life worth living, which in turn help individuals to flourish (Frederickson & Losada, 2005).

#### Thriving and Resilience

The literature on stress and coping has for many years almost exclusively focused on the negative psychological outcomes associated with stressful events. A recent trend in this literature however; is a focus on the positive outcomes or growth resulting from coping efforts. Coping researchers have begun to report that people are thriving because of their ability to cope with stress (resiliency) and that they have “grown” (thriving) because of their coping experience (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Park, 1998).

Of course not all people experience this kind of growth through coping, and their ability to thrive in one area of their life does not mean that they are thriving in all domains. What is important in this new area of stress and coping research is to determine

why some people are resilient or thrive through stressful encounters, while others do not (O'Leary, 1998; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Park, 1998).

Psychological resilience is concerned with a person's ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences, and with the ability for flexible adaptation to the changing demands of stressful experiences. Characteristically, resilient individuals have high positive emotionality, and optimistic and energetic approaches to life (Carver, 1998; Park, 1998).

Thriving is said to occur when an individual does not merely return to their previous level of functioning, but actually surpasses it in some manner. It is contingent upon a fundamental cognitive shift in response to a challenge. The challenge provides the opportunity for change because it forces a person to confront personal priorities, and to reexamine their sense of self. It is through the interactive process of confronting and coping with challenge that individuals are able to grow and to flourish (Carver, 1998; Saakvitne, 1998).

In order to better understand the constructs of resilience and thriving, it is helpful to examine the process of how an individual responds to adversity. In the process of coping, the focus is on the interaction of characteristics of the person and the stressor, with an emphasis on the importance of the meaning of the stressor itself. Essentially, it is people's interpretations of a stressful event that determines how they respond. These interpretations depend on the individual's personal and social resources, as well as characteristics of the stressful experience (Saakvitne, 1998).

Carver's (1998) model of psychological thriving is very helpful in understanding the relationship between thriving and resilience. First of all, what these two constructs have

in common is that they are both engaged in reaction to an adverse event. Carver explains that once having experienced an adverse event, some individuals “bounce back” either to their previous level of functioning (resilience) or to a higher level of functioning (thriving), others survive but with impairment, while still others succumb and do not recover at all.

Researchers (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Park, 1998) have suggested that a person’s ability to cope positively is largely determined by characteristics such as individual resources (personality), cognitive resources (beliefs, cognitions), social resources, and religious beliefs:

Individual Resources Personality characteristics; people that possess higher levels of optimism and hope, those who expect positive outcomes, and who believe they can attain their goals are more likely to experience positive growth in response to stress.

Cognitive Resources Cognition influences how individuals perceive risk, and how they subsequently deal with it. The creation of meaning, and the ability to activate deeply held values such as the world is a fair or just place and beliefs, such as their own invulnerability to harm in relation to the significance of facing a challenge, is critical to the ability to cope positively.

Social Resources Individuals may be more likely to experience stress-related growth and thriving if they possess strong social resources.

Religious Beliefs A strong religious faith may help people to confront stressors, and appraise and respond to them in a more optimistic way (O’Leary, 1998; Park, 1998; Strumpfer, 2003).

Waterman et al. (1994) suggest that today's competitive and ever-changing job market requires a "career-resilient" workforce. Employees need to not only be dedicated to the idea of continuous learning, but they must also be able to reinvent themselves to keep pace with change. For each individual this means staying knowledgeable about market trends, and understanding the skills and behaviors that organizations will need. It means being aware of one's own skill strengths and weaknesses, and having a plan for enhancing one's performance and long-term employability. It also means having the willingness and ability to respond quickly and flexibly to changing business needs.

Organizations can play a role in developing the career-resilient worker. By establishing systems that help employees regularly assess their skills, values and interests, they assist them with the ability to determine their best job fit within the organization. In this sense they encourage their employees to develop new skills, to learn, to become more flexible, and finally to grow and thrive.

### Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a construct that emerged from social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982) and refers to the beliefs that an individual holds about his or her own capacity to execute the resources necessary in order to perform a specific task. As I reviewed the organizational health psychology literature for studies on factors that influence positive coping in the work environment, it appeared to me that self-efficacy may be strongly associated with work-related performance because it is closely related to adaptability, cognitive processing, and motivation (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

In reviewing a number of studies on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Decker, 1980; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Schunk & Gunn, 1986; Weinberg et al., 1979) there appeared to be a

consensus among researchers about the influential role of self-efficacy, especially in relation to motivation and execution of action. For example, self-perceptions of efficacy have the ability to influence how much effort an individual will expend or how long they will persist in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences. So individuals who entertain serious doubts about their capabilities will tend to lessen their efforts, or give up all together when faced with adversity. On the other hand, those who have a strong sense of efficacy tend to direct their attention and effort to the needs of the situation, and can therefore be motivated to greater achievement.

### **Career Literature**

Career counselling has a very rich theoretical base, evidenced by the numerous data based theories and counselling strategies that populate the field. Many scholars in the field of career (Harris-Bowlsbey, 2003; Collins, 1997; Hall, 1996; Niles, 2003; Pope, 2003; Savickas, 2003; Savickas & Lent, 1994; Sullivan, 1999; Tang, 2003) view the foundational theories of pioneer scholars such as Holland (1973; Holland & Gottfredson, 1976), Krumboltz (1993), and Super (1990), as major strengths of the field because they provide scholars and career counsellors with well articulated models and tools that are very useful for conceptualizing career issues.

These early career scholars developed their theories of career in accordance with the values and views of the modern industrial era, with a focus on the vocational behavior of white middle class men, and the bureaucratic and hierarchical form of the large organizations that dominated the last century (Savickas, 2003). They largely focused upon individual traits and developmental stages, and tended to neglect the organization in which individuals worked as a factor that played a role in career choice and management.

Career, from this perspective, was viewed as evolving within the context of one or two organizations throughout the person's career lifespan, where progression occurred in linear stages, and success was defined by the organization, and measured by promotions and increases in salary (Collin, 1997).

With the onset of globalization and rapid technological advancements, and the implementation of change strategies such as reorganization, and downsizing, organizations have dramatically changed the very nature of career, and career opportunities. Rather than linear progression and stability, the contemporary work environment is defined by rapid change and rising complexity. Rising complexity is comprised of a number of various influences; new technologies, new interactions between economic, political, social, religious, and private spheres, to employees needing multiple jobs to survive, or from people having to juggle more life roles (Hall & Mirvis, 1995).

There is now considerable agreement among contemporary career theorists and researchers (Borgen, 1997; Bridges, 1994; Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 2000; Hall, 1996; Harris-Bowlsby, 2003; Inkson & Amundson, 2002; Marshall & Bonner; Nicholson, 1996; Rifkin, 1995; Savickas, 2003) that traditional models for explaining organizational, social, and cultural influences on career may no longer be valid. Because these traditional theories do not adequately take into account the larger environmental context in which careers are now being played out, scholars argue that they are not broad enough to encompass the elements of the present global work environment.

The changing economic landscape has rendered careers based on a specific occupation, profession and organization, less stable and unpredictable. As a consequence,



contemporary career scholars (Brousseau et al., 1996; Inkson & Amundson, 2002; Nicholson, 1996; Savickas, 2003) are calling for a shift to a more change-oriented definition of career and philosophy of career management. They argue that individuals should prepare themselves for a career involving frequent changes in employers, and in the very nature of the work they perform.

### The Evolving Construct of Career

According to a number of studies on career issues, a definition for the construct of career appears to be somewhat of a contentious issue (Brousseau et al., 1996; Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 2000; Nicholson, 1996; Young & Collin, 1992). From the more traditional and lay perspective, career refers to the patterns and sequences of occupations and positions occupied by people across their working lives. From the contemporary and broader perspective of “personal career”, career has come to mean movement through a series of situations that impart identity. Because a career arises from an interaction of the individual with organizations and society, and thus encompasses both objective and subjective dimensions, a clear conceptualization of the notion of career appears to have remained elusive (Collin & Young, 2000; Young & Collin, 1992).

Contemporary career theorists appear to be embracing the broader view of what constitutes a career, in essence, defining career as a sequence of role-related experiences accumulated over time (Collin, 1998). Career in this sense has no boundaries, and encompasses moves between organizations, in which there are no objectively observable pathways, and no norms of objectively observable progress or success (Amundson, 2004; Brousseau et al., 1996; Nicholson, 1996).

This new conceptualization of career does not assume normative stages, but rather individual rates and directions of change. Assessments of fulfillment, achievement or success become internal and subjective, and occupational moves take place in response to a changing, complex self. In this sense, career can be used as a construct that allows individuals to construct meaning in their life (Collin, 1998; Collin & Young, 2000; Young & Collin, 1992).

#### New Conceptualizations of Career

The “Boundaryless” Career According to researchers (Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Amundson, 2002; Sullivan, 1999), workers outside of the traditional career model are becoming the norm. Thus, the notion of a “boundaryless” career has taken hold. Some of the hallmarks of a boundaryless career include: portable skills and knowledge, personal identification with meaningful work, on-the-job action learning, the development of multiple networks, and peer learning relationships, and individual responsibility for career management.

The Protean Career Another way to frame the career contract change is by viewing it as a shift from the organizational career to the protean career. A protean career is shaped by the individual with the aim of meeting the needs of the person, rather than the organization, and can be reinvented by the person at different times according to changes in the environment, and their personal situation. The ultimate goal of a protean career is psychological success in one’s work, and the feeling of pride and personal accomplishment that comes from achieving one’s goals (Hall & Mirvis, 1995).

A shift to the perspective of the protean career means that career is no longer conceptualized in terms of a connection to any one organization, and even, from an

association with lifelong paid employment. In the protean career, the contract one holds is with oneself and one's work. Thus, career, and personal life become highly interrelated (Hall & Mirvis, 1995).

### Adapting to Career Change

The current fast-paced work environment places developmental demands on individual workers for two key competencies: identity growth (more self-reflection and self-learning), and increased adaptability. For older workers who have spent many years developing an identity and one specific set of skills, which they thought would last for life, the notion of changing one's career identity, and acquiring new skills can be especially challenging. The idea of being forced to pursue a more protean career can be daunting and can be a tremendous blow to one's self-esteem and confidence. For an older worker who already may feel undervalued and vulnerable, this can lead to a number of negative psychological outcomes including increased stress and depression (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Schein, 1996).

### Factors that Influence Career Development and Coping

Career Plateauing Career plateauing is a concept that may have considerable relevance to understanding factors that hinder the coping abilities of probation officers in their work environment. The literature on career plateauing (Applebaum & Finestone, 1994; Ettington, 1998; Rotondo & Perrewe, 2000; Tremblay & Roger, 2004; Weiner et al., 1992) suggests that when organizations implement change strategies such as downsizing or restructuring in an attempt to become streamlined, and therefore, more responsive to environmental changes, traditional, hierarchical career paths for promotion are reduced or even eliminated altogether. Career plateauing occurs as a consequence of

these decreasing rates of promotion, which then forces employees to remain in the same positions for a number of years without an increase in job responsibility.

Because the notion of promotion or upward advancement for many employees is a clear indicator of success in their career, career plateauing can result in a feeling of “being stuck”. A common assumption about employees who have been plateaued is that they are less motivated and productive, have bad attitudes, and feel less satisfied. A number of studies (Ettington, 1998; Rontondo & Perrew, 2000; Tremblay & Roger, 2004; Weiner et al., 1992) refute this assumption, reporting that when compared with non-plateaued employees, plateaued employees were neither less motivated, nor less satisfied, and did not have poorer attitudes, or work behaviors. They associated being plateaued with a job that was less challenging, and less rewarding, and therefore, reported lower career aspirations. In organizations such as corrections and in particular the BC probation services, opportunities for upward advancement are limited.

Career Anchors “Career anchors” may provide another opportunity to illuminate the factors that impact the coping abilities of probation officers. According to Schein (1974, 1996), a career anchor is a descriptive and predictive tool that represents a person’s self-concept, consisting of self-perceived talents and abilities, basic values and evolved sense of motives, and needs as they pertain to career. Career anchors evolve as an individual gains occupational and life experience, and serve as driving and constraining forces that guide career decisions and choices. Most people are not aware of their career anchors until such a time as they are forced to make choices pertaining to self-development, family or career.

Schein (1974, 1996) identified eight career anchors and their corresponding motivations:

- (1) Technical/functional competence (achievement of expert status among peers)
- (2) General managerial competence (willingness to undertake decision-making and solve organizational problems)
- (3) Autonomy/independence (freedom in job content and settings)
- (4) Security/stability (long-term employment and retirement benefits)
- (5) Entrepreneurial creativity (opportunity for creativity and new businesses or services)
- (6) Service/dedication to a cause (working for the greater good of organization or community)
- (7) Pure challenge (testing personal endurance)
- (8) Lifestyle (obtaining balance between personal and family welfare with work commitment)

The concept of a career anchor becomes especially applicable in the contemporary work environment, as more and more people are laid off, and are left to figure out what to do next in their lives. Marshall and Bonner (2003) used Schein's (1974, 1996) theory of career anchors to explain how re-organizational business strategies like downsizing, impact the career motivations, values and interests of employees. The results of their study indicated that lifestyle and challenge respectively were the most important career anchors across age and culture, with the least preferred career anchor being security/stability.

Their findings suggest that there has been a significant shift of values, and motivations in the workplace. The message that employment security has been replaced by challenge

and lifestyle speaks to the validity of the notion of the protean career; a shift from the organization as the driving force, to the individual, where the search for self-fulfillment and career choice is internally driven.

The trend toward autonomy and life style as anchors may be a healthy development, given the changes occurring in the new workplace. Both the organization and the employee are adjusting to the idea that the old psychological contract may no longer be valid, and that they have to look out for themselves, meaning that organizations will become less paternalistic and employees, more self-reliant. Employees that develop their skill base, and maintain a flexible attitude, and organizations that offer learning and development strategies that support their employees, will fare better during times of upheaval and transition (Marshall & Bonner, 2003; Sullivan, 1999).

The unpredictable and constantly changing nature of the economy and the work environment is driving the need for new, dynamic conceptualizations of career. Career theories that once formed the solid foundation of the career counselling field are becoming less relevant to the modern work environment. The changes affecting workers across industries have now triggered the need to develop ideas of career that take peoples' experiences of their environment into account. As Savickas (2003) stated, the gaps between existing career theories, and the demands of contemporary work environments are now determining the direction for new research endeavors. By focusing on the self-sustaining strategies that probation officers use to cope well with change that affects their work, my research will begin to address these gaps.

### Career Dynamics of Probation Officers

As little is known about the career dynamics of probation officers and the way in which they cope with change in their work environment, a review of the literature in the psychology, business, and career data bases was undertaken. The search revealed a dearth of information pertaining to probation officer career issues. One study undertaken by Whitehead (1986) addressed the issue of burnout among probation officers in the United States. The study explored the nature and extent of burnout in probation and parole officers using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Although this study appears to be seminal in the area of probation officer job satisfaction, it was minimally relevant to the current study. The results pertain to issues faced by probation officers some 25 years ago, and do not address the impact of recent changes in the work environment due to organizational strategies such as downsizing and reorganization, and the ability of probation officers to cope with these changes in a positive fashion.

Another study investigated the unique strains and frustrations of probation officer work (Brown, 1993). Although it did identify some of the issues that lead to probation officer burn-out and career dissatisfaction, it did not offer an appreciation for how probation officers construct meaning in their careers, and further, what contributes to their ability to cope well with change, and to remain resilient or to thrive in their careers. Other articles related to police work, and the unique nature of stress in this type of career.

Overall, the majority of the articles I found related to the effectiveness of community programs for reducing parolee offending behavior, and the wider social process of why people change. However, they offered no insight into how probation officers view their

careers, or how they cope with change. Clearly, neither the work experience of probation officers in general, nor those who are doing well at work in the face of continuous change, nor the impact of increasing change on probation officers appear to be areas of active research in the career literature. In an effort to gain some understanding of the possible sources of factors that help or hinder probation officers' ability to cope in their work environment, I turned to the probation and correctional work environment literature.

### **Probation and Correctional Work Environment Literature**

In order to gain an understanding of the coping ability of probation officers in the work environment, I commenced a review of the organizational and business literature. As this search yielded no relevant studies on probation officers and their work environment, I turned to the criminal justice literature (Criminology, Criminal Justice and Behavior, the Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, Federal Probation, the Journal of Criminal Justice, and Justice Quarterly). The studies that emerged from this search revealed that the majority of research on work environments within the criminal justice system has focused on police officers and correctional officers, with very little attention paid to probation officers (Patterson, 1992; Simmons et al., 1997; Slate et al., 2003; Wells et al., 2006; Whisler, 1994). The studies that did pertain to probation officers were quite limited in their scope, focusing primarily on factors that are associated with job stress and job satisfaction (Simmons et al., 1987; Slate et al., 2003; Tabor, 1987; Thomas 1988; Wright et al., 1997).

Two of the earliest studies completed on probation officers (Whitehead, 1985, 1986) examined the role of stress in their job satisfaction. However, they made no mention of



the organizational factors that impact officers' ability to cope in the work environment. The focus of both studies was on the negative influences of job stress, suggesting that stress and burnout in probation officers are the result of factors such as boredom with the job, role ambiguity and conflict, and lack of participation in decision-making.

Additional studies (Abdollahi, 2002; Brown 1987; Finn, 2000; Finn & Kuck, 2003; Simmons et al., 1997; Slate, 2000; Slate et al., 2003; Storch & Panzarella, 1996; Thomas, 1988; Violanti & Aron, 1994; Wells et al., 2006; Whisler, 1994; Winter, 1993) confirmed these results, and added stress factors such as frustration with lack of promotion, poor supervisor relationships, unnecessary paperwork, lack of time to accomplish job tasks, dangers of the job, and lack of appreciation by the public.

#### The Correctional Work Environment

Despite the overwhelming focus on the relationship between job stressors and probation officer job satisfaction, I was able to find some studies in the criminal justice literature (Hogan et al., 2006; Kerce et al., 1994; Lambert et al., 2002; Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990; Poole & Pogrebin, 1991) that acknowledged the environment in which probation officers and correctional officers work. These studies suggested that the work environment plays a significant role in terms of the relationship between employee job satisfaction and the development of negative psychological outcomes.

One study in particular (Poole & Pogrebin, 1991) examined the past hiring practices of correctional administrators, suggesting that they are a contributing factor to the job stressors/negative outcome perspective, because these administrators did not take the relationship between environment and job satisfaction into consideration when they hired staff. The researchers argue that by trying to find the right person for the job instead of

trying to make the job right for the person, correctional hiring practices became too one-sided. That while it is important to consider how individual characteristics might affect the operation of correctional institutions, it is also necessary to consider how stressors found in the correctional work environment might affect correctional staff.

Based on a review of the combined results of a number of studies (Hogan et al., 2006; Kerce et al., 1994; Lambert et al., 2002; Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990; Poole & Pogrebin, 1991), I was able to compile a list of work environment factors that are most frequently associated with probation officer job satisfaction/dissatisfaction. These factors include organizational commitment, role conflict and role ambiguity, supervision and job autonomy, and job variety. I discuss them in some detail in the following section.

Organizational Commitment A study by Hogan et al. (2006) revealed an interesting aspect of the work environment/job satisfaction relationship through examination of the role of attitudinal states. These authors argue that work environments influence employees through their attitudinal states connected with job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment was defined as the employee's loyalty to the organization, identifying with the organization and its core values, and having a cognitive desire for meaningful involvement in the organization. In the Hogan et al. (2006) study, high organizational commitment and high job satisfaction were both linked to positive employee behavior, and higher levels of job performance. Other studies (Cullen et al., 1985; Lambert, 2003; Lambert et al., 2002; Robinson et al., 1992) identified constructive feedback, organizational fairness, and promotional opportunities as having a positive association with organizational commitment, while job stress, lack of participation in the

decision-making process, role conflict and work alienation were identified as sources of burnout.

Studies by Grossi et al. (1996) and Brown (1987, 1993) offered additional insight into the way in which attitudinal states are relevant to the probation officer work environment. They suggested that organizations that are consistent with a bureaucratic make-up, such as corrections, by their nature do not encourage feedback from their employees. This one-way direction of communication can impact both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. For example, when new probation officers come to the realization that the bureaucracy they work for does not allow the freedom of operation that they had idealistically envisioned their job satisfaction and organizational commitment decreases. The seasoned officer can also be affected when their sense of professionalism, developed over many years of service, comes into conflict with the constraints of a bureaucratic organization. As these officers continue in their career, the likelihood that they will encounter role conflict and work alienation will increase.

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity The stressors of role conflict and role ambiguity received considerable attention in the criminal justice literature (Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980; Hepburn & Knepper, 1993; Hogan et al., 2006; Van Voorhis et al., 1991; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1985). Role ambiguity was generally referred to as uncertainty or lack of information about duties and responsibilities associated with a job. Role conflict was said to occur when behaviors for a given job were inconsistent with one another. The studies I reviewed suggested that correctional officers in particular, reported stress associated with frequently changing job assignments and work tasks.

Results of a number of studies (Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980; Hepburn & Knepper, 1993; Hogan et al., 2006; Mills, 1990; Van Laningham et al., 1966; Van Voorhis et al., 1991; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1985) consistently linked role conflict and role ambiguity among correctional and probation officers with reduced job satisfaction. However, role conflict appeared to be the greater stressor of the two.

Van Voorhis et al. (1991) offered additional insight into the nature of role conflict in probation officers, by suggesting that the very nature of probation work itself, including the requirement to “wear many hats”, creates the conflict. Probation officers are at once the cop, the caseworker, and the counsellor. They are often required to operate in the contradictory roles of the law enforcement officer on one side, and the counsellor/rehabilitator on the other.

Supervision Another aspect of the work environment associated with job satisfaction was supervision. Researchers (Brown, 1987; Cullen et al., 1985; Grossi et al., 1996; Lombardo, 1981; Van Voohis et al., 1991) reported a positive association between supportive supervision and higher levels of job satisfaction among correctional workers. These studies suggest that supervisors play a key role in providing recognition of the employee.

Job Autonomy and Job Variety Studies (Jurik & Winn, 1987; Lambert, 2004; Wright et al., 1997) also suggested that job autonomy and job variety are associated with correctional officers’ job satisfaction. Job autonomy refers to the degree of freedom that employees have in making job-related decisions. It involves participation in organizational matters, not just in tasks related to specific jobs. Job variety reflects the degree of variation in job tasks. The researchers reported a positive association between

job variety and job autonomy and job satisfaction, suggesting greater job autonomy and job variety leads to increased job satisfaction.

### The Changing Role of Probation Officers

Given my observations of the frequency with which probation officers are exposed to change in their work environment, and my interest in their experiences of being a probation officer, it was felt that a review of the literature, with a focus on the changing role of probation officers would be helpful. Although the number of studies that resulted from this search are few, their findings were informative.

A study by Farrow (2004), that examined job satisfaction of probation officers with 10 plus years of service, reported that the sheer scope of change in the work environment had a negative impact on the officers. The authors reported that officers consistently commented that the aims, objectives, and organizational structure of probation services had changed so much, that they could hardly recognize the service they joined some 20 years earlier. The requirement for a different skill base and work focus contributed to their feelings of being devalued and underappreciated.

Other researches (Holt, 2000; Nellis & Chui, 2003; Trotter, 1999) also noted the scope and pace with which probation officers have had to cope with change, and suggest that it has dramatically altered how they function in their role as probation officers in a number of important, practically based ways:

- (1) A de-emphasis on rehabilitation of offenders and more focus on protection and enforcement of court orders.
- (2) An increased prescription of task and decreased opportunity for exercising professional discretion.

- (3) A need to develop new skills related to computer processing.
- (4) An increase in the demands for bureaucratic processes in the form of manuals and protocols.
- (5) An increase in workload as part of officer accountability.

The findings from a number of studies (Farrow, 2004; Holt, 2000; Trotter, 1999) suggest that these changes are likely due to fundamental shifts in ideology. A decade ago, social work approaches defined the operational ideology and practices of probation work. Present day operational ideology is concerned with the centralization of decision-making authority (less officer decision-making autonomy) and funding linked targets (offender programming) to reduce offender risk. Although worker commitment continues to be acknowledged as important in changing offender behavior, current probation operational practices appear to place less emphasis on this relationship, and look more to programming and cognitive behavioral methods as effective risk-management strategies.

### Summary

Based on the review of the relevant literature, it appears that there are several gaps in the research that support the need for more research on probation officers and their work environment. First, the under-representation of probation officers in the research literature represents a significant gap in our knowledge about the unique aspects of this career. Second, despite the calls of researchers in both the career, and stress and coping fields, there does not appear to be any research regarding the strategies and techniques that are relevant and effective for helping probation officers to cope well with change in their current work environment. Third, much of the stress and coping research thus far

has focused on the negative psychological outcomes of coping. And further, the research strategies used in these studies have almost exclusively relied upon a quantitative methodology, which does not allow for a deeper understanding of the coping process.

The current study was designed to begin addressing these gaps. By taking a positive psychology approach, and by utilizing qualitative methodologies that used open-ended questions, the current study sought to examine how probation officers coped well with on-going change that affected their work. It was hoped that their experiences of change would contribute to the knowledge about the impact of the work environment on coping ability. It was also hoped that the results of this study would contribute to the development of career theories and vocational counselling strategies that would help individuals to more effectively manage their careers in this contemporary, ever-changing work world.

Although current research has begun to focus on the factors associated with positive coping, a holistic understanding of the coping process requires a focus on the positive aspects of coping as well, and the use of qualitative research methods that allow for an in-depth understanding of the coping experience. By examining the environment of change in which probation officers work, and their subjective experiences of coping well, it was hoped that their responses would add to the knowledge about the positive side of the coping process, and perhaps be of use in developing strategies that are effective for reducing coping stress in clinical practice. By examining the factors that either help or hinder probation officers' ability to cope well, it was also hoped that the current study would shed a light on some of the supports or barriers that individuals encounter when dealing with change.

The next chapter will discuss the research methodologies used to explore the current research questions, including the study design, participants, and data collection, and analysis procedures.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview of the Study Design**

Polkinghorne (1991) suggests that, “the purpose of qualitative research is to produce full and integrated descriptions of an experience or situation under study and to derive explanatory concepts and categories from the data” (p. 163). The current study was a qualitative, exploratory study that focused on three research questions: 1) what is the lived experience of experienced probation officers who are coping well with change, 2) what are the self-sustaining strategies probation officers use to cope well with on-going change in their work life, what hindered them from doing well, and were there things that would have been helpful but were unavailable, and 3) Did the research interview itself have an impact on probation officers’ sense of well being.

Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology (Husserl, 1962) method was chosen to address the first research question because it is concerned with investigating and describing the presence of a phenomenon precisely as it is given or experienced, and in terms of the meaning that phenomenon has for those experiencing it. By obtaining a rich, detailed description of the experience of being a probation officer, the phenomenological portion of the study illuminated the issues and experiences that were the most meaningful to this group of workers and thus, helped to establish the context for the critical incident portion of the study.

The critical incident method was chosen to address the second research question because it enabled issues to be viewed from the frame of reference of the participant, i.e., their feelings and attitudes on matters that are of critical importance to them. The

advantage of using the CIT is that the linkage between context, strategy and outcome is more readily teased out because the technique focuses on a particular event, which is explained in relation to what happened, why it happened, how it was handled, and what the consequences were (Cassell & Symon, 2005). An unstructured interview does not require a participant to focus in this way. So, while phenomenology assumes the uniqueness of individual consciousness, the CIT enables the researcher to gain insights both into particular cases and across a sample of cases in that typical issues raised by a particular group of respondents may be identified. For example, is there a common set of problems, or are coping strategies rare or typical?

Finally, the pretest/posttest approach was appropriate for the third research question because it is a research method that is commonly used to address the impact of an event or intervention.

### **The Phenomenological Research Method**

A descriptive phenomenological approach to research is concerned with the study of experiences from the perspective of the individual and thus, emphasizes the importance of the personal perspective and interpretation. As such, it is a powerful method for understanding subjective experience, gaining insight into peoples' motivations and actions, and for cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions (Cresswell, 2005; Holroyd, 2001; Wertz, 2005).

The phenomenological research method grew out of the work of the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). The purpose of Husserl's work was to broaden the concepts and methods of scientific exploration by including the study of consciousness and human experience. Husserl's (1962) descriptive phenomenology adopts the

methodological principle that scientific knowledge begins with a fresh and unbiased description of the subject matter under study (Wertz, 2005). According to Jasper (1994), phenomenology considers that the true meaning of phenomena be explored through the experience of them as described by the individual. The task is to investigate and describe all phenomena including human experiences in the way that they are lived.

Phenomenology as a research method examines the particular experiences of unique individuals in a given situation, thus exploring not what is (reality), but what it is perceived to be.

The two terms most synonymous with phenomenological inquiry are “essence” and “lived experience”. The first term “essence” is taken to mean the most essential meaning for a particular context. Phenomenology is essentially the study of essences; accordingly all investigative practices are concerned with finding definitions of essences, such as the essence of an experience. In descriptive phenomenology, a researcher is interested in discovering essences of a phenomenon from lived experiences (Giorgi, 1989).

The second term, “lived experiences” represents those experiences that reveal the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness a person has regarding events in which they have participated. These lived experiences serve as the basis for recalling how the individual lived through the event, thereby transforming them into objects of consciousness. The ability to recall the experience implies that the person must already have been constituted it as meaningful (Giorgi, 1989).

Rieman (1986) stated that the general guiding question in phenomenological research is: “What is the essence of this phenomenon, as experienced by these people?” The specific guiding questions are: “What is the phenomenon that is experienced and lived?”

and “How does it show itself?” Phenomenology aims to forage through the layers of interpretation to disclose experience as it unfolds relatively naively in peoples’ initial contact and involvement in a situation. In this study the participants were both male and female probation officers who had worked as a probation officer for many years, and who had also experienced a number of changes over the course of their career, who were coping well with those changes and were willing to talk about them.

Phenomenology was an appropriate method for this component of the present study because it permitted me to describe rather than explain. It is an ideal method for researching a subjective concept such as the meaning of the lived experience of being immersed in another culture such as probation and for understanding social phenomena from the individual’s own frame of reference. Thus, it was particularly effective in bringing to the fore, the lived experiences and perceptions of probation officers from their own perspectives (Beck, 1994; Creswell, et al., 2007; Priest, 2002; Wertz, 2005).

### **The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) Research Method**

The critical incident technique (CIT) was developed by Flanagan (1954) as a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in order to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems. CIT is a methodology that can be used to study effective or ineffective ways of doing something, collect functional or behavioral descriptions of events or problems, and to derive helping and hindering factors.

Although Flanagan (1954) originally developed the CIT to gather information for use in the aviation psychology program of the United States in World War II, it has since been used by a number of researchers in diverse fields to explore a wide variety of issues such as: workplace stress and coping processes (O’Driscoll & Cooper, 1994), how

individuals overcome depressed moods after a diagnosis of HIV (Alfonso, 1997), factors that contribute to effective communication (Query & Wright, 2003); effective and ineffective nursing practices (Benner, 1984; Grant & Reimer, 1987; Keating, 2002); productive retail service practices (Gremler, 2004); effective education and teaching practices (LeMare & Sohbat, 2002; Parker, 1995) and successful strategies for performance appraisal (Evans, 1994).

Woolsey (1986) suggested that the use of CIT is extremely applicable to the field of counselling and psychotherapy research, thus, opening the door for researchers in the field of career and employment research to apply the method to the examination of factors that help or hinder in group counselling, and in dealing with unemployment and downsizing experiences (Amundson et al., 2004; Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Borgen et al., 1990; Borgen et al., 2002; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Butterfield et al., 2009).

The CIT methodology has evolved from the technique originally developed by Flanagan (1954) that focused on observed activities, to its present form that captures psychological events as well as personal meaning. CIT now involves asking participants to provide details including (1) what led up to the incident; (2) their responses to the incident, the responses of other people; and (3) the outcome or consequence of their own and others' behaviors (McCormick, 1994; Morley, 2003). A particular strength of the CIT approach is that it links specific strategies that individuals use to the actual change event, thus establishing ecological validity. This helps to ensure that the incidents studied are relevant to the participants' experiences. Because the CIT method allows for free-expression through the process of an open-ended interview and the categorization of

experiences by way of its structured format, it appeared to be most appropriate for furthering an understanding of probation officers' perceptions of the helping and hindering factors that either enhance or impede their ability to cope well with change.

### **The Quantitative Pre-and Post-Test Design**

The quantitative component of this research resulted from anecdotal information collected from participants in CIT studies undertaken by the Counselling Psychology Program, at the University of British Columbia, which revealed that the process of being interviewed helped them to feel better and happier in relation to their experiences of change in their work environment (Alfonso, 1997; Amundson et al., 2004; Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Amundson & Morley, 2002; Borgen et al., 2002; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; Borgen & Maglio, 2004; Butterfield, 2001; Butterfield, 2006; Butterfield & Borgen, 2005; Butterfield et al., 2005; Butterfield et al., 2009; McCormick, 1994; Morley, 2003).

In order to follow in the same vein as this prior research and ultimately to determine if the interview itself had any impact on the participants' sense of well being, a scaling question was asked: "On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is doing very poorly, 5 is OK, and 10 is doing very well, where would you place yourself?" This question was asked at the start of the interview and again at the end of the interview, immediately following the critical incident component of the study. At this point, the participants had the ability to reflect back on the entirety of their answers pertaining to their experience of being a probation officer, the changes they mentioned, and the helping, hindering and wish list items. If the score they reported was different from the score they identified at the beginning of the interview process, they were asked "What's made the difference?" It

was theorized that some participants would benefit from the experience of sharing their stories with the researcher, and that the impact of this experience would be reflected by higher scores on the second scaling question (Butterfield, 2006; Butterfield et al., 2009).

### **Participants and Sampling Procedures**

#### Participant Inclusion Criteria

The participants in the current study were all experienced probation officers who worked at various probation offices in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. They ranged in age from 38 to 58; five were male officers, while fifteen were female officers. Because this study was intended to reflect the work experiences of “experienced” probation officers, the age of the participants included those who were age forty and older (38 was thought to be close enough to this target age). The majority of the officers were married or involved in common-law relationships (70%), 20% were single, while 10% were separated. Education levels included 14 participants with a bachelor degree (70%), two with a master degree (10%) and four with Diplomas (20%). Their years of employment as a Probation Officer ranged from 7.5 years to 28 years.

In order to be included in the study, participants had to be experienced probation officers who met five inclusion criteria; 1) they were older (age 40 and older), seasoned workers (it was felt that older, seasoned workers would have experienced more events over the course of their career and would therefore, have a broader, richer perspective of the career overall, 2) they had experienced changes that effected their work, 3) they self-identified as coping well with these changes, 4) they were willing to make a commitment of approximately three hours, and 5) they were willing to talk about their experiences.

Purposive sampling was used in the current study. Purposive sampling refers to judgmental sampling that involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain participants to include in the study (Burns & Grove, 1998). I expected that all of the probation officers who participated in my study would be comfortable discussing their experiences and would have insight and be able to reflect on their experiences of being a probation officer, and the changes they have experienced.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study utilized two in-depth, open-ended interviews to collect data. The purpose of the first interview was to collect information for the phenomenological, CIT, and scaling questions. The first interview lasted for approximately two hours. The purpose of the second interview was to review the results of the first interview with the participants, and to ensure that the way in which the information was organized reflected their experiences. The second interview lasted approximately one hour.

#### Assumptions of the Interview

Phenomenological interviews are a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in the theoretical tradition of phenomenology (Mashall & Rossman, 1995). There is a relationship between the philosophical tradition and the method, which distinguishes this interview format from others. This distinction is clearly in the relationship between researcher and participant, where the researcher adopts a reflective stance. Such reflectivity acknowledges that the involvement of the researcher as an active participant in the research process shapes the nature of the process and the knowledge produced through it. Adopting a reflective stance (considering the nature of their own involvement) helps the researcher to remain aware of the potential for bias and to bracket



or suspend his/her beliefs about the lived experience being studied in order to remain open to new discovery.

In the phenomenological component of the current study, an open and unstructured interview format was used to collect the phenomenological data. These open-ended questions (see Appendix IV) in the phenomenological component were designed to orient participants to the study by asking questions such as “As a way of getting started, perhaps you could tell me about your experience of being a probation officer?”, “What does being a probation officer mean to you?”, “What does coping well mean to you?”, “What is your experience of change?” , and “What meaning do you attribute to your experiences of change?” The interview questions were designed to elicit rich, descriptive accounts of the participants’ experiences and were purposefully broad and general in nature. It was hoped that the nature and format of the questions would provide the participants with ample opportunity to express their feelings and respond in their own words.

The first scaling question was asked directly after this portion of the interview process. In order to determine if the interview itself had any impact on the participants’ sense of well being at work, they were asked: “On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is doing very poorly, 5 is OK, and 10 is doing very well, where would you place yourself?” This question was asked at the start of the interview and again at the end of the interview, immediately following the critical incident component of the study.

The CIT interviews were also open-ended. However, they followed a semi-structured format. This process of data collection is consistent with a CIT qualitative interview process. According to Kvale (1996) “A qualitative interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level, though it is usually harder to interview on a meaning level.

It is necessary to listen to explicit descriptions and meanings as well as to what is “said between the lines”. The interviewer may seek to formulate the “implicit meanings”; “send it back” to the subject, and obtain an immediate confirmation or disconfirmation of the interviewer’s interpretation of what the interviewer is saying” (p.32).

The critical incident questions are also contained in the Interview Guide (see Appendix IV), following the phenomenological component and the first scaling question. During this portion of the interview, participants were asked to describe incidents or factors that helped them cope well with changes that affected their work (helping factors); what incidents or factors made it more difficult to cope well (hindering factors); and whether there were other things that would have helped them to do even better had they been available (wish list items).

At the end of the critical incident component, the same scaling question was asked again. If there was a difference between the scores on the first and second scaling question, participants were asked what made the difference. Finally, participants were asked whether they had always coped well with change. If they responded with a “no” answer, they were then asked, “When did this change for you?” and “What happened that caused you to begin to cope well with change?”

The final component of the interview was comprised of collecting demographic data that included the participants’ occupation and job level, number of years of service as a probation officer, age, sex, country of birth and first language, marital status, family status, and educational level.

### The Interview Process

In the current study, I conducted all 40 interviews (20 initial interviews and 20 follow-up interviews) myself, either in person (the first interview) or by telephone (the second interview). The in-person interviews generally took place either in the participants' homes, in their work environment, or in places that were comfortable for the participants. All 40 interviews were audio-taped and extensive field notes were taken by me during each interview. I used participant numbers to identify both the field notes and the interview tapes in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Prior to the research interview, the participants were oriented to the study, fully informed of the research questions, the aim of the study, and the type of questions they would be asked. The first interview consisted of four components; the phenomenological component that established the contextual framework for the CIT portion of the study, the scaling questions, the CIT component, and finally, the demographic component. Before commencing with each interview, participants were invited to ask any questions they might have, and review, discuss, and sign the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix III). Only then did the interview process begin.

The interviews were an open dialogue focused on the aim of the study. As participants described their experiences and the critical incidents, I took extensive notes. Both descriptive experiences and factual incidents were explored as well as the meaning these incidents held for the participants. At different times throughout the interview, follow-up questions were asked in order to explore what was being said between the lines. Many descriptions of both experiences and critical incidents held multiple

meanings for the participants. In these cases participants were asked to elaborate on what the most meaningful aspects of the event were for them.

Open-ended prompts such as “Can you tell me more about that?” or “What else can you tell me about your experience?” were also used to simply explore the participants’ experiences and descriptions in more detail. The interviews were focused first on eliciting experiences, and events, then on the meaning of the experience, event or incident with clarifying and follow-up questions being asked throughout. In every interview participants reflected back and began to describe experiences and incidents that affected their ability to cope well beginning from when they joined the Probation Service through to the present. This allowed the interview to flow, and made for a natural process of reflection over time.

The second interviews were conducted approximately 12 months following the first interviews. This lengthy interval between the interviews occurred for two reasons: 1) I transcribed all of the interviews myself, and 2) the volume of rich and complex data was extensive and took longer than I anticipated to analyze and code. When I was ready to proceed with the second interviews, I contacted all of the 20 participants and e-mailed a copy of the results of the study that pertained to them, along with full instructions on what they were being asked to do. At the same time, I scheduled an appointment for the second interview. All of the 20 participants selected to be re-interviewed by telephone. Participants were invited to contact me if they had any questions. The primary purpose of these second interviews was to achieve consensual credibility of my findings. With this purpose in mind, I discussed my thematic analysis with each participant in terms of whether the themes I uncovered fit with their experience of being a probation officer. All

of the second interviews occurred over speaker phone. This allowed for them to be audio-taped. I also took extensive field notes during each interview to capture the discussion details.

The second interviews varied in length between one hour to one hour and a half. Eighteen of the twenty participants confirmed that the findings of my study represented their personal experiences of being a probation officer, the meaning inherent in the experience of being a probation officer, and the helping, hindering and wish list items. Their comments included “Yeah, you got it”, “Yep, that’s it”, “No, I wouldn’t add anything”, “Wow, I don’t remember saying all of that, but that sounds just like what I would say”. One participant commented that she did not like hearing the comments that she made about the new probation officers, elaborating that her comments sounded “mean”. However, she affirmed that they were her experiences and did not request any changes. Two other participants requested that I add additional information. One officer reported that her circumstances had changed since our first interview and she wanted me to reflect that her current experiences with her new manager were positive, that she felt supported by him, and that she perceived him to care about her as a person. She also wanted to add that her job duties had changed, that she had taken on a more intensive caseload, that her skills were being better utilized by this work assignment, and that she felt more valued and relevant in her work. The second officer wanted to add that her feelings about the formalization of a senior parole officer position had changed. They were now positive and supportive. She reported that she had encountered some difficulties in her personal life and found the support she received from the senior parole officer in her office to be very helpful. She requested that I represent the change

involving the development of a senior parole officer position as positive rather than negative.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data in the current study were the written transcriptions of the audio-taped interviews. I transcribed all twenty of the first interviews verbatim. After all twenty transcriptions were completed, I listened to each tape again, reading along with the transcription, adding notes and making any needed corrections as I went. I also added observations from my field notes about any physical or nonverbal gestures, thus assuring that the participants' exact meanings of experiences were accurately represented. I saved the transcripts in a protected word file on my computer.

The data analysis for the current study involved two components; a phenomenological "explication of the data" analysis and a critical incident analysis. Two complete sets of data files (20 transcripts for each analysis; 40 in total) were loaded into ATLAS/ti 5.0. One set was identified as "phenom" and the other as "CIT". One of the challenges in conducting a qualitative analysis is the vast amount of data it can engender and therefore, the difficulty of managing it. Use of this software did not supplant my role in determining what constituted a "unit of meaning" or a "helping", "hindering" or "wish list" item but rather, facilitated coding and managing the huge amounts of data that were generated by the research questions. As part of the data management process, I began my analysis of the data in the same order that I began my participant interviews; by focusing on the phenomenological data first. I completed the entirety of this analysis before moving on to examine the CIT data.

### **Phenomenological Explication of the Data**

The goal of the phenomenological component of this inquiry was to determine the underlying structures of meaning that constituted the lived experience of being a probation officer (Giorgi, 1997). It was with this objective at the forefront, that I approached my data. Giorgi's (1989) phenomenological method was utilized in analyzing the participants' transcripts. I chose this method because it is a systematic way to uncover and discover the meaning of the lived experience of research participants who have experienced the phenomenon being researched. In Giorgi's phenomenological method of inquiry, explication of the data follows a five-step process that included: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction, 2) delineating units of meaning, 3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, 4) summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it, and 5) extracting general and unique themes from all interviews and making a unique summary (Holroyd, 2001).

After transcribing all of the interviews I commenced with a thorough reading of the data in order to achieve an intuitive understanding of the experience of being a probation officer. As I listened to participants' descriptions of their experiences and read the transcripts again, and again, I began to identify and extract significant statements (meaning units) and coded them accordingly. As different topics began to emerge, I grouped the meaning units with a similar focus together under themes that appeared on first sort to constitute the essential meaning of the experience of interest. I developed lists of these essential themes and continued to re-examine and edit them until I was satisfied that when taken together, they constituted the lived experience of being a probation officer. They were then described and elaborated in a final summary. This

process of identifying, coding, and summarizing meaning units was completed for all 20 interviews.

### **Critical Incident Data Analysis**

Woolsey (1986) suggested that there are three steps in the CIT data analysis process: 1) selecting the frame of reference, 2) forming the categories, and 3) establishing the appropriate level of specificity/generality to use in reporting the data and findings. The interviews for the critical incident component were analyzed and coded one at a time. Each item that was thought to be a critical incident or wish list item was scrutinized in detail to ensure that there was sufficient supporting antecedent and outcome information, and that its meaning or importance had been captured. Items that met the criteria were coded as either helping or hindering critical incidents or wish list items. All of the 652 critical incidents were then grouped into categories in each of the respective areas (i.e., helping, hindering, and wish list items) one interview at a time. When this process was complete, the critical incidents were then reviewed and sorted into categories.

The categories themselves were then examined in order to determine if they were clear, if they could be combined, or whether there was too much overlap between categories. Once this examination of the categories was completed, they were sorted one final time into the final descriptive categories.

### **Phenomenological Trustworthiness/Credibility Checks**

In Phenomenological research, standards of trustworthiness and credibility are established by the believability, accuracy, rightness of fit, and usefulness of the research to people beyond those who participated in it (Beck, 1994). Methods of establishing trustworthiness and credibility include: acknowledging the subjective judgments of the



researcher, verification of the accuracy of the data with participants, using low inference descriptors (verbatim accounts), and peer debriefing whereby findings are regularly presented to others for peer evaluation (Beck, 1994; Creswell et al., 2005; Priest, 2002; Wertz, 2005).

I found one of the most helpful ways to remain cognizant of the potential ethical considerations I mentioned above, was to step back from the research process and adopt a “reflexive posture”. Some of the reflexive questions I formulated for myself included: Whose voice does the research process privilege? Whom does the research benefit? To whom is it a problem? Why is it of current concern? Why is this group being studied? What is doable? What does it mean for an individual participant to share their life story? How do I give back to the individual or community?

I sought to ensure the credibility of my research findings by transcribing the interview tapes verbatim and by doing my best to articulate my assumptions on the research topic and document my lived experience as a parole officer who has also experienced to some degree, the phenomenon under study. I accomplished this by maintaining extensive notes of my experiences with each of my participants, exploring and journaling my feelings and documenting my own reactions, experiences, insights, and reflections. All efforts have been made to accurately represent the participants’ experience and the meaning of their experience to them, knowing inherently that the meaning making process is littered with interpretations.

In order to ensure that that I had “bracketed” out my own ideas and opinions from the analysis and that I had indeed accurately represented the participants’ experiences, I asked a Psychologist who has worked with Probation Officers both in and out of their

work environment to review the themes that emerged representing the experience of being a probation officer, and ascertain that they were consistent with his experience of the phenomena. His feedback confirmed that my findings achieved a degree of “fittingness” between my interpretations and the lived experience of probation officers (Koch, 1994). The final aspect of establishing trustworthiness of the findings was concerned with theoretical agreement or comparing the emergent categories against relevant scholarly literature. Support for all of the emergent themes was found in the literature.

A final credibility check involved returning to the participants to ensure that the extracted themes represented their experiences. The participants were provided with a transcription of their interview, asked to review the analysis and emergent themes, and comment on the degree to which the themes represented their experience. All of the 20 participants responded to the phenomenological themes and confirmed that they accurately represented their experiences. When new, relevant data were offered, these data were incorporated into the final analysis and summary of the data.

### **CIT Trustworthiness/Credibility Checks**

In the CIT component of the research, a total of nine credibility and trustworthiness checks were conducted for the current study. These methods for determining credibility and trustworthiness are consistent with those suggested by Butterfield et al., 2005, Butterfield et al., 2009, Flanagan (1954), Borgen and Amundson (1984), Koch, (1994), Kvale, (1996), and Woolsey (1986).

Descriptive Validity The first means of determining trustworthiness was aimed at providing descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992). In this regard I audio-taped all of my

interviews to ensure the accuracy of the participants' accounts. Throughout the data analysis process, I worked from verbatim transcripts of the tape-recorded interviews. Participant cross-checking that occurred during the second interviews gave the participants an opportunity to check the initial categories against their contents, confirm the soundness of the category and thematic titles, and to assess the findings for congruence between my interpretations and their accounts of events and experiences. As stated earlier, all of the participant interviews, including the first and second validation interview were audio-taped in order to capture their exact words and the nuances or pauses that added emphasis to what was expressed. The participants verified that the overall written descriptions and meaning structures of their lived experiences were accurate and relevant.

Fidelity The second credibility check was that of fidelity. This entails asking an expert in the CIT research method to listen to a sample of an interview tape to ensure the researcher is following the CIT method and maintaining consistency. This is intended to uphold the rigor of the research design and check for leading questions being asked by the interviewer. This check is consistent with Creswell's (2007) contention that a method's protocols and practices must be followed in order to achieve credibility. I submitted every fourth interview audiotape to an expert in the CIT research method. Her feedback confirmed that the interviews were conducted in accordance with the CIT research method.

Independent Extraction The third credibility check that involves an independent extraction of the critical incidents consists of asking a person who is familiar with CIT to independently extract the critical incidents and wish list items from 25% of the interview

transcripts. Once the incidents have been extracted, the researcher calculates the level of agreement between what he or she thought was a critical incident and what the independent coder thought was a critical incident. The higher the agreement rate, the more credible the claim that the extracted incidents represent the participants' helping, hindering, and wish list items. It is generally agreed that independently extracting 25% of the total critical incidents and wish list items is sufficient (Nilsson, 1964). I submitted five (25%) randomly selected transcripts and forwarded them to an independent coder to extract the critical incidents and wish list items. The coder was a Doctoral level researcher who was familiar with the CIT method. We achieved between a 95-100% match-rate for the critical incidents, confirming that that extracted items were representative of the participants' experiences.

Exhaustiveness The fourth credibility check is that of exhaustiveness. According to Andersson and Nilsson (1964), reliability is determined by tracking the point at which new categories stop emerging during the process of sorting new critical incidents and wish list items into tentative categories. Woolsey (1986) suggested that the researcher can assume adequate coverage of a domain when only two or three critical behaviours emerge when 100 incidents are gathered. At this point it is believed that the activity being studied has been adequately covered and has reached a point of "saturation". In the current study "saturation" was achieved after the seventh interview. Eighty per cent of the critical incidents and wish list items that were extracted from this transcript were placed into existing categories, suggesting the domain of the psychological construct being studied had been sufficiently covered.

Participation Rates The fifth credibility check is participation rates. According to Flanagan (1954), the more often independent observers report the same incident, the more likely it is that the incident is important to the aim of the study. Borgen and Amundson (1984) established a participation rate of 25% for a category to be considered credible. Each of the categories in the current study achieved the 25% test, indicating that the category scheme was viable.

Independent Placement of Incidents into Categories The sixth credibility check involves an independent judge placing 25% of the critical incidents into tentative categories initially formed by the researcher. Woolsey (1986) suggests a 75-85% agreement is required between the researcher and independent judge. I randomly selected and submitted 25 % of the total critical incidents to a Masters level therapist who was unfamiliar with the CIT method. The therapist received a list of categories and the category descriptions. The critical incidents and wish list items were provided to the therapist in random order. In cases where the independent judge did not understand the terminology used by the participants, agreement was achieved after discussion, and by providing the therapist with background information about the incident. The overall match rate was between 85% and 95%. The results suggested the categories were sound.

Cross-Checking by Participants The seventh credibility check involved participant cross-checking of the data from the first interview. This cross-check is intended to give participants a chance to review their critical incidents and wish list items, comment on whether the categories make sense and the extent to which their experiences were adequately represented by the category titles and to either add, delete or amend their critical incidents. This check is consistent with Fontana and Frey's (2000) contention

that researchers need to respect participants' expertise in their own histories and perspectives. All of the participants responded to the second interviews and confirmed the helping, hindering and wish list items extracted from their first interviews were accurate. All of the participants confirmed that the category headings made sense and accurately represented the meaning of their experiences; and that the incidents had been placed in the appropriate categories.

Expert Opinion The eighth credibility check involves submitting the tentative categories to two or more experts in the field. The experts review the categories and comment on whether they find them useful, whether they are surprised by any of the categories, and whether they think something is missing based on their experience. The rationale (Eilbert, 1953; Flanagan, 1954) is that the credibility of the tentative categories is enhanced if the experts find them useful. I sought opinions from two experts in the field; one a probation officer who did not participate in the study and the second a psychologist who is familiar with Probation work. Both individuals stated that the categories made sense and that they fit with their experience of probation officers' work experiences. The Psychologist suggested that I expand my category for spirituality to be more specific about what I meant by the term (e.g., religiosity). The second expert confirmed the appropriateness of the categories. The experts confirmed that all 10 categories were useful and appropriate and therefore, added to their trustworthiness.

Theoretical Agreement The ninth and final credibility check is theoretical agreement. According to Maxwell (1992) the concept of theoretical validity consists of making the assumptions underlying the research project explicit and comparing the emergent categories against relevant scholarly literature. The first aspect of theoretical validity is

concerned with the assumptions underlying the study. Evidence for the support for all of the underlying assumptions was found in the organizational change, stress and coping, social psychology, positive psychology, thriving, criminal justice and career literature, suggesting that the assumptions underlying the current study are sound.

The second aspect of theoretical agreement is concerned with comparing the emergent categories against relevant scholarly literature. Support for all of the critical incident categories was found in the literature.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

### **Overview of Chapter Four**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the current study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the data obtained during the phenomenological component of the interviews where the participants offered their unique perspectives on their experience of being a probation officer and the meaning they associated with the role. The next section presents the data collected during the critical incident component of the interviews. The final section discusses the impact of the interview on the participants, examines the results of the pre-and post- interview scaling question results, and reasons for the differences in the scores.

### **Phenomenology Results**

#### **The Experience of Being a Probation Officer**

One of the purposes of the current research was to explore what self-sustaining strategies probation officers use to help them cope well with on-going change in their work. As one of the underlying assumptions of this study asserts, the ability to cope well with an experience is influenced by both the nature of the event or experience and the meaning that an individual attributes to the experience or event. So, rather than just simply linking stressors to specific factors or incidents, I felt that it was first important to understand how individual probation officers assigned meaning to their experiences of change in the context of their role of being a probation officer and additionally, to ascertain what coping well meant to them. The phenomenological component of this study addressed this purpose by asking probation officers to describe their lived experience of being a probation officer in relation to their experiences of change in the



work environment and further, to elucidate the most essential meaning of these experiences.

Five hundred and ninety five (595) significant statements were extracted from the 20 verbatim transcripts that contained the participants' responses to the questions: "Tell me about your experience of being a probation officer?", "What does being a probation officer mean to you?", "What does coping well mean to you?", "What is your experience of change?", and "What meaning do you attribute to your experiences of change?" Because the participants' responses to each question resulted in data that was both rich and extensive, I chose to present the results pertaining to each question separately.

As my goal as a researcher was to examine both the nature of the experiences reported by the participant probation officers and the meaning the experiences held for them, the reported experiences were first grouped into themes that represented the nature of the event (the lived experience). For example, every experience reported by a participant probation officer that related to a function of their job duties was arranged under the theme "Nature of the Work". Further separation of these events into Positive and Negative allowed the events to be grouped according to the meaning (the essence) the event held for the officer. Because explaining by example is one of the best ways to enhance understanding, quotations containing the participants' exact words were used to facilitate explanation and meaning.

The participant responses pertaining to the question "What does being a probation officer mean to you?" resulted in seven major themes. They are listed in Table 1 and range from the themes with the most frequently cited participant experiences to the least. They are discussed immediately following the table.

Table 1: Themes From: “What is Your Experience of Being a Probation Officer?”

Theme	Meaning Association
Nature of the work	<b>Positive</b> -Includes: working with clients; interacting with other community resources; interacting with colleagues; protecting the community; working as part of a team
	<b>Negative</b> -Includes: chained to the computer; loss of autonomy over caseloads; increased accountability; the clients are more dangerous; less time to do good work; increased workload
Coping Strategies	<b>Positive</b> -Includes: emotional disengagement; balance compassion and distancing; leave work at work; home/work balance; get informed; focus on what works; fly under the radar; exercise
Management Support/ Style	<b>Positive</b> -Includes: mgt. style-two-way communication (local and upper); support; experienced; mgrs. As mentors
	<b>Negative</b> -Includes: style-autocratic; lack of support; inexperienced; young
Work Environment	<b>Positive</b> -Includes: good relationships with colleagues; social activities; private office space; flexible work hours; flex days; use of humor
	<b>Negative</b> -Includes: working in isolation; fear of discipline; negative colleagues; lack of job opportunities; inflexible work hours; stress
Colleagues	<b>Positive</b> -Includes: supportive; experienced; shared experience and philosophy; sounding board; mentors
	<b>Negative</b> -Includes: rude to clients; negative attitude
Training	<b>Positive</b> -Includes: at the Justice Institute; build connections; increased confidence; face-to-face learning
	<b>Negative</b> -Includes: on-line; impersonal; hard to retain information; no feedback
New Probation Officers	<b>Negative</b> - Includes: no life experience; attitude; not trained; lack critical thinking skills; enforcement oriented

### Nature of the Work

Participant responses relating to the experience of being a probation officer were primarily associated with the different duties that comprise the nature of their work. I captured these experiences under the theme “Nature of the Work”. The various duties included: working with clients, interacting with community resources, protecting the community, caseload numbers, autonomous decision-making, computer data entry, and increased accountability to policy. The participants attributed both positive and negative meaning associations to their experiences of “work” and in order to best capture the essential nature of these unique experiences, they were further grouped under the headings of “Positive” and Negative”.

Positive Positive experiences related to the aspects of probation officers’ work that included: being able to take part in different community-based projects, being able to advocate for their clients, writing reports, working with victims, facilitating core programs, interacting with other individuals in the Criminal Justice System (e.g. crown counsel, police, court clerks), attending court, the variety and challenge of the job, and working with their clients in order to help them effect change. What stood out was the participants sense of commitment to their work, that they genuinely liked their work and that they viewed their job as a vehicle in which they could make a positive contribution to society. They appreciated the variety of opportunities and tasks within the job and they expressed pride in their role of being a probation officer. The following participant quotes capture the essence of some of these experiences:

I say I have the best job. I love my job. I love it because it’s always changing. There are things that we can do to have an impact and there are things that I can say at the end of the day, not every day, but at the end of many days, I can say I

made a difference. I love my job because it allows me to make choices and I love the interactions with the other agencies and programs that I work with, the other services.

I really like my job and I think that's great after 18 years is that I really do. I like my job. I think I am passionate about it. I am passionate about working with people. I mean everything from core, I like teaching, uhm...I, you know maybe it's the social work part of it that I enjoy. I also don't mind doing the enforcement part of it too. I guess I like the variety of the job, you know you sort of...each person is different and you take them where they are at".

The relationship, that one on one with the client makes you feel good because the person is trusting you. You can work with that person, you can actually get you know, when you get to know the person you know where the weak points are. And these people open up to you, they become honest with you, you know. And you can actually do things with these people.

Negative In this theme, the participants described different aspects of their job that reduced the meaning of their career experience. These included loss of their decision-making ability, increased accountability in relation to their clients' behaviour, the increased dependence on the computer (data entry), the high risk nature of their clients, large caseloads and an increased workload, the organizational shift away from a client-centered focus to a focus on productivity and quantitative outcomes, and the lack of time to do quality work. The participants attributed these detractors to organizational policy initiatives that in many instances, radically changed the way in which they functioned in their role, and in so doing reduced the most meaning-making aspects of the work resulting in negative outcomes such as: increased stress, frustration and a desire to leave the career. The following quotes capture the essence of some of these experiences:

...You were valued for your opinion and your judgment and your ability to sort of deal with people and how you felt was the best way. And its been slowly, slowly changing by taking away from your personal judgment, your professional judgment. They hired you, they hired you assuming that you could do this job, but then they want to keep interfering, you know. Quit interfering just let me do it. Let me do it how I think it should go. I'm not going to break the rules of not

seeing people, all these things, right. I liked it better before because I felt more free to make decisions that I felt were appropriate for each person, because it's impossible on paper you know.

Just the stress of worrying about your clients, if they are going to do something bad in the community and you're going to be held accountable for it. And ahh...that's another huge irony, is that here I am wanting to do the best job I can for my clients. I'm wanting to do, I'm wanting to make positive changes in their lives, help them make positive changes in their lives. However, I'm also very worried that if anything they do; screw up or mess up, it's me that's going to get burned on my job. And what other job has that you know what I mean. It's just the biggest irony.

I'm happy when I leave at the end of the day, you know. I don't want to be here any longer than I have to. I worry all the time that you know, a case is going to go sideways and I haven't done something that I should have done. There's..back to that fear, you know that uhm...yeah. It makes me not want to be in this line of work anymore which is a shame because the clients I like, and I don't feel any, I've never felt that anything that ever happened with a client stressed me out or made me not want to be in the work I'm doing. It's the other end that makes me not want to be doing the work any more.

### Coping Strategies

In this theme, the participants described various coping strategies that they developed in order to create a balance between maintaining aspects of their work that they enjoyed and complying with policy initiatives that they felt reduced the meaning in their work. By adopting a particular strategy or attitude or perspective, they were better able to cope with the demands of their work. Their coping strategy experiences represented a range of emotional dispositions including self-sacrifice-based coping, proactive-adaptive coping, and emotional disengagement. This theme differs from the other phenomenological themes in the sense that the officers attributed only positive meaning associations to their coping experiences.

In relation to the self-sacrifice coping strategy, the participants described experiences where they coped by directing the majority of their energy and efforts to maintaining the aspects of the job that provided them with the most meaning such as their work with clients. The following participant quotes typify this coping stance:

I want to work with my clients and I want to do that with integrity. So if that means that I sacrifice on the other end, then I sacrifice on the other end. I don't get my paperwork done.

I'm the rebel where I don't care what they say, I do it anyways. And I know my work is good, but if they can't accept it, then really I just say now it's their problem. I won't take in on anymore because it's, it's, I will lose what I like in the job if I do. I won't let them beat me out of that. And that's one thing I've learned, I will be behind, so be it. I've accepted that.

Other descriptions of coping strategy experiences suggested more of a pro-active, adaptive stance:

I've always changed jobs or I've had to take on new tasks, that's what kept me going. I have to find something different about my job.

Well the job is stressful, but I found that exercise really helps a lot with the physical stress of it.

I think a big part of it is your own personal willingness to be flexible, to change.

I knew my contract; I got to know my contract. That was a coping strategy. I know the rules and when I felt disrespected by Branch management, the employer had to abide by them.

For others, their coping strategy experiences had more of an emotionally disengaging focus:

I find that to manage all the stress, to manage the stress of keeping up with deadlines and taking care of people and covering your ass, working extra hours, because I am the type that's going to take that hour with the client when they need it, that I just, I have been able to chose to forget about it.

Well I feel the way in which I cope with that is ultimately not allow it to affect me personally. Like, I really have developed a skill to leave that at work.

Finally, other descriptions of coping strategy experiences evoked more of a lamenting focus; coping by remembering the work for what it was, not what it is:

I like what I'm doing. And that's I think that's the struggle we all have, because deep down we do like our job. But we like it because we remember what it was. And I think a lot of us are still doing what we used to do and giving whatever they tell us to do lip service.

### Management Support/Style

This theme represents participants' descriptions of experiences that involved interactions with their managers, both at the local and regional levels of the organization. Their experiences pertained to a manager's style of managing, whether they were supportive or not, and their skills and abilities. Again, the participants attributed both positive and negative meaning associations to their experiences with managers, and in order to best capture the essence of the experiences, they were further grouped under the headings of "Positive" and Negative".

Positive "Positive" management experiences included interactions with managers that helped participants to feel supported, respected, safe, included, and motivated. Positive descriptions of managers included: the ability to engage in "two-way dialogue", the ability to listen and to consider the officers' input in their decisions. As well, the participants described these managers as experienced, knowledgeable, skilled in terms of knowing how to relate to people, and approachable. These managers demonstrated their support for the participants by their willingness to support their decisions. The following participant quotes capture the essence of some of these experiences:

...His whole thing about management was you're an adult, I expect you to work. And like the bar was so high because it wasn't micro-management. Like he didn't care what time you came in or what time you left...you're an adult. It was incredible, the work ethic under him, with no management really. He'd come by and talk to us and just you know, he knew.

I think that when people feel supported they don't feel that same type of pressure because they, I think they feel like they can go to the local manager and talk about what they need to be able to manage their work. And you get local managers basically laying out what time management should look like. That was great with our last local manager, he constantly checked in with people. He was making sure that everybody was working up to their full potential, but not in a negative sense.

It made the job more relaxing. You weren't worried, you just did what you did and if you made a mistake, then you just corrected it. You just knew that if you made a mistake they would support you, and then we'd you know, discuss it and better it. But there was no embarrassing let's get disciplined. They were there to back you up.

Negative "Negative" management experiences resulted in outcomes including: feeling isolated, unsupported, vulnerable, replaceable, and disrespected. The participants also described qualities of their managers that hindered their ability to form connected relationships with them including their lack of life experience and their lack of people skills. The following participant quotes capture the essence of some of these experiences:

Well my boss right now, he is very rational and very logical. I don't think he sees particularly any value in me as a person. He's not the type of person I would go to because he doesn't have the skills. My perception is that my manager doesn't have an integrated mature sense of people skills. So because of that I can't talk to him about anything real. So since I don't, then I'm isolated.

And I think what they don't do is listen to line staff. I really do, I think we're the ones dealing with these people. They had all these managers make decisions who have been off the line staff for so long or they haven't been through all the changes.

Managers weren't as afraid as they are now. Like they come in and they work for corrections for such a short time and before you know it, they're managers. They're following policy, they're not thinking. They just follow policy with very little empathy.

Because they have this tool that they have to use and so they have to call people to task and they have to basically criticize people's work and I think that's what it's basically getting to now. Instead of patting people on the back for a job well



done, they're looking for areas where you are making mistakes and then it becomes a big barrier.

### Work Environment

In this theme, participants described experiences pertaining to their work environment. They commented on the changing demographics in the work environment and the impact on them in terms of their interpersonal relationships. They described the structure of the work environment and how changes to their office space impacted them. They also described the changing nature of the work culture and the impact in terms of reducing their desire to want to remain in the career. Finally, they described their loss of communication and connection with other agencies and resources in the Criminal Justice System and how it impacted their sense of "belonging" and professionalism. The essences of these experiences are captured under the headings "Positive" and "Negative".

Positive Under "Positive" work environment experiences, the participants described experiences that increased their sense of connection, increased their tolerance levels, and helped them to feel supported. They described the advantage of being part of a big organization such as probation, and the pride they felt in being a member of the larger Criminal Justice System. They described experiences where they laughed with their colleagues and enjoyed social activities and outings, and how these interactions helped them to feel connected and supported. The essences of some of these experiences are captured in the following quotations:

The advantage of being part of a big organization is that even when things aren't going well here in the office you're working at, you still have those other relationships with partners in the Justice System.

When I have a positive relationship with colleagues I find humor in the day to day things that otherwise could be stressors. And we'll have that shared experience

that makes it easier not to react. So having positive relationships puts things in perspective and humanizes both us and the clients that we deal with. I'm feeling like I'm normal. I'm fitting in with other people, then I'm more tolerant in the work environment.

Negative Under "Negative" work environment experiences, the participants described experiences that resulted in feeling isolated, a loss of professionalism, a sense of disconnection with other agencies, working in a fear-based work environment and in some cases the erosion of connected relationships with their colleagues. They commented on the changing demographics in the work environment such as the growing imbalance between male and female officers, and the impact in term of interpersonal relationships and their sense of professionalism. The participants also described the structure of their office environment, and how changes such as increased security measures and going from private office spaces to cubicles impacted their sense of professionalism. They described a work culture governed by fear, brought on by their organization's shift in management style that changed from being supportive to micro-managing and taking punitive, disciplinary actions towards officers. They also described experiences such as not having the time to connect with other "players" in the Criminal Justice System, commenting that it reduced their sense of belonging in the Justice System and how at times, the disconnection impeded their ability to perform their duties. It also reduced some of the more meaningful aspects of their job such as going to Court and attending case conferences with other professionals. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of some of these experiences:

I know that there have been safety issues but I just never felt them. I never felt that they were warranted. It just felt closed in, the swipees. I started to feel like maybe I was working in a jail a little bit and it really bothered me.

...but sometimes its feeling governed by fear. It's a fear that you're not doing it right or you don't have the bloody time to do it. I mean I do not have the time to phone the victims. And you just kind of wait for it, you know, one of the files to, that one guy to explode.

...because if you go to any office it's totally dominated by women. I like working with women but I think offices tend to be healthier when you have a good mix of both men and women. And I think in terms of morale, it would be better if we had a good mix.

Because we're so overworked and stressed there is more arguing and anger going on between staff. And it's not because the staff don't like each other, they really do. But when you are overworked people tend to be shorter with each other. And it's created division camps in offices. Well it makes myself and my colleagues feel uncomfortable. Then there's that lack of trust. Who do you trust about anything that you say to a staff member when you have camps? So you're concerned about being betrayed. You don't feel a freedom to say what you want to say.

### Colleagues

In this theme, the participants cited experiences relating to their interactions with their colleagues. They described being mentored by senior officers and receiving invaluable practical skills through observing them work, feeling supported and connected to their colleagues, and being better prepared and more confident because of these interactions. The participants also described the nature of their collegial relationships and the impact of these relationships on their coping ability. The essence of their experiences are captured in "Positive" and "Negative" meaning associations.

Positive "Positive" collegial experiences included occasions where colleagues responded to each other's need for support and by doing so, increased feelings of connectedness and respect. The officers described situations where they relied on their colleagues for feedback, mentoring and modeling of effective and appropriate relationship building skills with clients. They described events where venting to other

colleagues allowed them to de-stress and refocus. Having their colleagues listen and support them also helped them to feel normal. The following participant quotes capture the essence of some of these experiences:

An important part is seeing how your co-workers work. There are many probation officers who I really admire the way they work. The way they deal with clients. You can almost measure the impact that they have. And that came from experience, with time, modeling with other probation officers, seeing how they work.

I can recall going to court and the experience of coming back to the office and everyone wanting to know how did it go, what happened, what did they say, and that camaraderie, that shared experience and support is uplifting. So even when things are scary or shaky, you're not really on your own.

Because it gives you another perspective or just an option. It gives you the ability to talk about it. Whether or not they give you their ideas, just get it out. I think it's a healthy outcome because then I don't let it blow around in my head all day. So from that I learned the value of doing that, of debriefing at the end of the day.

Negative "Negative" collegial experiences included occasions when the officers witnessed their colleagues being abusive towards a client and they described their response in terms of feeling ashamed and angry. They described the influence of negative co-workers or co-workers with personal issues and their feelings of resentment and disrespect. They described situations where their philosophical stance about the work (client centered) clashed with the stance of an enforcement-oriented colleague, and their withdrawal from and lack of trust for that colleague. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of some of these experiences:

I'm quite sensitive to probation officers who have personal issues that interfere with what I think are the basic criteria for being valuable on the job. People who I think have substance abuse issues, people who are not abusive, but so disrespectful to our clientele. That's a challenge for me because at the same time I don't want people to do that, I don't want to be the target of it. It just tremendously bothers me.

I don't know whether it's laziness, whether it's just not wanting to do things, whether it's a philosophy of you're the criminal and I'm not, kind of thing. I really don't know, but I've seen it enough. So I just shut down. But sure it bothers me. Hearing that client being abused so badly by one of the co-workers I work with, she was mean. I have less to do with them.

### Training

In this theme participants described how different training experiences impacted their motivation and ability to do the work. These included training experiences such as their initial three months at the Justice Institute and the resulting positive outcomes such as feeling more knowledgeable, competent, and confident. Finally, the participants described on-line training experiences and how this training format hindered their learning and the development of interpersonal skills and team building. The essence of these experiences are reflected by “Positive” and “Negative” meaning associations.

Positive “Positive” training experiences included an initial three-month training experience at the Justice Institute (JI). Participants were exuberant in their descriptions of this positive experience. They described the excellent quality of this training and noted the life-long connections they made with other colleagues, the friendships that developed, and their feelings of appreciation and loyalty towards the Branch for their investment in them. The following participant quotations reflect the essence of some of these experiences:

We were actually in a classroom where we were interacting with people. We were interacting with our colleagues and we were team building at the same time because all of a sudden these are your colleagues. And those connections I made 18 years ago, I still have to this day.

When I started taking the training, I thought I finally found my place. Well I can't believe I'm so emotional about it, but I felt like we were a family. And in essence we were because we were a small, really a small cog in the corrections

wheel, and that nobody really understood what we did. And it was kind of neat in that way.

Negative “Negative” training experiences pertained to on-line training. The participants commented that on-line training by its nature impeded their ability to learn and as a result, they felt frustrated and inadequately trained. They also discussed the impact of on-line training on the newer probation officers, indicating that they felt they were under-trained and unprepared to do the job. They also commented on the loss of meaningful training opportunities, including those for professional development and the outcome in terms of feeling unmotivated and redundant. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of some of these experiences:

One of the things that’s happened is that all of our training has been forced training. I haven’t had an opportunity in the last 10 years to do any training that I wanted to. Like I want to learn more about drug and alcohol abuse. It’s all like this year we’re introducing this computer program so everybody is going for three days. And so what’s happening is that some of the training we’re going on is really redundant and it’s geared at first or second year probation officers.

They have to take more on-line training while they are in the office, which disrupts the office because while they are training, they can’t be doing any work. The people they bring in today don’t know the job because they’re not trained. So they are not a real help up until 3 or 4 years once they are into their training. So there is this huge lag which the PO24’s have to pick up the slack and do all the work.

### New Probation Officers

In this theme, the participants described their experiences in relation to new colleagues (the “newbies”) in their work environment. The participants described a sense of disconnection with this new group of colleagues. Their disconnection was attributed to philosophical differences in terms of the purpose of the work. They viewed the new officers as more enforcement-oriented rather than client-focused. Additionally, they felt

disconnected in terms of their skill base. The participants described the new probation officers as quite adept at the technical skills, such as data entry and the use of the computer. However, they felt they lacked people skills, had limited life experiences, and poorly developed critical thinking and conflict resolution skills which hindered their ability to work effectively with clients.

These participants attributed a negative meaning association to these experiences. The caveat being that the negative associations were not directed towards the probation officers personally, but rather, the impact that their lack of skills, training, and experience had on them, i.e. it increased their workload. The participant quotes below capture some of these sentiments:

I worry about the type of people that are coming into the field. I think they're different people than we were hiring before. And I think like the old guard are the people who I think really wanted to do that social work kind of piece and I worry that the new people coming in, I mean they're trained on-line for crying out loud. There is no face-to-face learning. And they're right out of university, so most of what they've learned is out of a book. And they're trying to apply these theories, but that's not the way it works. And yet that's what's being reinforced by the way we do our work now. So again, that disconnect between those of us who came in a long time ago and saw the work as something very different.

They're young. The people coming in are still living at home with their parents. And they're telling people, offenders who've been around the block and back several times, have seen it all and done it all and you've got kids telling them what to do, how to lead their lives, what choices to make and it's like "Oh Lord". I mean there's gotta be some believability. I mean if I'm 50 years old and I've got some kid right out of university in their nice little outfit saying "Okay here's the way it's going to work", I'm tuning out. Who are you to tell me anything?

Now the breed that's coming in are sort of more enforcement...I need a job. I don't like this job and then leave as soon as they can. Initially, I think they thought there would be career advancement, but there isn't, so they are looking to move somewhere else.

New people coming into probation did not have that commitment to the overall vision of probation. There was even more of a sense of disconnect there. I saw

them as seeing probation as just another job. They would just as easily be slapping hamburgers as doing bail. There was no commitment to the vision and to the work.

### Summary

The experience of being a probation officer is primarily informed by the nature of the work (job tasks), and by the meaning the officers assign to these specific tasks. For example, probation officers in the current study found the most meaning in the relationship-building aspects of their work, whether that included working with their clients, or interacting with their colleagues and managers. Autonomous decision-making and opportunities for learning and professional development significantly increased their motivation and job satisfaction. Support from managers and colleagues were also important motivational forces in that they helped to validate the officers' sense of accomplishment, thereby increasing their sense of loyalty and feeling of connectedness, which in turn maintained their desire to remain in the career.

The negative aspects of the experience of being a probation officer were also predominately related to the nature of the work. Their organization's shift away from a client-centered focus where the emphasis was on building relationships with clients emerged as a significant source of angst and ideological conflict. The outcome of which, resulted in officers feeling increased stress and fear and a growing dissatisfaction with their career. In an effort to address the conflict, officers adopted creative strategies that helped them to maintain the meaningful aspects of their work and satisfy their sense of moral obligation to their clients while at the same time allowing them to comply with organizational policies. Other negative experiences such as working with more dangerous clients, increased accountability for their clients' behaviour, and the lack of



management support, served to further increase officer stress levels and in so doing, reduced their job satisfaction.

### **What Being a Probation Officer Means**

The stress and coping research (Lazarus, 1968; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) indicates that the way in which a person copes with an experience or event is intrinsic to the meaning they will assign to that experience or event. Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) suggest that positive coping occurs when individuals engage in a three-step process that includes: appraising the situation as positive, engaging in problem-focused coping, and infusing the event with positive meaning. In order to gain an appreciation of the self-sustaining strategies that probation officers use in their process of coping well, it was felt that it would first be important to gain an understanding of how they assigned meaning to their role of being a probation officer. The participants' responses to the question "What does being a probation officer mean to you?" resulted in seven themes. They are listed in Table 2 and range from the themes with the most frequently cited responses to the least. They are discussed immediately following the table.

Table 2: Themes From: “What Does Being a Probation Officer Mean to You?”

Theme	Meaning Association
Being an Agent of Change	Helping people change and being an instrument of social change
Making a Contribution	Being effective and making a contribution to the community
Having Pride in the Career	Being part of a great organization and being proud to be a probation officer
Being a Resource	Offering services and giving people options
Being a Professional	Being a representative of the Court and working in the criminal Justice System

### Being an Agent of Change

In this theme, participants identified being able to help people or establishing relationships with their clients as holding the most meaning for them in their role as a probation officer. The participants used descriptors such as being a coach, being there to assist people, being an instrument of change, interacting with clients, and encouraging change.

### Making a Contribution

Participants commented that making a contribution to the community, keeping the community safe, doing something with their lives, and making a difference provided them with a sense of purpose not only in relation to their role as a probation officer, but in terms of their lives in general. Their sense of contribution was not just related to the specific tasks of their job per se, but rather to their notion that helping clients make positive changes in their lives resulted in safer communities and by association meant that they were contributing to social change on a much broader scale.

### Having Pride in the Career

In this theme, participants' comments included: being part of a great organization, having a career that they were proud of, experiencing their career positively, and having a respectful job. Participants described feeling proud to be a professional who is held in high regard and recognized for the important role they play in keeping society safe.

### Being a Resource

This theme captured the participants' comments about the meaningful role they play in providing service to others through education and their access to resources such as counseling services and needs based treatment. Comments such as helping children,

helping friends, and equalizing the playing field revealed the presence of a greater social conscience in the sense that the officers felt a sense of responsibility to use their knowledge and access to government resources in order to help those people who are most vulnerable and in need.

### Being a Professional

In this theme, participants described their role as a representative of the Court, being part of the public service agenda, being an advocate for clients, wearing two hats in terms of having to balance their dual role of enforcement officer and counselor, working in the Criminal Justice System and actualizing the social agenda of Corrections. Their comments reflected the value they attribute to being a professional within the larger Criminal Justice System, rather than being an officer only within a specific probation office.

### Having Skills and Knowledge

Comments such as “It’s not something anybody can do well” captured the participants’ sentiment that they are uniquely suited to do probation work and that they associate a degree of expertise and skill to the role. The participants expressed pride in the acquisition of considerable knowledge and skills over the course of their careers and viewed these attributes as valuable not only in terms of being able to assist their clients, but also in terms of being a respected resource to other agencies such as Crown Counsel and Police.

### Summary

For these participants, the essence of being a probation officer was intrinsically linked to the ability to help others and to make a contribution to society. The officers

appreciated and valued the skills, knowledge, and abilities that resulted from their training because these experiences provided them with insight, awareness of the plight of others, and empathy for suffering. Being a probation officer provided them with the opportunity to actualize deeply held values and beliefs about helping others and thus, the ability to become better people.

### **What Coping Well Means**

Since understanding how people interpret and respond to differing situations is intrinsically important to understanding the way in which they cope, it was felt that it would be important to determine what coping well meant to each participant. The probation officers who participated in the study were invited to provide their responses to the question “What does coping well mean to you?” The participants’ responses were grouped into 9 themes that are listed in Table 3. The themes are discussed in detail immediately following the table.

Table 3: Themes From: “What Does Coping Well Mean to You?”

Theme	Meaning Association
Having good relationships with colleagues	Feeling respected by colleagues at work
Being positive	Having a good attitude; going with change; being resilient
Having it together	Staying on top of things; having enough energy to get the job done efficiently and effectively; sleeping at night; not crying; not feeling overwhelmed; venting; not abusing anything; awareness of personal boundaries and limitations; being satisfied with different areas of my life; limiting stress
Having opportunities	Making changes when you can; moving to a different office; learning new skills
Doing activities outside of work	Playing hard outside of work; exercising; building connections with others; doing something fun and personal; reading; volunteering
Leaving work at work	Not taking your job home
Being ethical	Being true to the goal of helping people; being true to your values/principles; not taking sick leave when not needed
Social support	Good personal relationships with spouse family and friends; building connections with others; having balance between work and home
Taking breaks from work	Traveling; holidays

### Having Good Relationships with Colleagues

In this theme, participants reported that receiving positive feedback from their colleagues was an important indicator of coping well. Having their colleagues seek them out for advice or for venting purposes was equally valued as it reinforced the acquisition of important skills and knowledge that in turn, affirmed that they were respected by their colleagues and therefore; successful in their work as a probation officer.

### Being Positive

“Being positive” was also identified as an important indication of coping well. Being positive included: having a good attitude, going with change, being resilient, not hanging on to things you can’t control, focusing on the good aspects of the job, taking direction, prioritizing the work, staying out of politics, moving forward, having a good day and not just wanting to get out, and being flexible. The participants reported that being positive helped them to feel happier, to feel more motivated to come to work, do the work, and to enjoy their work.

### Having it Together

In this theme participant descriptions included: staying on top of things, having enough energy to get the job done efficiently and effectively, sleeping at night, not crying, not feeling overwhelmed, venting, not abusing anything (substances), awareness of personal boundaries and limitations, being satisfied with different areas of my life, and limiting stress. The participants linked these positive emotional coping skills to coping well.

### Having Opportunities

“Having Opportunities” included making changes when you can, moving to a different office, learning new skills, taking on new job tasks. In this theme, coping well was associated with being proactive and seeking out new job opportunities or opportunities for learning, as well as taking on the responsibility for ensuring that the work environment remained positive.

### Doing Activities Outside of Work

This theme included experiences such as: playing hard outside of work, exercising, building connections with others, doing something fun and personal, reading, and volunteering. What was most striking about this theme was the participants’ awareness that having stress relieving outlets outside of their work environment was an important ingredient in their ability to cope well. Stress-relieving outlets included exercising and participating in activities that were creative and fun. One participant mentioned that she arranged her activities at work around having extended lunch hours so that she would have the time to exercise and re-energize during the day.

### Leaving Work at Work

These items highlighted the participants’ awareness that creating balance between their work and home lives was an essential component in their ability to cope well. By “mentally disengaging” from their work, the participants were able to alleviate work stress. This allowed them to reenergize and remain motivated to do the work, which in turn contributed to their job satisfaction.



### Being Ethical

“Being Ethical” included being true to the goal of helping people, maintaining my own style, being true to my values/principles, and not taking sick leave when not needed. The items cited in this theme represented the participants’ beliefs that moral and ethical behaviour play an important role in the ability to cope well. Their comments reflected an awareness of the need to remain vigilant about maintaining congruence between work behaviour and their personal values and principles in relation to treating their clients with dignity and respect. Finally, coping well was associated with ethical conduct (i.e., don’t take sick leave when it’s not warranted, don’t cheat the system).

### Social Support

In this theme, participant comments included: having good personal relationships with spouses, family and friends, and building connections. These comments reflected an awareness of the important role that social support plays in the ability to cope well. They mentioned the positive benefits of maintaining relationships with people outside of their work environment. One participant commented that he feels happier and healthier when his relationships with wife and children are positive. Another participant commented that when she is happy at home she is also happier and more productive at work.

### Taking Breaks From Work

This theme illuminated the participants' awareness of the detrimental role that work stress plays in coping well and the need to disengage in order to re-energize and remain enthusiastic about the work. One participant mentioned that he breaks his vacation time up into mini-holidays in order to have more opportunities to be away from work.

Another participant viewed the opportunities at work that allow her to travel to different

regions throughout the province as a perk. She explained that it affords her the opportunity to meet other staff and to benefit by gaining a greater appreciation of how other offices work. Still another participant identified her flex-day as a significant coping well strategy. She commented that having a day to focus on her needs was important because it allowed her to take care of the tasks and issues that were necessary for maintaining balance between her personal life and work.

### Summary

What was interesting about the participants' descriptions of coping well was that they revealed not only their keen awareness of the need to create balance in their lives, but also that they actively engaged in doing so. They focused on the positive elements of their work and downplayed the negative by maintaining a positive attitude, learning new skills, taking advantage of different job opportunities, reducing their stress through exercise, creating balance between their work and home lives, and maintaining positive relationships with their colleagues, friends, family and supervisors.

### **Experience of Change**

In order to understand the nature of change in their work environment, participants were asked to describe their experience of change as it affected their work life. These experiences could have occurred at any time during the course of their career and could incorporate any event as long as it significantly impacted their work. Three theme clusters emerged from the participants' experiences of change. They are summarized in Table 4 and are discussed in detail following the table.

Table 4: Themes From: “What is Your Experience of Change?”

Theme	Meaning Association
Nature of the Work	<b>Positive:</b> Technology Organizational change Ministry split
	<b>Negative:</b> No time for clients More dangerous offenders Change in job duties Change in job skills Courts and sentencing Increased workload Work environment Reliance on computers Increased accountability Decrease in discretion Loss of resources Loss of team, community contact Training Staff-new PO's, turnover
Organization	Shift in Branch focus from client-centered to corporate-productivity
	Management style (micro-mgt.), young inexperienced managers, lack of people skills, lack of support
	New policies
	Hiring practices
	Reorganization
Personal	Personal growth
	Stress leave

### Nature of the Work

The participants' experiences of change in this theme included: technological change, less time to work with clients, training, management style, the more dangerous nature of the clients, increased workload, a decrease in discretionary decision-making, the work environment, and a loss of team, and networking opportunities. A common thread was that the changes significantly altered the way in which the probation officers performed their job. Although some of the changes that altered the officers' job duties in a positive manner, the majority resulted in negative outcomes for the officer.

Positive "Positive" change experiences related to technology, organizational change, and the split of the Ministries. These change experiences resulted in positive outcomes such as increasing the officers' ability to get their work done and greater efficiency and effectiveness. One officer commented that for her the work became more relevant because the specific needs of the clients were being addressed. The following quotes reflect the essence of some of the participants' positive change experiences:

I really appreciate our connection with the court system, our interplay between our CORNET system, and the JUSTIN, being the court system, that's really useful. So we get an automatic update if the client has new court matters, if they were arrested over the weekend. That's really, really useful.

It was client-focused but not necessarily to the betterment of the client, it wasn't objective, it wasn't looking at what is, why is this person before the Court? What brought them here, what led up to them coming here? And then the shift, the significant shift was let's look at the bigger picture. Let's look at why they actually come in to reduce the chance that they are going to come back again. So I liked that it became more relevant.

When they split in 96, it didn't really bother me at all. I mean it was kind of refreshing to talk to adults for a change. I mean you didn't have to deal with social workers or parents anymore. It was just the person in front of you. So it was quite different.

Negative These change experiences included: technology, organizational change (shift in focus, hiring practices and the split of the Ministries), training, management style, and the nature of the clients. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of these change experiences:

I'm an agent of change however you've only got 15 minutes to do that in each of your appointments and don't take too much longer cause we're going to give you such a huge case load that if you take more than one minute more with each client, that's going to put you x number of minutes every week behind. And then that just piles up and the work piles up.

What has changed in my opinion has been the increased dependency upon the computer systems. We have less time because of the demands of the computer system. We have all these tools and things that are supposed to make things easier. I remember in the 90's I had a caseload of over a hundred. I have a case load now today its 62 but I have less time than when I had more cases.

I don't think I'm recognized in the same way as being a team player within the bigger picture. Occasionally I'll get validated from the judge. But that's very rare, it used to be common.

The training, you get a feeling that they've gone on the cheap. I mean before the training was always done at the Justice Institute. That wasn't just an ability to learn, or a place to learn but it also was a venue to get together with other probation officers and just talk.

The loss of control over decision-making for their caseloads emerged as a significant negative change experience:

I remember when I came in the system we had total independence. We were hired for our judgment and our being able to cope in any situation and make good decisions. Not because, it doesn't mean that we were always right, but at least there was trust in you as a person to be able to have the good judgment and to make good decisions. Now they are saying to us, no we don't trust you, we don't trust your judgment. We're telling you how to do it and that's it. There is no deviation from this you will follow the plan that's it. Now I come from a situation where I was hired because of my judgment and because I'm able to make decisions. That's been taken away and when I say the soul of the job was taken away, that's the crux of the issue. My autonomy has been totally ripped out. It's gone.

It was different. We had more control over what we did with clients. You know a lot of po's; the youth po's especially, they could take their clients skiing or out for sports or take them out for coffee or meet them somewhere. You went to court more often because you were part of I guess a plan. And it seemed that management was more supportive and they, they were interested in their employees. Whereas now, I think it's they have to answer, they have to cover their butts and it's just very bureaucratic now. Everyone is afraid to make a mistake.

The participants also attributed the change in the type of managers being hired and their style of managing with a negative meaning:

They're hiring managers basically green. They're basically green with no real life experience. I mean the last two they hired, they just moved out of home. And they've never, they hardly lived on their own and they're hired as managers. I mean to me that's unheard of. That would never happen before. It was someone with 20 years experience.

You do what you need to do because God forbid something were to happen and that's what it's about, that's the difference. Because before I don't think these thoughts were there. Now it's about you've got an offender, they go off the wall, so if they go kill someone it's our fault. So, if they didn't report that day, we get in trouble for it. I don't understand how a guy who reports to me can leave the office and then we're going to be accountable for that. And this is where that kind of stuff happens, staff have been disciplined. And of course we're still a small community, our little population of probation officers and that's just sick. So then it instills more fear, and that's what I'm saying, we've seen it, we see it when people have gotten into trouble for stuff that a probation officer couldn't have done anything about.

Participants also described having to deal with increasingly more dangerous clients as a negative change experience:

You see years ago we used to have more of a cross section of offenders; we had high, medium and low. Although we didn't class them that way, we didn't do that, we didn't do CRNA's back then. So we had a good balance of offenders which made the job less stressful and more tolerable because you get that break from dealing with low risk offenders or that one time offender. Now we don't get those offenders. When that offender comes in, they go to a PO14 or a junior po. So now we're constantly dealing with chronic, dangerous, high-risk offenders, one after another after another. Whereas before every second or third one would be that low risk offender, which made the job easier to deal with. Because when you're dealing primarily with high risk offenders, it creates more stress, it just does.

Finally, participants described the nature of their training and some aspects of technological change as negative change experiences:

The nature of the training is also changed. It's changed, it's on-line. We were actually in a classroom where we were interacting with people. We were interacting with our colleagues and we were team building at the same time because all of a sudden these are your colleagues. Well I think the result of the on-line training is people who come to work aren't able to perform the job. They have no sense of belonging to anything. It becomes a job. And when I finished I felt like a probation officer. I was part of this great organization. I was part of a great thing. Nowadays it's a job, they come and go.

So that networking, whole notion of networking, the human collegial connection is gone because we've got the computer. So I don't have to meet somebody eye ball to eye ball. So I don't sense that you might have needs or wants or concerns the way I do.

...diminishing amount of people time, much more computer time and with the expectation that that computer work has to be done because the sort of unwritten rule is if it's not documented, it didn't happen. And so that was a significant amount of pressure you know on people to do that computer work. That was not a nice shift...I really liked going to Court. I really liked doing oral PDR's or PSR's. I really liked going out into the community

### Organization

In this theme, participants described change experiences related to how the organization "does business". In particular, participants described their organization's shift in philosophical focus from being "client-centered" to a "productivity-oriented" focus. As a result, participants felt devalued, and that their value to the organization was no longer based upon their ability to work with clients, but rather, by how many clients they interviewed or how many reports they produced. The following participant quotes capture the essence of this change experience:

I have felt that this organization has moved more towards that corporate model which I would say devalues the employee. I think overall, from the top, the very top down, at the top you're less of a human or you're less of a person, more of the corporate structure.

So philosophy, is before it was more to interact with the client, you could do that, and now it's...now its all about here is our policy that we've come up with again and you better have all these things done within a timeframe. So philosophy is not about the client anymore, it's about the policy. That's shifted. It's not about the client anymore, they say it's about the client, but it is so not about the client, it's about cover your ass.

It's gone from being client centered to being paper work centered or administrative type data entry. And, the focus for the last probably I don't know, could it be five full years maybe, would be on trying to maintain impossible standards.

Now it's paper over people. But it isn't so much that, what it truly is, is that we used to be a social service, there is a difference between thinking that you're going into probation because you're a social service as opposed to you're going into probation because your part of a business. It's, it's distasteful. I don't recall thinking that's what this was all about, but that's the philosophy.

Management Changes related to the lack of management support or a punitive style of management also emerged as an important change experience. Participants associated their managers' style of "micro-managing" with negative psychological outcomes including: fear of discipline, feeling over managed, and feeling isolated and devalued by their managers. They attributed the qualities of new managers such as being inexperienced and lacking in life skills to outcomes such as feeling devalued, disconnected, and feeling isolated. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of these experiences:

...there's a lot more accountability and while that's not a bad thing, it's just another layer to be aware of. Local managers are doing all the quality assurance now and at any given time they're yanking files and scrutinizing them,



scrutinizing your case management plan and asking you know “Why aren’t you doing this, why didn’t you do that?” It’s a lot of micro-managing. Whereas I think what attracted me and I think others to the job initially was the autonomy.

Before it was like the big arm of the government would protect you, one hundred per cent support from the Ministry. Now it’s like whose file has gone wrong, let’s get rid of them. So there’s a lot more punitive attitude towards staff. And so it puts us at personal risk where we feel our livelihood is at risk.

There are a lot of local managers and regional managers out there that are unrelenting and unforgiving and if you aren’t adhering to policy and procedure to the letter. You know people are being reprimanded.

New Policies and Hiring Practices This theme also represented negative change experiences including: poorly thought out policy changes, and too much change. Participants described the new case management plan change as being poorly thought out, that they were unable to implement it and that overall, it was inefficient and ineffective. An additional negative change experience involved the hiring process. Participants expressed a mistrust of the process, that it was “unfair” and geared to benefit younger officers. They also commented that changes to the hiring process resulted in less qualified staff. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of some of these sentiments:

The case management plan, I didn’t do well with that change because it’s a document that is inherently flawed. But you’re supposed to deal with it and I find it very difficult to deal with it because you’re dealing with something that doesn’t work. You’re given a tool and they say use this tool to fix the engine, but the tool doesn’t really work. And you have to manipulate the tool in an unnatural way to get it to work. And that’s difficult to work with.

I remember at the provincial conference, management going on and on about how wonderful the young po’s are without a hint of mentioning, giving any strokes or praise to the senior po’s. I was offended. We’ve given all this time, all this experience and they don’t seem to place any value on it.

Reorganization Changes also resulted from cut-backs that occurred when the Corrections Branch closed a jail in the downtown Vancouver area. The participants experienced the loss of colleagues and a reduction in the quality of some services. The following participant quote reflects the essence of some of this experience:

The cuts that happened, the cutbacks when they closed the old jail down, the financial cuts, loss of staff, colleagues losing their jobs, people within the institution losing their jobs. That was really difficult for people as well. And that's led to some delays in service. Before I could walk over there and do my report or interview in half an hour, now it takes me over half a day depending on traffic.

### Personal

In this theme, the participants described change experiences of a personal nature including: an increased knowledge and skill base, increased self-awareness, and greater compassion for others. They associated these changes with the training and learning opportunities they received at work and attributed a positive meaning to them:

For me its compassion, its understanding the pain and ugliness. It's gotten rid of my whining tendencies I might have had. I can see other peoples' coping skills and I've realized how fortunate I've been in my life to have the life I've had.

You know being that I've changed, I think I have more insight into what my job actually is.

I think that most of the time we are given the option to grow. We are given the ability to grow and I think a big part is your own personal willingness to be flexible to change.

So that was a change in thinking that kind of happened over the years. So it became more of being able to look more at the layers instead of just the outer and realizing that it's a person that you're dealing with and something that you could have a huge impact in their life. Maybe initially when I first started in probation that didn't play a part into some of my thinking as much as it does now.

Stress leave Under “Stress leave” the participants described changes that reflected their awareness of the increasing amount of stress in their work environment and the need for effective coping strategies. These change experiences were attributed with negative meaning associations, the essence of which are reflected in the following participant quotes”

Record numbers of people are being disciplined. And they tend to be the senior staff. It makes me stressed and fearful. Fearful, well am I going to be next because lots of times it's just being lucky or unlucky. I don't sleep nearly as well as I used to. I never lost sleep. I'd come in and I wouldn't feel threatened.

If I talked realistically to my colleagues in my office, many of them have escape plans. That would never have happened in the 90's.

### Summary

Consistent with their experience of being a probation officer, participants primarily described change experiences relating to the “nature of their work”. Overall, they attributed a negative meaning association to the change experiences. The majority of which resulted from policy changes that shifted the focus of their work away from the most meaningful aspects of the work such as individual client work, to a focus on the technological aspects of the work. The impact left the participants experiencing a diminishing amount of personal agency and meaning in their work and lamenting over the loss of a meaningful career.

### **Meaning Attributed to Change Experiences**

As the purpose of my research was to investigate what self-sustaining strategies probation officers use to cope well with the change in their work environment, it was felt that it would be important to gain a deeper understanding of the how the experiences of change impacted the participants (outcomes) and further, how in the face of continuous

change, they were still able to cope well. The participants' comments about the meaning they attributed to their change experiences resulted in four major themes that are summarized in Table 5. They are discussed in detail following the table.

Table 5: Meaning Attributed to Change Experiences

Theme	Meaning Association
Work Outcomes	<p><b>Change in Branch focus from client-centered to corporate</b>  <b>Positive-</b> Including: work is more relevant  <b>Negative-</b> Including: loss of professional identity; resistance; trapped; fracture between Branch philosophy and personal</p>
	<p><b>New Duties</b>  <b>Positive:</b> Including: teaching core  <b>Negative:</b> Including: focus on technical skills; less client contact; less community work; consider retirement or career change</p>
	<p><b>Reduced ability to get the work done-</b>Including: reduced administrative support; increased data entry duties; no time</p>
	<p><b>Loss of colleagues/new colleagues-</b>Including: loss of team; loss of connection with other member in CJS; disconnect between younger and older PO's</p>
	<p><b>Work environment-</b>Including: cubicles results in loss of professionalism and personal space; security measures creative climate of jail and send a negative message to clients</p>
	<p><b>Change in management style and loss of support-</b>  Including: work in isolation; reduced motivation; mistrust and reduced cooperation</p>
Psychological Outcomes	<p><b>Positive-</b>Including: increased motivation; work is more relevant; increased competency; more efficient; increased interest; expertise</p>
	<p><b>Negative-</b>Including: Loss of meaning in the work, decreased motivation, fear of reprisal, overwhelmed</p>
Emotional Outcomes	<p><b>Positive-</b>Including: feeling more appreciated by clients, more efficient, increased competency</p>
	<p><b>Negative-</b>Including: feeling resentful; frustration; grieving; stress; anxiety; depression</p>
Personal Outcomes	<p><b>Positive-</b>Including: prioritizing family and spending more time with family and friends away from work; becoming involved in new activities; developing new interests</p>
	<p><b>Negative-</b>Including: less time with family and friends; loss of relationships; increase in negative coping</p>

### Work Outcomes

In this theme, participants discussed change experiences pertaining to the organization's shift in focus, new job duties, loss of colleagues, increased workloads, the work environment, and changes in management style and support. Although the majority of participant comments in this theme were attributed with negative meaning associations, some positive outcomes were reported.

Positive Some participants described positive work outcomes including the work being more relevant, greater proficiency due to the implementation of computers, and new, challenging duties such as teaching core programming. The following participant quotes reflect some participants' sentiments:

It was a shift for me that was positive. Zeroing in and matching client needs with what we have to offer. So I think it became more relevant.

Technology can be a good thing. I have very factual information about court dates and things so I gain efficiency and speed around 95 per cent of the data that I need.

Negative Negative change experiences included: the Branch's shift in focus from client-centered to a focus on productivity; the loss of colleagues and impact of new colleagues, new job duties, a reduced ability to get their work done and to do quality work, work environment issues such as the move to cubicles and away from private office space and increased security measures and finally, a change in management ranging from management style (autocratic and micro-management) to the experience and characteristics of the manager. Negative outcomes included: stress due to an increase in accountability for client's behaviour, a philosophical disconnect with the Branch and

their approach to the work, feeling devalued, a loss of professional identity in relation to being “agents of change”, a loss of purpose, fear, stress, and a regimented, manualized nature to their work.

I feel more like I’m running a business, that’s what I feel like and I’m more like a business manager and that I have to be much more black and white and linear. Everything has to be on track. So I’m really not able to do the work the way I think it needs to be done which is more time out in the community, more hands on, more helping. I don’t feel quite so much like I’m helping people anymore. It feels oppressive. I don’t know that we’re sort of valuing the individual so much any more.

It affects me because my own personal self will not let me sacrifice the client, I don’t feel that’s right. I can’t do that so you feel inadequate. Even though you know logically that you cannot possibly fulfill this, it makes you feel like you’re not doing enough, not doing good enough.

I feel susceptible to disciplinary action because there is so much more policy and because there’s so much micro management. There is just no way that we can do the job the way they want us to do, given the workload that we have. There is so much more stuff that has been thrown at us over the last 7 years, core programming, electronic monitoring, CRNA’s, victim contact.

### Psychological Outcomes

Positive Although the majority of outcomes cited by participants in this theme were negative in nature, some participants did describe positive outcomes such as: an increased interest in their job due to teaching core programs, increased efficiency and effectiveness resulting from technology, and increased competence and expertise in relation to the separation of the Ministries. Participants commented that focusing on the needs of one client group allowed them to hone and develop their skills and feel very competent in that one area as opposed to feeling minimally effective across a number of areas. The following participant quotes reflect the essence of some of these experiences:

Core programs, I mean when they first came out I mean, I didn't think I could do it. Now every time I do it, I learn, and I'm actually enjoying doing it. And more importantly I believe I'm helping to instill some change in the people that I work with which again, that's kind of gratifying.

Negative Negative outcomes primarily related to the impact of the Branch's shift in focus away from a client-centered perspective to a perspective that highlighted productivity and accountability. "Paper over people". The participants commented that the shift in focus reduced the meaning in their work, decreased their motivation to do the job and most importantly, that the accountability-oriented job duties increased their fear of reprisal from the Branch. Participants also described feeling overwhelmed by the volume and rapid pace of policy changes. One participant stated that he would barely comprehend the changes resulting from one policy change before the next policy "rolled out". The following participant quotes capture these sentiments:

I have found that the amount of change that we have endured over the last six years has just been unbelievable. For me overwhelming as well. It's every aspect of what we do with a client has changed. Too much too fast. I have not felt like I have been caught up ever in the last six years.

There is a culture change. There is a sense that everything is quantifiable. So the notion of accountability with the computer and things, like people are being monitored.

Once upon a time I would have jumped up to fix a problem in the system or come up with a solution. I just figure I don't have to do that now, so I become less spontaneous about offering suggestions.

And when you're stressed you don't think as clearly as when you're relaxed. So you might not even be absorbing all the information you want. And when you're stressed it creates you know physical, physiological problems or leads to physical problems. Like not sleeping. My sleep, I mean I don't sleep nearly as well as I used to.



### Emotional Outcomes

Positive The positive emotional outcomes in this theme were attributed to teaching opportunities and technological changes. The participants reported that teaching core programming helped them to feel more appreciated by their clients. Because the computer system provided them with the most updated and relevant information about their clients, they also felt more efficient and competent in their work.

Negative The most startling negative outcome reported by participants was “working in an environment of fear”. The participants attributed their fear to the Branch’s emphasis on accountability through adherence to policy. Participants’ inability to keep up with policy changes and ideological conflicts with their organization’s philosophical stance resulted in a number of negative emotional outcomes including: feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, stressed, anxious, depressed, and finally grieving the loss of the most meaningful aspects of their work. The following participant quotes capture the essence of some of these impacts:

I have to find ways to control the stress. I go to the gym everyday which helps but it’s obviously not enough. So what more can I do? I don’t have, I can’t change the job because the decisions are being made by this one person over there. You know I just don’t have that kind of power. I feel helpless. I don’t have the ability to control it.

It’s frustrating. It’s frustrating to do the job. It’s frustrating to not connect in a meaningful way. It’s frustrating not to be trusted, that I’m not an idiot, that I can’t go beyond what I have to do and try to make the system work. So incredible frustration and a bit of sadness that there is that lack of support.

It’s stressful, anxiety producing because I’m not getting the work done and I have to take shorter lunches and no breaks. I don’t chat a lot with my colleagues.

### Personal Outcomes

Positive The participants cited positive outcomes such as: prioritizing family and spending more time with family and friends away from work, becoming involved in new activities, and developing new interests. These personal outcomes evolved out of the participants' efforts to replace the meaning they lost in their careers with interests and activities outside of their work environment.

I still give you know, I still give. I'm not depressed by it, I'm not empty of it, I just don't attach as much to it as I used to.

I have my own family now. When I started I was single and they are my priority so the job is not as important.

Negative Participants described negative personal outcomes such as having less time to spend with family and friends, loss of relationships (marital) and an increase in alternative negative coping such as sick leave or increased substance use. These personal outcomes resulted from having to work longer hours in order to manage an increased workload and working evening hours in order to perform tasks such as core programming.

...so my anxiety to meet a certain level of accountability throughout my career made me work really hard, made me put relationships aside. I know for sure because of my own attitudes that I did not value my spouses as much as I valued my job. That was a big loss.

### **Have Participants Always Coped Well With Change?**

In order to gain an understanding of the factors that contributed to the participants' ability to "cope well", particularly in light of the changing nature of their work

environment, they were asked, “Have you always coped well with change?” Sixteen out of the twenty participants (80%) indicated that they had always coped well with change. They attributed their ability to cope well to intrinsic personal characteristics such as having a positive attitude and being flexible, having positive support from family and friends outside of Corrections, having good problem solving skills, and being open to change. The following participant responses highlight some of their comments:

I enjoy change. I sort of thrive on change. I like challenges. I am a problem-solver. I am very creative. I have an artistic side, so I actually enjoy change.

...a healthy lifestyle, a healthy attitude. I guess that whole willingness just to do well. So I make that paramount in the way I see things. To focus on what's important to me is kind of what gets me through the day.

In answering the question, “Have you always coped well with change?” four participants indicated they had not always coped well with change. One participant linked not coping well to personal issues such as dealing with illness and the death of a spouse. Another participant recognized that not coping well was connected to her need for control. She reported that her feelings of powerlessness were triggered when a number of new policy changes that she felt were poorly thought out began to impact the areas of her work that she liked. She stated that she developed a negative attitude and became resistant to the changes. Another participant indicated that her ability to cope well decreased when she realized that the managers that she respected and who had been her mentors, were gone. She stated that she felt isolated and found it difficult to continue to cope well. The following participant quotations capture some of the participants' reflections:

There has been a lot of changes and they haven't been sort of well done changes. Like it's been okay let's do it, let's make it up as we go. I was getting bogged down and stressed. I was wasting a lot of time and energy. You know how much energy it takes to be negative. And may be a fair fit of it was you know that line contempt before investigation. I think I fell into that a fair bit.

For those participants who answered "no" to the question "Have you always coped well with change?", a follow-up question was posed to them "What changed so that you are now coping better with change?" The participants cited a number of reasons including maturity (age and stage), having a family of their own and developing the ability to prioritize the important things in the life, and learning how to leave work at work. One participant cited self-awareness as a factor in that she realized she was being perceived as negative by her colleagues and did not like that quality about herself. She was able to cope better with change when she decided to focus on the aspects of her job or life that she liked and could control.

So that was a huge brainwave and shift that I decided to focus on the stuff that I liked. I let go and try not to latch onto the issues anymore that I have no control over.

### **Critical Incident Results**

The critical incident portion of the interview was intended to gather data relating to the research question pertaining to what self-sustaining strategies probation offices use to help them cope well with on-going change that effects their work, what hinders them from doing well, and whether there are things that would have been helpful but were unavailable. The twenty probation officers (5 males and 15 females) interviewed in the study described six hundred and fifty-two critical incidents. Of these, 305 were hindering critical incidents, 260 were helping critical incidents and 87 were wish list items. All of

the 652 critical incidents were analyzed and then organized into 10 categories.

Participation rates for each category were calculated by dividing the number of participants who mentioned items pertaining to a category by the total number of participants (N=20). Borgen and Amundson (1984) suggested that a participation rate of 25% is sufficient for determining the soundness of a category. All 10 categories met the 25% participation rate in one of the helping, hindering and wish list item categories.

The categories are presented in order of the most frequently cited critical incidents through to the least. The results pertaining to each category are discussed first in relation to helping incidents, following by hindering incidents and finally, by wish list items. Participant rates for each category are also discussed. Finally, participant quotations containing the participants' exact words are used to facilitate explanation and meaning. Table 6 summarizes the categories, the total number of items in each category, and the participation rates. The results pertaining to each category are discussed following the table.

Table 6: Critical Incidents and Wish List Categories

Category	Helping Critical Incidents (N=260)			Hindering Critical Incidents (N=305)			Wish List Items (N=87)		
	Participants (N=20)		Incidents	Participants (N=20)		Incidents	Participants (N=20)		Incidents
	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%	N
Nature of the work	<b>19</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>68</b>	20	100	70	14	70	28
Colleagues	<b>19</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>21</b>	11	55	21	3	25	3
Management	<b>17</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>22</b>	18	90	68	13	65	20
Personal Factors	<b>14</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>82</b>	7	35	8	7	35	10
Work Environment	<b>13</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>20</b>	13	65	37	4	20	5
Training	<b>13</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>16</b>	9	45	10	4	20	4
Technology/ Computer	<b>10</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>10</b>	10	50	14	2	5	2
Family/Friend Support	<b>8</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>9</b>						
Organizational Philosophy/Policy	<b>8</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8</b>	18	90	47	7	35	10
Job Skills	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	6	30	6	2	10	2

### Nature of the Work

The largest category of combined critical incidents is “Nature of the Work” with a total of 167 incidents, broken down as follows: 68 (40%) were helping incidents with a participation rate of 95% contributed by 19 participants; 71(43%) were hindering incidents with a participation rate of 100% contributed to by 20 participants; and 28 (17%) were wish list items with a participation rate of 70% contributed to by 14 participants. This category comprises incidents where participants described experiences pertaining to their work including the workload itself, the clients, the tools or resources that are available in the process of doing their job, job opportunities that are available through their organization, increased accountability for the behaviour of their clients, and autonomous decision-making.

Helping Incidents In this category participants described aspects of their work that were the most meaningful and thereby provided them with the greatest satisfaction. These incidents included working with their clients, having autonomous decision-making over their cases, the availability of effective technological tools such as different computer programs, and having different job opportunities such as teaching at the Justice Institute, teaching core programming, working on special projects or managing specialized case loads. The positive outcomes that arose from this category included feeling more motivated to do the work, being more efficient at their jobs and an increased ability to cope with the changing nature of their job. The following participant quote illustrates:

I've always changed jobs or I've had to take on new tasks. That's what's kept me going. And to think I've been around since 1989, it's half my life. So it's because I've moved around or else I get bored if I didn't do something different. I have to find something different about my job.

Hindering Incidents The hindering category included incidents where participants cited different aspects of their work that contributed to feeling frustrated, vulnerable and stressed, all of which prevented them from coping well with change. Examples included increased accountability stemming from new policy directions, increasing workloads and lack of time to do the job, diminishing or inefficient resources, loss of autonomy in relation to decision-making over caseloads, a lack of job opportunities, and the increasingly more dangerous nature of their clients. The primary outcomes arising from these hindering incidents included less motivation to do the work, stress, and resistance to new policies and changes. The following examples illustrate these participant experiences:

So my work is all high crisis, high criminal. We don't do any nice work anymore so there isn't that personal relationship. And there's also, it's more difficult to balance because all my clients are bad people and they're evil, not all of them, but a lot of them.

...for me the not so good part would be the time constraints we have to work and to do good work and kind of what tools we're given to do good work or the tools that were taken away like going out into the community and being with the offender.

Wish List Items The wish list category included incidents where participants wished for things that would make their job more manageable, for example, a reduction in their caseload numbers. They also wished for more resources and specifically resources that matched their clients' needs such as better developed substance abuse programming. Some participants requested increased decision-making over their cases and provided the



example of not having to refer their clients to core programming if they felt they would be better served by using a different resource. Others wished they had more variety in their job such as attending Court on a regular basis or that they could have the time to go into the community and meet with other agency personnel such as the police or social service workers. The positive outcomes stemming from these items would be an increased feeling of support and a heightened sense of professionalism. These outcomes would in turn contribute to increased energy and creativity and help the participants in their ability to cope well with the demands of the ever-changing nature of their work.

The following participant quotes illustrate some of these outcomes:

I would like more resources to the job. Like more resources or programs for mental health clients, programs for women and more counselling resources for clients.

...less work, less cases and when there is overload that the manger takes responsibility, it becomes a management issue. It used to be if we had overload like in the summer reports that the manager would write to the courts and say you know we can't do this or reassign it for a month. Yeah so work, less work.

### Colleagues

The "Colleagues" category had a total of 45 incidents that included 21 (47%) helping incidents with a participation rate of 95% contributed to by 19 participants; 21 (47%) hindering incidents with a participation rate of 55% contributed to by 11 participants and 3 (6%) wish list items with a participation rate of 25% contributed to by 3 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping category included incidents where participants described being supported by their co-workers and colleagues and feeling listened to, validated, respected, empathized with, mentored, and encouraged. Examples of helping incidents included chatting with and having positive relationships with colleagues, having colleagues as role models (i.e., seeing how other probation officers work), and being able to vent to and receive feedback from co-workers. The positive outcomes that arose from these critical incidents were feeling connected, having emotional and professional support, gaining different perspectives on work-related issues; especially in relation to dealing with clients, and the ability to get more work done through informal work networks (i.e. help from the Court clerks, police or social workers). One participant talked about the importance of having the respect of her colleagues:

An important part of it is also seeing how other co-workers work. There are many probation officers who I really admire the way that they work and deal with clients. I guess that's what's exciting about the job is you can look at your co-workers and see different ways of doing your work. And I don't think that ever really stops. And part of the enjoyment of working is also that you gain respect amongst your colleagues. I think that's important because it gives you another perspective or it gives you an option just to talk about it. Whether or not they give you their ideas, just being able to get it out feels like there is maybe some closure for yourself, you know.

Hindering Incidents The hindering category included incidents where participants described working with new probation officers who lacked both the life experience and the people skills necessary for working with probation clients and their experiences of working with colleagues who treated clients disrespectfully. The participants also talked about experiences where they lost colleagues due to retirement and illness and colleagues who quit. The negative outcomes that arose from this category included having to work

harder because of colleagues who lacked skills and training, having to act in mentoring roles for new colleagues in addition to managing their own caseloads and not being acknowledged for their efforts, feeling stressed, abandoned and disconnected when colleagues quit or retired and feeling grief when colleagues were lost due to illness. And further, when they witnessed colleagues being disrespectful to the clients they felt frustrated, they attempted to avoid those colleagues, and they felt their overall professionalism as probation officers was reduced. The following participant quote illustrates:

I can say I'm quite sensitive to probation officers who are disrespectful to our clientele. That's a challenge for me because at the same time that I don't want people to do that, I also don't want to be the target of it. But I know it's wrong. It's just tremendously bothers me because I feel like I am at times included in the brush of people who are disrespectful to that individual and that it lowers the professionalism. The public perception of us I think will go down. I'm sensitive to being called a government employee in such a way that suggests that we don't care about our job. I feel angry and generally what I've done are two things, I have overdone with trying to compensate to everybody else (clients) for the next few days or I try to make sure that when that person is around that I'm showing and modeling what respectful communication looks like.

Wish List Items The wish list category included incidents where participants wished that the new probation officers would be better trained when they arrived at the work site, they also wanted more staff to be hired to help with the workload and finally, they wanted to have more time to be able to talk with their colleagues, to share ideas, and to build relationships and create a sense of team. The participants felt that by having more trained staff their workload would be lessened and they would have more time to talk with their colleagues, to vent, to gain a different perspective, and to feel more connected at work. They felt this would lessen their stress and help them to feel more open and

accepting of change in their work environment. One participant talked about hiring new staff with people skills:

I wish they would hire people based on ability, I mean with more people oriented skills and not technological qualifications. We need people with people skills, communication skills and a background in the helping field. If I'm going to be working with these people they need to have some sense of what they're doing. It would be a much healthier worksite and we'd have a more coherent group because we'd be people with similar backgrounds, similar experiences and we'd at least be able to speak a similar language and understand each other. The people who do come in with that background are dedicated to what they're doing because they've got that experience. They have an understanding of why they're here. It's not just a pay cheque. It's a career. The focus is back on being a career, being a profession.

### Management

The "Management" category had a total of 110 incidents, broken down as follows: 22 (20%) were helping incidents with a participation rate of 85% contributed by 17 participants; 68(65%) hindering incidents with a participation rate of 90% contributed by 18 participants and 20 (15%) wish list incidents with a participation rate of 65% contributed by 13 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping category included incidents where managers were supportive, provided mentorship, had experience, and demonstrated the skills necessary to engender trust and loyalty in the participants. When managers offered encouragement, support and respect, the participants felt more connected and were more willing to take risks. This fostered a more positive and open attitude toward change, which in turn helped them to cope well with new changes in their work environment. The positive outcomes arising from supportive managers included knowing there was access to help if needed, getting another perspective on how to cope with new policy changes or to deal

with clients. Management support also helped them feel acknowledged and valued which gave them greater confidence and increased their openness to change. The following example illustrates:

...a client whose name I won't mention, mentally ill, drug addict, totally outrageous, he was very short and we had a mail slot and he lifted the mail slot and he peed through the mail slot when we were having our meeting, right. And I'd had it. I'd just had it. This guy's pee is coming through the mail slot and I was sitting there. And I phoned my boss and I said, "I'm quitting". He said, "What happened?" And I said, "So and so just came by and we were having our morning meeting and he peed through the mail slot and I've had it. I've just had it". And he said, "Meet me for coffee". And that's exactly what happened. We went up the street and we sat down and we had a cup of coffee and by the end of the hour, I was laughing about it. It was stupid. The outcome was we got a new door with the mail slot at the top. But I was believed, right. I was believed. I felt valued as an employee. So even when I phoned him and said I'm quitting, you can take your job, he said, "No you're not, I'll buy you a coffee and let's talk, let's go through this".

Hindering Incidents The hindering category included incidents where participants cited the inexperience of new managers, their lack of people skills, and their inability to manage adult professionals. They also commented on their style of management, which for the majority of participants involved micro-managing. Many of the participants described feeling like "Big brother is watching". They cited examples of managers who managed through the threat of consequence; thereby creating an environment of fear in the work site. Many participants mentioned that their local managers no longer function as mentors, that they were seldom accessible at the work site, and that they offered little to no support. The primary negative outcomes arising from these hindering incidents included being afraid to take risks, being less creative, feeling resentful and resistant to change; all of which resulted in being less effective and productive at work. The following participant quotes illustrate a few of these outcomes:

...they scape goat, they try and blame somebody and that person is the person on the bottom, that being the probation officer. You feel like you have no support what so ever.

So there's a lot more punitive attitude towards staff. And it puts us at personal risk where we feel our livelihood is at risk, our family is at risk.

Wish List Items The wish list category included incidents where participants wished for more emotional and practical support from their managers. Examples of wish list items included a desire for managers to be more present in the work environment, for them to provide mentorship, and for them to listen and to be engaged with their staff. The main outcomes arising out of having more management support would be feeling encouraged and supported in decision-making, and having a resource for venting and feedback. The following example illustrates:

I realize managers can't tell everything to everybody about everything, but maybe taking into consideration the opinions of the people that are doing the work before they make all the changes.

That they would honor and encourage dissenting opinions.

### Personal Factors

The "Personal Factors" category had a total of 100 incidents, broken down as follows: 82 (82%) were helping incidents with a participation rate of 70% contributed to by 14 participants; 8 (8%) were hindering incidents with a participation rate of 35% contributed to by 7 participants, and 10 (10%) were wish list incidents with a participation rate of 35% contributed to by 7 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping incidents in this category included participants' descriptions of their personal traits, attitudes, awareness, coping strategies, and methods of self-care that helped them cope well with change. Examples of helping incidents were being flexible, having a positive attitude, emotionally letting go, feeling in charge of one's own life, balancing work with home life, being spiritual, volunteering, and having an active life outside of work. The positive outcomes that resulted from this category included being aware that they had options, that they had strategies for coping, and that they could manage change and cope well at work. The following participant quotes reflect some of these sentiments:

What helps me cope? I'm hopeful. Well I can always kind of see that I could be worse off than I am at this point in time. When I get down in the dumps which I don't do too often, I think I could be in a wheelchair, I could be blind, and those kinds of things usually get me a grasp on reality. You try and think of the positive things in your life rather than the negative things in your life.

Hindering Incidents The hindering incidents in this category included incidents where participants cited poor self-care strategies, being inflexible in their thinking, being prone to depression, feeling overloaded, and not sleeping as preventing them from coping well with change. Examples of hindering incidents included: worrying, feeling anxious, isolating, and feeling irritated about change. The negative outcomes of these hindering incidents included: resistance to change and a decreased ability to manage in the work environment. The following example illustrates:

I'm adaptable to change but it hasn't been sort of well done change. I was getting bogged down and stressed. I was getting snippy at work and stuff like that. I was really frustrated, I got really frustrated when they started putting up bars and windows and just that whole shift to that, making the office more secure, frustrated with going from face to face learning to PO's learning on-line. So not having skills, frustrated that it seems that PO's are scared of people in some ways.

Wish List Items The wish list category included incidents where participants wished they had more support from their organization. They cited examples such as: being provided with counsellors who are familiar with the nature of their work, in-house training for wellness and health, reduced gym memberships, time to exercise during lunch breaks, longer vacations, and early retirement packages. The positive outcomes arising from these examples of having more support would be less stress, a stronger sense of connection and therefore better mental, emotional and physical health. The end result being increased energy and creativity and therefore, more tolerance and ability to cope well with change. The following participant quote illustrates:

Specific counsellors for community corrections, available to, perhaps even mandatory. Somebody that you can come in or go for coffee with, that's not part of the employer.

### Work Environment

The "Work Environment" category had a total of 62 incidents, broken into: 20 (32%) were helping incidents with a participation rate of 65% contributed by 13 participants; 37 (60%) were hindering incidents with a participation rate of 65% with 13 participants and 5 (8%) were wish list items with a participation rate of 20% with 4 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping category included incidents where participants described being able to cope with change by having their own private office space; a place to retreat to and think about what was happening. They also talked about feeling connected in the work environment, being part of something that was important, being part of the probation family, and being able to network and meet other players in the



Criminal Justice field. The positive outcomes that arose from these incidents were feeling part of a team, being able to rely on other people and to gain a different perspective, feeling like a professional, and having the confidence to cope with new changes in their work environment. The following participant quote captures this outcome:

The advantage of being part of a big organization is that even when things aren't going well in the office you're working at, you still have those other relationships with other partners in the Justice System and that carries you through because I know it's going to change. The cycles going to change when things are bad in an office, someone is going to transfer, someone's going to quit, someone's going there will be change.

Hindering Incidents The hindering category included incidents where the participants cited the stress in the job, conflict between colleagues, the pressures of the job due to time frames, the stress of worrying about their clients' behaviour, feelings of fear associated with accountability and being fired, the fractured nature of the work environment, the loss of informal connections with other agencies in the Criminal Justice System, and the dysfunction of their organization. The primary negative outcomes that resulted from these hindering incidents were resistance to change, discontent, exhaustion, self-doubt, isolation, and a desire to leave the job.

....you're much more aware of timelines. You're much more aware of the fact that at any given time somebody is going to scrutinize your work. Like there is that fear for people, reprisal, fear of if you're not adhering to policy to the letter, people are being reprimanded. And I can only imagine for new people coming in how overwhelming, it must seem overwhelming. And I do know that people because of that are leaving the branch.

Wish List Items The wish list items were those where participants expressed a desire for better working conditions and a professional atmosphere. Examples of items in this category included having their office space remain private and not go to cubicles, they requested more office space to run programs, and they requested less of a “jail-like” secure office environment. One participant stated that she would like to be able to have clients back in her own office because it would make her feel more in control of the relationship. Another participant wished that her office space would remain private rather than going to a cubicle. She explained that having a private space where she could shut the door allowed her to destress and gain some perspective about her work.

I don't want my office to go to a cubicle. I really don't want that. I don't want to do anything that's going to aggravate.

### Training

The “Training” category had a total of 30 incidents that included: 16 (54%) helping incidents with a participation rate of 65% contributed by 13 participants; 10 (33%) hindering incidents with a participation rate of 45% contributed to by 9 participants and 4 (13%) wish list items with a participation rate of 20% contributed to by 4 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping category included incidents in which participants described positive training experiences and how the skills/competence and confidence they received helped them deal well with the changes they faced over the course of their dynamic career. An example of an incident in this category involved the connections the participants made with other colleagues at the Justice Institute during their initial training. They explained that the relationships served as the foundation of their support throughout

their career. Other incidents included developing good conflict resolution and critical thinking skills, developing effective people skills, being provided different learning opportunities, and learning about effective strategies for helping their clients change. Positive outcomes for the participants included: feeling as though they had different job opportunities at work, having a sense of being able to cope with the demands of the work, and being informed about the work they were doing and therefore feeling more confident and competent. One participant talked about her training experience at the Justice Institute:

When I was trained you went to the Justice Institute for 14 weeks and within that training there was two practicum. You came into the community feeling like you had all the skills and the knowledge that you needed. You would have been given the opportunity to kind of get your feet wet in a lot of different areas, but not with the expectation that you would have a case load yet. And then you come out of the Justice Institute and you're ready to go. I felt prepared. I felt ready to do the job. I felt like I could take on anything that they threw at me.

Hindering Incidents The hindering incidents that the participants described were related to the lack of training opportunities, the change in the nature of training, and the loss of training opportunities at the Justice Institute. The participants commented that the changed format of their training (on-line)) reduced their opportunities to socialize with other colleagues and reaffirm support and feel connected as a professional group. Examples of specific hindering incidents were the on-line training, the prescribed nature of the training where participants were sent to learn how to implement new policies rather than attend training for professional development, and the lack of time or opportunities for training. The negative impacts that arose from this category included the lack of connection with other officers, decreased learning (many commented that their retention

of information decreased with on-line learning), not feeling supported by the Branch, feeling stagnant in their job, frustration with new, lesser trained PO's, and having fewer new job opportunities. The following participant quote highlights the negative outcome related to on-line training:

The changes that I'm not thrilled with would include on-line training. I really hate on-line training. To me, I don't know who is behind there and what they're doing and how genuine they are. I like to see people. I like to know what their reaction is. I can put something in and I get this great lengthy response back, but I don't know if it's genuine. To me, it could be just a push button response that everybody gets back. It really doesn't say that what I did was good, bad or ugly. It was just okay. So there is a disconnect. And I know that staff have had other people do their on-line training because they didn't get it. So it doesn't have credibility to me, the process. And I believe that it isn't done with the intent of providing better learning. I think it's done because it's cheap. So I don't buy into it. I feel resentful, well resentful it too strong a word. I just don't value doing it. It's like part of the job that I don't want to do and if I ever have a choice, I try to get around it and do other things.

Wish List Items The wish list items for this category were those that included changing the training practices back to face-to-face learning at the Justice Institute. Specific wish list items mentioned were being able to attend training seminars and conferences in order to increase their knowledge in areas such as mental health and substance abuse, or self-development skills training workshops, more training opportunities at the Justice Institute, and a return to hands on, face-to-face learning. Participants thought these items would increase their feelings of being valued by the Branch, increase their skill base, improve their sense of professionalism, maintain their sense of creativity and interest in their work, and help them feel more connected to their colleagues.

### Technology/Computer

The “Technology” category had a total of 26 incidents that included 10 (38%) helping incidents with a participation rate of 50% contributed to by 10 participants; 14 (54%) hindering incidents with a participation rate of 50% contributed to by 10 participants; and 2 (8%) wish list items with a participation rate of 5% contributed to by 2 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping incidents were computer-related programs that made it easier for participants to cope well with change. Items included the specific computer programs that provided them with updated information about their clients’ sentencing dates and outcomes, relevant historical information, and current case work notes. Examples of specific helping incidents were receiving updated information about their clients, being able to read typed case work records as opposed to hand written notes, having access to the Courts and police data banks, and being organized. The positive outcomes arising out of these helping incidents included feeling in control, having information with which to make informed decisions, feeling effective and efficient, all of which resulted in greater productivity. One participant talked about his experience with the C2 computer system and its positive impact in terms of helping him manage his work:

Okay C2, wonderful system because managing a file, when you look at a file, years ago before they had C2, you would open up a file and fricking paper work falls out and you’re having to read a person’s notes. It was difficult. You’d be there for 20 minutes trying to figure out what’s going on. C2 is such a well organized system that they have on the computer. At least when you go on, especially if you’re looking at someone else’s file, let’s say the PO is away on vacation and I look at his notes through C2, you can easily figure out what’s going on. It’s a wonderful way of organizing thought. Which is a good part, that was a good change.

Hindering Incidents The hindering category included incidents that were workplace related. Some specific hindering items included the never-ending learning on the computer, increased accountability, data entry, increased use of e-mail, loss of administrative support, the focus on technical skills, increased dependency on computer systems, and the increased attachment to the computer. The negative outcomes arising from the increased focus on technology included lack of interest in the job, loss of autonomy, a feeling of being micro-managed, loss of connections with colleagues due to dependence on email, less quality time with clients, frustration over mundane data entry, and a desire to change career. One participant quote highlights some of these outcomes:

We have less time because of the demands of the computer systems per se. Yes I can make my phone calls. I can do my emails. I can do that. I don't have time to leave my desk to walk over to the financial aid office. It's a rare occurrence. It used to be a common occurrence that I could have face-to-face contact with my colleagues. I don't have time. I don't have that hour because there is always pressure of recording it all on the computer, one way or another. It's all geared to the computer input and somehow that dealing with the client as a person, the notion of the relationship part of the process of change, relationship being part of respect, seems to have been watered down.

Wish List Items The wish list items included technology items that would make the job easier. Specific wish list items included having digital voice recorders, more cell phones, more lap top computers that participants could take home and work with, and more company cars. The anticipated positive outcomes from having this technology included increased efficiency, increased flexibility in work hours, more time to work with clients, more opportunities to be out in the community and less time inputting data.

### Family/Friend Support

The “Family/Friend Support” category had a total of 9 helping incidents with a participation rate of 40% contributed to by 8 participants. There were no hindering incidents or wish list items. The helping incidents included incidents where friends and family cared, supported, listened to, validated, empathized, and encouraged participants. Examples of helping incidents included talking with or receiving support from a spouse and friends, having healthy and emotionally grounded friends outside of the work environment that offered new and interesting ideas and opportunities for the participants. The positive outcomes arising from receiving support from family and friends included knowing there was help if they needed it, getting another perspective through which to understand the changes they faced, having a safe haven to retreat to, having their work validated, and feeling valued at home and with friends even if they were not feeling valued at work.

### Organizational Philosophy/ Policy

The “Organizational Philosophy/Policy” category had a total of 65 incidents including: 8 helping incidents with a participation rate of 40% contributed to by 8 participants; 47 hindering critical incidents with a participation rate of 90% contributed to by 18 participants and 10 wish list items with a participation rate of 35% contributed to by 7 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping category included incidents where participants described the benefits of working in a career where their personal values and beliefs could be actualized by the work itself. The participants described working from a client

centered perspective and how being able to help their clients change honored their beliefs about helping others, they stated that the work allowed them to have a sense of purpose in their life, and that by holding their clients accountable to the orders of the Court, they were contributing to the safety of their communities. Participants also described how some of the new policies helped them to become more efficient and effective in their work, created new opportunities in their work, and kept their jobs interesting. Specific helping incidents cited included the separation between family, youth and adult probation in 1996, core programming, and the introduction of the new report writing formats and case management strategies that helped them to focus their work with clients by targeting specific areas for change. Positive outcomes from these critical incidents included feeling more efficient and effective, the work being more relevant, having access to resources that increased their job effectiveness, and greater focus in their work due to streamlined report formats. One participant talked about being able to realize her values and spiritual beliefs through her work as a probation officer:

I feel proud of who I am and what I do. I feel like I am here for a reason so it fits into some of my spiritual beliefs and not just doing a cake walk through life. But you're actually supposed to do something and be a part of the world and connected and stuff. So all of that feeds into self-confidence and purpose and so on.

Hindering Incidents The hindering incidents were those where participants described the organization's philosophical shift away from being client-centered to a focus on productivity, and the organization's focus on accountability and process rather than being a helping organization. They also described the overwhelming number of policy changes, they described how many of the changes were poorly thought out, not implemented well, and how overall they made their jobs more difficult. Specific



hindering incidents cited included not being able to focus on the needs of the clients, having to work differently with the clients (one-on-one work to group work), a focus on productivity (client completion rates for core programming), adherence to policy, incongruence between philosophical stances, the organization's focus on productivity (completed programs) rather than client success, new case management plans, different computer programs, the different levels of probation officers (e.g., PO14 and PO24), new sentencing options, and the hiring process. The negative outcomes that resulted from the organization's philosophical shift to a productivity driven focus resulted in participants feeling disconnected from the organization, not feeling supported, feeling unappreciated, feeling ineffective and unproductive, feeling unmotivated, feeling betrayed, loss of interest in the work, and wanting to leave the organization. Negative outcomes arising from too many policy changes included feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, being on a constant learning curve, feeling inadequate, loss of autonomy, reduced professionalism, feeling unfairly treated, and feeling frustrated and resentful of change. Some of these sentiments are represented in the following participant quotes:

We've gone from a helping organization to a corporate structure. We've come from what we would say a helping to corporate. In helping people you know different approaches have to be used because we are all different. But now it's like the corporation having all the answers and nothing else matters. I mean I think our focus on technology over people seems to be the philosophy. It's more important that all this information is input into the system than actually doing anything with these people. As long as it is on paper and in the computer there is this perception that you are doing something and that's a hindering factor because you could put anything down and it doesn't actually mean your doing it or it's effective. And that's where we are doing the smoke and mirrors game. I mean upper management can talk to the minister and say well look at this information we input, look what's going on, people are involved in this and this and this. That it's not accomplishing anything is irrelevant, but we have the facts and figures to show that something is going on. And that's where the lack of morale, the fall

and deterioration of the morale comes from, that lack of belonging to something meaningful, meaning in your work, you know self-satisfaction.

What I have found on the hindering side is that the amount of change that we have endured over the last six years has just been unbelievable. For me overwhelming as well. Its every aspect of what we do with a client has now changed. It's not just a little bit and with all this change I feel, and especially with computers there is this scrutiny. The feeling is creepy either you're doing something wrong or you're gonna get shit because some asshole went out and shot his wife and you didn't phone her by the policy manual, by the book or some damn thing. The feeling is really, really overwhelming.

Wish List Items The wish list category included incidents where participants wished that the organization's philosophical stance would shift back to being client-centered. The participants also wished for transparent practices in hiring staff. Examples of items in this category included a desire for the work not be based on being afraid of the clients (security measures in the offices), that the work should be about responding to the needs of the client, that the participants would have a greater say in developing a plan to meet those needs, greater fairness in the hiring process (specifically in relation to having to panel for new job opportunities), and more job-relevant qualifications for new staff including more people-oriented job experience and life skills. The participants anticipated that a philosophical shift that favored a client-centered focus would allow them to "mesh" their personal philosophy about caring for people with the work that they do as probation officers, that it would provide them with a sense of validation (people over paper is the best approach), increase their loyalty to the Branch, increase their commitment to the work and the job, reduce the stress that they feel due to the conflicting ideologies, provide them with a greater sense of purpose, increase their job satisfaction, and increase their motivation to remain in the job. They also anticipated that by having

better hiring practices new probation officers would be better qualified and would therefore; be able to relate better to clients. They felt that if the internal hiring process was more inclusive (designed to tap the best qualified younger and senior officers) that it would open more doors for them, provide them with more career options, help them feel more effective in their careers, and increase their job satisfaction.

### Job Skills

The “Job Skills” category had a total of 12 incidents that included: 4 (33%) helping incidents with a participation rate of 20% contributed to by 4 participants; 6 (50%) hindering incidents with a participation rate of 30% contributed to by 6 participants and 2 (17%) wish list items with a participation rate of 10% contributed to by 2 participants.

Helping Incidents The helping category included incidents where participants described how their personal attributes including their job skills, attitudes and abilities helped them cope well with change. Examples of helping incidents were: being proficient at the computer, being able to train other colleagues, having the skills to deliver core programming, possessing a positive attitude, and having the interpersonal skills that helped them to make connections with other people in the Justice System and to maintain those connections. The positive outcomes arising from this category included being aware of one’s skills and feeling confident, feeling connected and valued, being adaptable to change, being resilient, having job options, and feeling creative and purposeful. The following participant quotes illustrate:

I still get my job done because I have many, many, many contacts. I have people whether it’s in the Mental Health teams of Forensic system, I know police officers and I still phone them when I have concerns about a client. What makes things work are my connections. Connections I earned over the years.

I have those skills and I know when I was in my own, training and working with a group I think I was trained very well. And I was relying on my experience of being trained and bringing that with my colleagues here. I feel more connected to the staff that I'm doing group with. It reinforces when I get the feedback from staff that I'm good at this, this is something I can do.

Hindering Incidents The hindering category included incidents where participants cited experiences where they felt their skills were not recognized or valued by the Branch. Examples of hindering incidents included: feeling that the “soft” people skills are no longer valued, that data entry skills are more important, and that degrees are valued over years of work experience. The negative outcomes arising from these hindering incidents were frustration over the lack of recognition of their people skills, feeling redundant and devalued by the Branch, sadness over their loss of purpose, fear about learning new skills, resistance to change, and decreased interest and effectiveness at work. An example illustrates:

The job has changed so much that it's just boring, very boring. And there is no job satisfaction in certain aspects. In the day to day case management, filling in some sheet on the computer, absolutely none. And there is always some new thing on the computer to learn and it's just never ending and that's just definitely not my strong point.

Wish List Items The wish list category included incidents where participants wished they could go back to doing the kind of work that they knew they were good at, and that they liked. Examples of wish list items included returning to specialized case loads and focusing more on the people-oriented aspects of the work. The main outcome of having more people-oriented job tasks would be a sense of importance and validation of their worth as employees.

### Summary

The participants' descriptions of critical incidents resulted in ten distinct categories of helping and hindering items that either enhanced or detracted from their ability to cope well with change in their work environment. A further analysis of these ten categories revealed that the frequency with which the participants endorsed the helping and hindering incidents in each category were fairly equivalent (see Table 6). For example, in the Nature of the Work category, 95% of the participants endorsed helping critical incidents that created satisfaction in their work (i.e., autonomy over decision-making, working with their clients, job opportunities) and thereby helped them to cope well with change. Conversely, in the same category, 100% of the participants endorsed hindering critical incidents that reduced the meaning in their work (i.e., loss of autonomy over decision-making, lack of job opportunities, lack of time to do the job) thereby hindering their ability to cope well with change in the work environment. These findings reflect the accuracy with which the results of the study reflect the participants' experiences and add to the truthfulness and credibility of the study.

### **Scaling Question Results**

One of the purposes of the current study was to determine whether being interviewed and having an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of coping well would influence the participant's sense of coping well. In order to test the hypothesis that the interview would increase the participants' sense of coping well, the first scaling question was asked at the start of the interview and the second scaling question was asked immediately following the critical incident component at the end of the interview. The differences between the participants' responses to the first and second scaling questions are

summarized in Table 7. The results pertaining to the difference in scaling question scores and participant comments are discussed following Table 7.

Table 7: Scaling Question Results

Participant #	Coping Scaling Question #1	Coping Scaling Question #2	Explanation for Difference
1	8	8	
2	8.5	8.5	
3	8	8	
4	8	8	
5	9.5	9.5	
6	7	7	
7	7	8	Interview has helped me come full Circle.
8	8	8	
9	8	7	The Interview. I have reflected on things more.
10	7	7	
11	8	9	The interview. Talking about thing I realize I do cope well.
12	9	9	
13	5	8	Interview. I was able to communicate how I was feeling.
14	7	7	
15	7	7	
16	9	9	
17	8	10	The interview. Talking about the past gave me better perspective.
18	7	7	
19	8	4	The interview. Reflecting on the discussion, I feel alone.
20	7	5	The interview. I feel helpless brought this into awareness.

Results from the scaling questions indicated that the interview process itself did not have an impact on the majority of the participants (65%) who participated in the study. Of the 20 participants who participated in the study, seven (35%) had post scaling question scores that were different from their pre-interview scaling question scores. Of the seven, four of the participants had higher coping well scores at post-interview, while three were lower at post-interview.

The explanations for the difference in scaling question scores provided by the four participants whose coping scale scores were higher at post-interview indicated that their sense of coping well was heightened after the interview process itself and consequently, they realized that they coped better than they had previously thought. Their comments included: “The interview has helped me to come full circle and I realize after talking about all of the experiences that I have been through, that I do cope pretty well”; “Actually, after talking about everything, I realize I am coping well”; “Well before I talked to you today I wasn’t feeling like I was coping well. But now that we’ve talked and I’ve had a chance to talk about how I feel, I feel much better and I think am I coping much better than I thought”; “Talking about the positives and recognition of my experience of coping well. It’s given me a different perspective”.

The explanations for the difference in scaling question scored provided by the three participants whose coping scale scores were lower at post-interview indicated that their feelings of hopelessness, isolation and frustration with new policies and management practices were heightened after the interview and upon reflection of these feelings, they reduced their coping scores. Their comments included: “I feel helpless and our conversation has brought that into awareness for me, that no matter what I do, I can’t



control the stress at work and I worry for my health”, “It’s interesting because when I talked about my external resources it made me feel happy and validated, I said an eight. And now after we’ve talked and I realize that the managers I respected are all gone, now I feel like a four or five”; “Because of our discussion, I’m reflecting on things more and I feel more frustrated because of some of the changes that have occurred than before we started to talk”.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the phenomenological and CIT results of the study, followed by the results that the interview process itself had on participants. The implications for probation officers, their organization, and the field of counselling psychology are then presented. The findings are also considered in light of the relevant existing literature in the field (this process also serves as a final credibility check-are the findings consistent with previous research?) Finally, implications for future research are discussed and the limitations noted.

### **Research Questions**

The study explored the following research questions: 1) what is the lived experience of experienced probation officers who are coping well with change, 2) what are the self-sustaining strategies probation officers use to cope well with on-going change in their work life, what hindered them from doing well, and were there things that would have been helpful but were unavailable, and 3) whether the research interview itself had an impact on probation officers' sense of well being. The results pertaining to the phenomenological component and the critical incident categories presented in Chapter Four are discussed in more detail in this section, as are the results of the CIT credibility check that compares the 10 categories with the literature.

## **Phenomenology Results**

### The Experience of Being a Probation Officer and the Meaning Assigned to the Role

In order to gain perspective and knowledge about the change experiences that probation officers encounter in their work environment, it was thought that it would be first important to gather background information about how probation officers experienced their role as a probation officer and the meaning they associated with the role. When I commenced the interviews with the participants, I had no idea how they would respond to the open-ended questions and the unstructured nature of this portion of the interview process. However, I was surprised when this portion of the first interview comprised more than half of the interview time. This was due to the officers' engagement in the interview process and their willingness to provide rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences.

Given my own experience of having worked in a correctional environment, I was not surprised, in light of the fact that the participants self-identified as coping well; to find that many of the participants expressed negative experiences, emotions and psychological outcomes during the telling of their stories. Explanations for these outcomes may be found in the stress and coping literature, emotional psychology literature and the thriving and resilience literature.

Researchers in the stress and coping field (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993, 1998; Summerfield & McCrae, 2000) suggest that positive or adaptive or effective coping has the function of both regulating stressful emotions (emotion-focused coping) and altering the situation that causes the distress (problem-focused coping). The authors

argue that emotion-focused coping occurs when individuals determine that they have no means of changing the negative situation that is causing stress. The research on depression (Edwards & Cooper, 1990) also informs us that stress occurs when there is a lack of congruence between an individual's values and abilities and the work environment. Karasak's (1979) demand-control model of occupational functioning suggests that when an employee's control over their work is limited and the psychological demands of the job are high, depression will result.

What these coping strategies appear to have in common is that they note how immobilized individuals can be in response to an adverse event. Researchers in the thriving and resilience field (Carver, 1998; Ickovics & Park, 1998; Maddi, 2005) suggest that some individuals view an adverse event as a challenge and "bounce back" either to their previous level of functioning (resilience) or to a higher level of functioning (thriving); others survive but with impairment and still others do not recover at all (succumb). Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) suggest that positive coping occurs when individuals engage in meaning-based coping that includes appraising the situation as positive, engaging in problem-focused coping and infusing ordinary life events with positive meaning. Ultimately, they thrive because of their ability to cope with stress (resiliency) and grow (thrive) because of their positive coping experience.

The participants in the current study fell into the category of being "resilient". Without exception, they expressed interest and passion for their work. Despite the negative aspects of the organizational changes they experienced, for the most part, they still looked forward to coming to work. While not always feeling a sense of loyalty to their organization, they were resolute in their loyalty to the cause of helping their clients

change. A number of participants saw their work with clients as affirming their purpose in life and stated that it provided them with the opportunity to actualize deeply held values and spiritual beliefs about giving, contributing, and helping others.

Studies in the positive coping literature (Frederickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Levensen, 1998; Isen et al., 1985) provided insight into the participants' positive coping attitudes by suggesting that positive affect promotes creativity and flexibility in thinking and problem solving, and that positive affect can serve as a buffer against adverse physiological outcomes such as stress. In positive prevention, human strengths such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for flow and insight act as buffers against mental illness. According to Seligman (2002) a positive psychology approach (incorporation of the above principles in one's daily functioning) to prevention will measure, understand and build the positive human characteristics that make life worth living and that help individuals flourish. The participants' ability to adopt and implement creative solutions to perceived negative changes was apparent when they described how they were able to strike a balance between doing what they had to do to satisfy the policy requirements of their organization while still continuing to do the aspects of their work that provided them with the most meaning.

Many of the studies and books that I read on the history of probation and community correctional practices noted the initial social service ideological underpinnings of probation work. (Andrews, 1989; Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Andrews et al., 1990; Bahr, 1981; Bonta, 1997; Braithwaite, 1968; Cohen, 1985; Culhane, 1975; Forbes, 1950; Gendreau, 1987; Hartman, 1982; Lambert & Madden, 1976; Mason, 2003; Oliver, 1984;

Palmer, 1975; Pearce, 1969; Woodhams & Philips, 1961). The majority of participants in the current study identified the social work or “client-centered” ideological stance of the work as being their primary motivation for choosing probation as a career. They also reported that their work with clients; seeing clients change in a positive manner, and being able to play a role in that change sustained their motivation for the work and their commitment to their organization over the years. However, it was apparent that the organization’s shift away from this “social work” ideology in favor of a more productivity-oriented philosophy (number of clients seen and reports completed), was a significant source of conflict and frustration for the majority of the participants in the current study.

#### What Coping Well Means

The large number (151) of participant responses to this question indicated that the construct for coping well meant different things for different participants, and that it was comprised of diverse behaviours and attitudes ranging from exercise, having good relationships with colleagues, being positive, being ethical, being spiritual, taking breaks from work, having it together, working part-time, and having social support.

The participant responses that included comments about coping, making changes, taking breaks, staying on top of things, limiting stress, not feeling overwhelmed, and sleeping at night were consistent with the findings in the stress and coping literature (Folkman, 1992; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sommerfield & McCrae, 2000) and the positive coping literature. Researchers in the stress and coping field suggest that positive coping ability occurs when individuals employ problem-solving coping strategies in situations where they determine something

can be done to change the negative situation. Fredrickson (1998) suggests that positive emotions can broaden an individual's attentional focus and behavioral repertoire, and can build intellectual and physical resources necessary for positive coping.

Positive psychology researchers also inform that qualities such as hope, optimism, contentment, and satisfaction play a role in coping well. Participant descriptions of being positive, having a good attitude, going with change, being effective in their work, being spiritual and ethical were also consistent with the thriving literature (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Park, 1998). These researchers contend that a person's ability to cope positively is determined by the above-mentioned qualities

Participants also mentioned having good relationships with their colleagues, feeling respected by their colleagues and having good personal relationships with others as indications of coping well. Support for these comments can be found in the social psychology literature. A number of researchers (Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002; Bliese & Britt, 2001; Kudielka et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2005) have argued that social support; including support from family, friends, co-workers and managers act as important buffers against negative psychological outcomes such as absenteeism, stress and burnout.

#### Change Experiences and Meaning Attributed to Change Experiences

The participant responses to the question of how specific changes in their work environment impacted them were of course, emotional responses. Overall, the emotions that the participants attributed to the specific changes they identified resulted in negative psychological outcomes. Comments such as feeling overwhelmed, fearful of reprisal, feeling less professional, feeling less motivated to do the work, feeling less creative, stressed, anxious and frustrated reflected their responses to changes that limited their

control over decision-making, reduced the meaningful aspects of their work, and held them accountable in a way that they felt was not only unfair, but beyond their ability to control. It was not surprising therefore, that they would assign negative feelings to the changes.

Support for their responses can be found in the burn-out and depression literature. Karasak's (1979, 1998) Demand-Control Model posits that when control over the execution of tasks is limited, job stress occurs. Additionally, the burnout literature (Bakker et al., 2005; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001) suggests that when employees feel emotionally drained, lose trust and become emotionally disengaged from their work, they are at greatest risk for burnout. While it was clear that the participants who participated in the study were not suffering from burnout, it was interesting to note that when discussing their feelings about the specific changes that reduced the meaning in their work and their sense of being valued, the elements consistent with one aspect of burnout (emotional exhaustion) were apparent.

The stress and coping literature also provides insight into the participants' negative emotional responses. Lazarus's model of coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) argues that stressful emotions occur when individuals determine that they have no means of changing situations that create stress. And further that the person's perception of personal control (belief in the ability to affect change) over the stressful situation determined the level of stress experienced.

Although the emotional impacts that participants expressed were primarily negative, it is important to remember that they were responding to specific changes that they did not like, and felt that they had no control over. All of the participants reported that they liked



their job. Some even expressed feeling passionate about their work. In fact, some of the changes they mentioned did result in positive emotional impacts such as feeling more competent, more efficient, and the work being more relevant. So, I don't view their negative responses as an indication that they were not coping well.

The stress and coping literature (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) helps to explain the participants' positive coping responses. The researchers inform us that when people feel that something can be done to change negative situations at work, it gives them a greater sense of control and they feel more positive. The stress and coping literature also supports the notion that chronic stress and positive affect can co-exist (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). That they are independent dimensions related to well being (Fredrickson, 1998; Park, 1998). The thriving and resilience literature (O'Leary & Ickovis, 1995; Park, 1998) suggests that when people possess the qualities of a positive attitude and cognitive flexibility, they are better able to cope with stressful situations.

#### Have Participants Always Coped Well With Change?

The determination of whether or not participants have always coped well with change was relevant to the current study because of the implications for workers who were not coping well with change, and their ability to change their coping response. As it turned out, the majority of the participants in the current study did report that they had always coped well with change. Only four participants indicated that they had not always coped well. Although the percentage of participants who had not always coped well represented only 18 % of the sample, their experiences were still relevant to the findings of the study.

In particular, their responses about what helped them to cope better with change offer hope to other workers who are struggling with change.

Consistent with the idea that people can learn to cope well with change, the four participants offered some insight into what could help others cope better with change. The helping incidents that they described included becoming more self-aware, creating balance between work and home, having support from both colleagues and supervisors at work, having support at home from friends and family, and focusing on the aspects of their work that they liked. Their responses suggest that helping workers who are not coping well with change become more aware of their resistance to change, helping them to focus on what they like about their work rather than what they don't like and helping them to focus on their personal strengths and weaknesses, might be effective interventions for increasing their capacity for coping well with change. Further, their responses indicate that by providing the resources (counselors, mentors, etc.) to help people deal with the emotions that get in the way of coping well with change, organizations might reduce their employees' resistance to change and thereby increase their tolerance for change.

Support for these results can be found in the burnout, business, stress and coping, social support and psychological thriving and resiliency literature (Bakker et al., 2002; Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002; Bliese & Britt, 2001; Borgen, 1999; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Maddi, 2002; Maslach et al., 2001; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995). All of these different bodies of research suggest that people are capable of change, and that providing them with important resources helps in the process of coping well. For example, the downsizing literature (Borgen, 1999; Borgen et. al., 1989)

indicates that downsized employees coped better when they participated in employment and other intervention groups. The benefits included: emotional support, self-esteem and confidence, shared experiences, networking opportunities, and a sense of community.

The social psychology literature posits that support through group cohesion helps to buffer the effects of burnout (Bauer, 2000; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002) . These researchers suggest that the social environment provides confirmation of social identity and offers instrumental and other forms of support. Additionally, that trust in management helps to moderate the relationship between work overload and stress and strain that leads to burnout.

The literature on burn-out (Baker et al, 2005; Brown et al., 2005; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Peters, 2000) and depression (Kessler & Frank, 1997; Stansfeld et al., 1997; Stansfeld et al., 1999; Want et al., 2004; Wang & Patten, 2001; Wilkins & Beaudet, 1998) affirms the relationship between control over the execution of one's work tasks and job stress. For example, factors such as social support, feedback, fairness, and autonomy can reduce job stressors and increase coping ability.

The psychological resilience and thriving literature informs us that individuals who direct their attention and efforts towards modifying and altering some aspects of themselves; in particular their beliefs and specific skills, can improve their coping abilities.

## **Critical Incident Results**

### **Comparison of Categories to Relevant Scholarly Literature**

Support in the literature was found for all 10 categories created from the data obtained from the critical incident questions asked during the first interview. The supporting literature encompasses many different disciplines including business (organizational change, organizational culture, occupational health), social psychology, criminal justice, career, stress and coping, resiliency and thriving, burn-out and depression, and positive psychology. For the purpose of the following discussion, ‘Wish List’ items have been incorporated into helping incidents. The rationale being that had the items existed, they would have helped the participants cope better with change. Each of the 10 critical incident categories is discussed in relation to a fit with the relevant literature.

#### Nature of the Work

This category included: workload, accountability, autonomy, nature of the clients, resources, and job opportunities and included both helping and hindering items. Support for the positive role of having autonomy, working with clients, having resources and job opportunities in coping well was found in the business, criminal justice, emotional psychology, stress and coping, and career literature. Conversely, support for the negative impact that having a high workload and increased accountability has on coping well, was found in the criminal justice, organizational change, burn-out and depression and probation/correctional literature.

The business literature talked about both the positive and negative impact of organizational change on employee’s ability to cope well with change. Some studies

(Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Davis, 2003; Kanter, 1999; Leana & Barry, 2000; Misha and Spreitzer, 1998; Susskind, 2007) noted the positive outcomes of organizational change including a new sense of efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, employees felt increased excitement at the prospect of new job opportunities and personal growth following changes in their work environment. Conversely, the studies also implicated an increased workload resulting from organizational downsizing as a significant factor contributing to increased levels of job stress.

The career literature discussed the negative role of organizational change in relation to reduced job opportunities or unemployment due to downsizing (Borgen & Amundson, 1984, 1987) and the emotional challenges associated with unexpected and unwanted job transition, such as lateral moves and demotions (Maglio et al., 2005). In addition, some studies also discussed the notion of career plateauing in relation to lowered career aspirations (Ettington, 1998; Rontondo & Perrewe, 2000; Tremblay & Roger, 2004; Weiner et al., 1992). In relation to helping factors, researchers (Collins & Young, 2000; Inkson & Amundson, 2002) discussed the positive aspects of an internal, subjective process of constructing meaning and success in career, in that assessments of fulfillment and achievement become internal and in response to the changing nature of the individual rather than the organization.

Although the literature pertaining to probation officer work experiences is not expansive, there are some studies (Abdollahi, 2002; Finn, 2000; Finn & Kuck, 2002; Slate et al., 2003; Whitehead, 1985, 1986) that suggest stress and burnout in probation officers results from boredom with the job, lack of promotion (job opportunities),

unnecessary paper work (workload), lack of time to accomplish job tasks (resources), dangers of the job (clients) and lack of participation in decision-making (autonomy). On the other hand, Lambert (2004) suggested that job autonomy, job variety, and participation in organizational matters increases job satisfaction and in so doing helps to buffer the effects of job stress and burnout. The majority of the participants described all of these factors and attributed them to recent organizational policy changes.

The burn-out and depression literature discussed the role of protection factors in relation to employees' coping abilities as well as the implications for coping when resources are not sufficient to meet job demands. In terms of helping factors, Karasek's (1979, 1998) Demand-Control model highlights the importance of employees maintaining control over the execution of their job duties. The model suggests that autonomy and role consistency are key factors that buffer against job stress. On the other hand, the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker et al., 2003) suggests that insufficient job resources or the wrong kind of resources can lead to stress or burnout. Having autonomy and losing autonomy over the decision-making in their cases were both helping and hindering incidents that were frequently mentioned by the participants in this study. They had important implications in terms of their sense of professionalism and their job satisfaction. The lack of, loss of, inappropriateness of, or benefit of having effective resources were also widely cited by participants, as discussed in Chapter Four.

### Colleagues

This category also included helping and hindering incidents pertaining to the influence of new probation officers. Support for both helping and hindering incidents was found in the business, career, social support, and emotional psychology literature. The sub-

category of “new probation officers” was included in this category because the participants frequently mentioned them as a hindering factor. It should be clarified that when the participants referred to new probation officers, it was not in relation to specific individuals, but rather to the manner in which the organization trains them, the difference in their qualifications in relation to the participants, and the impact of these factors in terms of increasing their workload.

The frequency with which the participants endorsed the sub-category for “new probation officers” (55%) was of interest. I believe the implications of this are significant in terms of the positive buffering affect of social support and cohesion in the work place. Based on the participants’ comments in this category, the following factors appear to be at issue. First, the perception of participants was that the new probation officers are hired because of their technological skills, not because of their people-oriented skills, as was the case for many of the “senior” participants in this study. Second, many of the new probation officers are quite young, lack life and job-related experiences, and take a more enforcement-oriented approach in the work. Third, the new probation officers frequently leave the job, and as a result the seasoned officers do not want to expend the emotional resources necessary to form relationships with them. Finally, the new probation officers are trained on-line and arrive at the job site only partially trained and in need of significant supervision and mentoring. As a result, the seasoned officers are required to “pick up the slack” resulting in more work for them. These factors taken together resulted in a significant emotional and philosophical disconnect between the two groups, the implications of which are discussed in the following social support literature.

A study by Bliese and Britt (2001) suggested that when workers are members of a cohesive group (strong organizational culture), work stressors have a weaker relationship to stress outcomes such as depression and burnout. Social support in this sense, is expected to help individuals cope with stressors because of the belief that the social environment provides confirmation of social identity, and instrumental support such as emotional, informational and feedback to group members. Conversely, when this group cohesion is missing, individuals are more prone to negative stress related outcomes.

Along the lines of positive colleague support, a study by Martin et al., (2005) suggested that an employee's appraisal of collegial relationships as positive is significantly associated with the individual's ability to positively adjust to organizational change. Thus, if employees rate their social environment at work as positive, they will feel more confident and in control of how organizational change will affect them. The majority of participants made comments that were consistent with these findings. One participant in particular discussed the nature of her collegial relationships and how they influenced not only her interactions with clients, but also her work choices in terms of who she wants to work with, where she works, and what duties she is willing to take on.

Although the negative impact of colleagues in relation to coping was not widely endorsed by the participants, a number of them (55%) did identify it as a hindering factor. Examples of hindering incidents included colleagues being rude and disrespectful to clients, colleagues acting unprofessionally or having personal issues such as abusing substances. The literature on burnout offers some explanation for the development of some of the negative employee behaviours described by the participants. Studies on burnout (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli



& Peeters, 2000) suggest that depersonalization and reduced accomplishment are key factors in burnout. Depersonalization refers to a negative or detached response to others, for example, a lack of consideration for one's clients. Reduced personal accomplishment results from a decline in an individual's feelings of competence and successful work achievement.

### Management

This category was comprised of helping and hindering incidents pertaining to management skills, management style, management support, and lack of management support, and contained both helping and hindering items. Support for these items was found in the business, social support, and criminal justice literature.

In terms of a helping factor the organizational commitment literature suggests that when employers demonstrate value for their employees (support) and care about their well-being employees are better able to cope with change (Havlovic et al., 1998; Terry et al., 1996). In the current study, the participants who felt valued, listened to, and who felt important to their organization identified their managers' style of managing as helping them cope well with change. On the other hand, the participants (and these were the majority) who did not feel they had a voice within their organization, and who did not feel valued, mentioned their managers' style; in particular managers who micro-managed them, as a hindering factor.

The social support literature supports the notion that managers help to buffer the negative impact of job stress by providing support through two primary roles; social support and mentoring. Many of the participants commented on the positive personal qualities of past managers and how their support engendered trust and social cohesion in

the work environment. Conversely, the emotional psychology literature (Kessler & Frank, 1997; Wang & Patten, 2001) suggests that workers who received limited support from their supervisors were more likely to experience depression and were less productive at work. A number of participants mentioned their managers' failure to provide direction, support and even resources. In fact, many stated that their local managers were often not present in the work environment and so access to them was limited. In addition, they felt quite alienated from their upper management and silenced and excluded from the process of organizational policy development.

The career literature also addressed the role of management support, however; more from the aspect of the organization's role in developing career-resilient workers. Waterman (1994) suggested that organizations can assist employees to become and remain resilient by establishing systems that help them assess their skills and interests, provide them with the opportunities to learn and develop new skills, and then determine where their best fit within the organization would be. The participants in the current study mentioned all of these items in their discussions of helpful coping factors. Many in fact identified the job opportunities and the ability to learn and develop new skills as the most positive and rewarding aspects of their career.

Finally, the criminal justice literature speaks very loudly to the issue of management support or lack thereof in relation to employee coping. Two studies (Grossi et al., 1996 & Brown, 1993) that addressed management style through the role of attitudinal states were very relevant to the results of the current study. The authors suggested that bureaucratic organizations by their nature do not encourage feedback from their employees and that this one-way direction of communication can negatively impact both

job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Many of the participants in the current study identified the one-way direction of communication with their upper management as a significant hindering factor in their ability to cope well with change because they felt completely shut out of the decision-making process that related to the development of new policies that directly impacted the way in which they did their jobs.

On the other hand, in relation to helping factors, studies on correctional officer work satisfaction suggested that because supervisors play such a key role in providing recognition of employees, their support is significantly related to high levels of job satisfaction. Again, examples of positive mentoring, experiences of being positively supported and encouraged by both upper and middle management were mentioned by the majority of participants and were clearly associated with their ability to cope well with change.

### Personal Factors

The category of “Personal Factors” was comprised of incidents pertaining to coping strategies, attitude, and self-care. The helping and hindering items described by the participants were supported by the research literature in a number of fields including the social psychology literature, the emotional psychology literature, the positive psychology literature, occupational health psychology and the stress and coping literature. In reference to the helping factors, many of the participants described having a positive attitude, being open-minded in terms of seeing the positive aspects of change, and being flexible and able to adjust to change. Finally, they mentioned personality traits, such as being positive and adaptable, “being personally suited to do this kind of work” and the

ability to develop self-care strategies, as being an important personal attributes in the ability to cope well with change.

The research literature is replete with studies that speak to the impact and importance of personal traits, attitudes, and emotions in successfully handling many different aspects of living, including change. Lazarus (1993) talked about personality variables, traits and emotions in relation to stress and coping reactions. Specifically, he identified the personality traits of resilience, hardiness, learned resourcefulness, optimism, self-efficacy and a sense of coherence as being helpful in resisting the negative impacts of stress.

Further, the positive coping literature (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000) discusses the role of meaning-based coping in positive coping. The authors suggest that positive emotions can broaden an individual's attentional focus and behavioral repertoire which in turn builds social, intellectual, and physical resources. Additionally, Isen et al. (1985) found that positive affect promotes creativity and flexibility in thinking and problem solving, and that positive affect can serve as a buffer against the physiological consequences of stress.

The participants in the current study demonstrated the qualities of positive affect when they talked about being flexible in their thinking and having a positive attitude when presented with new policy directives by the Branch or required to develop new technological skills. In fact a number of participants referred to themselves as creative problem solvers; and further, that they considered this quality to be fundamental to being a successful probation officer, especially in relation to helping their clients.

The resilience literature (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995) also discusses the notion of flexibility in emotion regulation. Many of the participants talked about the importance of

not taking themselves or things at work too seriously and using humour as a coping strategy. The psychological thriving literature discusses the role of self-determination, awareness of competencies and confidence as contributing to resilience (ability to cope with stress) rather than burnout (Park, 1998). The positive psychology literature discusses the importance of human strengths such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, perseverance, and the capacity for flow in relation to coping (Seligman, 2002). The occupational health literature stressed the importance of achieving congruence between individual abilities and values in terms of coping with the demands of a specific occupation (Wang & Patten, 2001). The participants mentioned all of these qualities when talking about their self care, having confidence in their abilities and skills, and being aware of their unique personal suitability to probation work (i.e. “either you can handle it or you can’t”).

In terms of hindering incidents, the burnout literature discussed cynicism (attitude) and detachment (withdrawing from or numbing one’s feeling) as two of the primary indicators of burn-out (Brown et al., 2005 & Maslach, 2003). Many of the participants in the current study talked about experiencing both aspects of burn-out, which lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased stress, less energy at work and decreased effectiveness at work. Additionally, the resiliency literature (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Park, 1998) discussed the role of limited flexibility in that people who reach the end of their capacity to assimilate change demonstrate frustration, irritability, and low productivity. These emotions were expressed by the participants when they talked about being micro-managed at work and their resulting feelings of hopelessness and sense of loss of control. They also expressed these feelings when they talked about the lack of

management support and fear of reprisal, and their tendency to withdraw and keep to themselves, leading to isolation and less creative involvement in their work.

### Work Environment

This category also included the sub-categories of connected/disconnected and office structure and consisted of both helping and hindering incidents. Support for both the helping and hindering aspects was found in the business, social psychology, emotional psychology and criminal justice literature. The hindering items formed the largest group in this category. Several examples of hindering items identified by participants in the current study were related to organizational change practices and management actions.

The downsizing literature informs us that one of the key ingredients in whether or not employees develop positive or negative attitudes in relation to organization change is the gain or loss of connections to network resources that were viewed as valuable (Brokdener, 1988; Henkoff, 1990; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). This was certainly the case in the current study. Many of the participants spoke of the importance of networking and the benefits in terms of having greater resources as well as a feeling of being connected and being viewed as contributing members of a much bigger system. They provided many examples of situations where they relied on their connections with other members of the Justice community to either gain information or to assist them in performing their job. On the other hand, they shared their sense of alienation, their sense of loss of community and feelings of disconnection resulting from policy changes that significantly reduced and in some cases eradicated their interactions with fellow employees and other agencies.

Another important factor that participants mentioned in relation to hindering incidents in their work environment were issues pertaining to changes in organizational culture. Many of the participants described working in a culture of “fear and stress” and they associated this with the organization’s focus on accountability. They identified their managers’ style of micro-managing, holding probation officers responsible for the behaviour of their clients, and the implementation of poorly thought-out policies and ineffective plans and unattainable standards as contributing to their high levels of anxiety and to their fear of being fired. Lazarus’s (1968) model of coping helps to explain this response. According to his model, stress is comprised of an interaction between a person and an event. Stress arises when the interaction leads to a threat appraisal. However, the most salient factor in the determination of a stress outcome is the person’s perception of having personal control over the stressful situation. The majority of the participants in the current study cited lack of control over their workload, lack of control over their clients’ behaviour, lack of control over their caseload, and lack of control over the development of policies that direct their work as factors that significantly contributed to the stress and anxiety in their work environment.

Heider’s (1958) socio-cognitive theory of culture formation also informs us that an employees’ perception of change can influence the formation of a work environment culture and impact coping in either a positive or negative manner. Further, organizational change studies (Crank, 1996; Reino et al., 2007; Silvester et al., 1999) also suggest that resistance to organizational change can occur because of the organizational members’ response to new ways of doing and thinking about things. If the group perceives the

organizational change to be unfair or ineffective, then the perception of the change on an individual level will likely be the same.

As mentioned before, the social support literature talks about the positive effects of a strong, cohesive organizational culture, and its relationship to coping. Bliese and Britt (2001) suggest that from a social influence perspective, groups who are characterized by high consensus are presumed to be well functioning and to have low levels of internal conflict and stress. This was true for the majority of the participants in the current study. They mentioned how feeling connected through a shared philosophical vision for the work and a common identity as probation officers helped them in their ability to cope well with new policy changes.

Finally, the criminal justice literature addressed the issues of the work environment on coping. A number of studies (Hogan et al., 2006; Lambert et al., 2002; Poole & Pogrebin, 1991) suggest that the work environment comprised of factors such as organizational commitment, role conflict (frequently changing job assignments and work tasks), supervision and job autonomy and variety play a significant role in the relationship between employee job satisfaction and the development of stress or burnout.

### Training

This category included both helping and hindering items. Support for the items was found in the business, and the social support literature. In terms of helping factors, many of the participants mentioned the high quality of training they received during the three months of their initial training at the Justice Institute. They also talked about the positive social connections they developed with other co-workers during their training and how they maintained and relied on these relationships for support throughout their careers.



As mentioned above, support for the benefits of positive collegial relationships is found in the social support literature. A study by Bliese and Britt (2001) discusses the positive effects of a strong, cohesive organizational culture and its relationship in positive coping. A study by Martin et al. (2002) informs about the buffering effect of collegial social support on job satisfaction and burnout.

The majority of participants in the current study mentioned the on-line training as a hindering item. Participants described the impersonal nature of the training, the lack of genuine feeling in the feedback, the incongruence of the training method with their learning style, and the lack of opportunities for face-to-face interactions and personal skill building, as examples of hindering factors. A number of participants described the training as “on the cheap”, suggesting that it was implemented by their organization in an effort to reduce training costs. The organizational change literature appears to support this notion of on-line training being a cost saving strategy. Davis and Leana (2003) and Barry (2000) suggest that a number of factors play a role in influencing an organization’s beliefs about the need for change and identify cost savings as one of them. They point out that continuous change is motivated by cost savings particularly in the area of human resources that includes training costs.

#### Technology/Computer

This category included both helping and hindering items. Support for both was found in the organizational change, career, and criminal justice literature. The participants mentioned technology; specifically the computer and related systems as both a helping and hindering factor. They offered praise for the computer systems that allowed them speedy access to client information because it improved their effectiveness and

efficiency. On the other hand, they described feeling frustrated by the reliance on the computer and resentful that data entry now represents the majority of their daily work-related duties. They also mentioned the loss of communication with other colleagues, the need to develop new skills, and an increased sense of alienation due to increased time spent using technology (voice mail, e-mail, computers) and less time spent with their clients.

The career literature discusses the negative impact that technological change can have on employees; especially employees who are at mid-career or older. Two studies (Hall & Mirvis, 1995 & Schein, 1995) noted that for workers who have formed a work identity and who have enjoyed their career based on a certain set of job skills and abilities, the idea of having to learn new technological skills can be frightening and stressful and can result in a decrease of their self-esteem and confidence.

The organizational change literature offers further support for these findings. A number of studies (Davis, 2003; Hopkins & Weatherington, 2006; Leana & Barry, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002; Susskind, 2007) indicated that organizational change does result in a number of negative outcomes for employees. These included the loss of important communication networks when fellow employees or managers lose their jobs due to organizational change strategies, the erosion of trust and morale as the workload increases due to staffing decreases, and the need to develop new skills that result for many employees in increased levels of job stress.

A study in the criminal literature (Nellis & Chui, 2003) also supports the notion that certain aspects of organizational change can negatively alter how probation officers

function in their roles. They identified the need to develop new skills in relation to computer processing as one aspect.

### Family/Friend Support

This category contained only helping incidents. The importance of receiving support from family and friends was mentioned by nearly half of the participants in the current study. There is a significant amount of discussion about the helping role of social support in the psychological thriving, social psychology, burnout, stress and coping and organizational research literature. Two studies (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Park, 1998) talked about the important role of social resources in an individual's ability to thrive, and the importance of family as the primary source of validation. Park (1998) noted that one of the roles of social support is to help individuals interpret stressful experiences in a less negative way. Participants talked about the role of both family and friends in offering validation of their work, providing opportunities to take their focus off of work and re-energize, providing them an outlet to vent and release their frustrations from work, and allowing them to feel a sense of connection outside of their work environment.

The burnout literature also noted the important role of family and social support in terms of the ability to reduce the likelihood of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). It discussed the importance of community in helping people remain healthy and avoid burnout, and the notion that technology (email and voicemail) is interfering with people's ability to spend time in person with their friends and family, thus increasing the likelihood of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2001).

Finally, the career counselling literature discussed the important role of family and social support in terms of career choice (Byrd, 2002). Borgen and Amundson (1987)

emphasized the crucial role of social support for people experiencing major career transition, particularly in relation to downsizing. Although some of the participants in the current study did experience some negative consequence due to downsizing (loss of colleagues, reduction in service, increased workload), the majority of participants gained many positive benefits from the support they received from their family and friends both at work and in their private lives.

#### Organizational Philosophy/Policy

This category contained both helping and hindering incidents. Support for both was found in the business, emotional psychology and social psychology and criminal justice literature. The business literature informs us that organizational ideology plays a prominent role in the development of policies that create change at the operational level of the organization (Reino et al., 2007; Trice & Beyer, 1993). The criminal justice literature also supports the notion that fundamental shifts in correctional ideology result in significant changes in correctional work environments. For example, in the past years social work approaches defined the operational ideology and practices of probation work. However, current operational ideology is concerned with centralization of decision-making authority (reduced officer decision-making autonomy) and funding programming as the primary means of reducing offender risk. The majority of participants in the current study mentioned the Branch's shift away from a client-centered focus to a process-oriented focus as a hindering factor. They described the shift as incongruent with their personal philosophies about helping people, and attributed feelings of invalidation and frustration in relation to their reduced decision-making abilities. Further, while the majority of participants identified some positive aspects of the organization's shift in

focus, such as core programming, they resented being forced to teach it, and further being directed to refer all their clients to attend.

The criminal justice literature also discusses the relevance of employee attitudinal states (Grossi et al., 1996). The researchers contend that because organizational leaders in beaurocratic organizations do not traditionally encourage feedback from their employees, their personal ideologies in relation to policy development can have a tremendous impact on employee coping at the line level. This occurs through employee attitudinal states in relation to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The determination of whether or not employees develop positive or negative attitudes appears to be related to factors such as their perception of the appropriateness of the policy change, congruence between the change and their personal values and ideology, and the impact of the change in relation to job duties (Brockener, 1988; Henkoff, 1990; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998).

Positive outcomes occur when employees view a change as helpful (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2005; Davis, 2003). For example, they can feel a new sense of efficiency and effectiveness. They may also feel energized and excited at the prospect of new opportunities and changes in their work environment.

Leiter and Maslach (2001) inform us that the overall pace of change within the organization also plays a significant role. They argue that highly centralized and formalized organizations can alienate workers when they implement too many change strategies, too quickly. A study by Farrow (2004) suggested that the sheer scope of change in the work environment had a negative impact on probation officers.

The person-environment fit theory (Edwards, 1996; Edwards & Cooper, 1990) suggests that stress occurs when there is a lack of congruence between an individual's values and abilities and the demands of the work environment. For example, new employees can become disillusioned when they realize that the bureaucracy they signed up to work for does not allow the professional freedom of operation that they envisioned. As well, seasoned employees can be affected when their sense of professionalism comes into conflict with the constraints of the organization.

### Job Skills

This category contained both helping and hindering incidents. Support for both was found in the business, positive psychology, career and criminal justice literature. In the social psychology literature, Bandura (1977, 1982) talked about the role of self-efficacy in helping people cope well. He argued that the beliefs that an individual holds about his or her own capacity to perform a specific job task determines work-related performance. Self-perceptions of efficacy increase the amount of effort an individual will expend or how long they will persist in the face of aversive experiences. The career literature also spoke to the issue of employee self-reliance. Marshall and Bonner (2003) suggested that employees who develop their skill base and maintain a flexible attitude would cope better during times of transition.

The concepts of self-efficacy and self-reliance described well the experiences of many participants in the current study who expressed a sense of competency and self-sufficiency in relation to their job skills. They reported that their skills and abilities helped them to persevere even in the face of negative events in their work environment because they felt competent, knowledgeable and qualified. One participant commented

on her advanced problem-solving abilities and how having these abilities helped her to perceive negative events as challenges rather than problems. As a result, she embraced the challenges and felt a sense of accomplishment when she was able to solve a problem or overcome a barrier.

In terms of hindering items, the business literature talked about the negative impact of change strategies such as downsizing in relation to employees needing to develop new skills. They suggested that uncertainty about continued employment due to poorly developed or lacking job skills results in increased levels of job stress. Additionally, the career literature discussed the impact on older workers when they are required to develop new skills. Hall & Mavis (1995) suggested that for older workers who have enjoyed years of career success based on a certain set of skills, the prospect of having to learn new skills may impact their self-esteem and confidence. For older workers who already feel undervalued and vulnerable, this can lead to increased levels of stress or depression. A number of participants in the current study mentioned experiencing stress and anxiety because of the organization's shift to a focus on technological skills. Some described a poor aptitude and low motivation for developing these skills. They mentioned feeling that their organization devalued their skill set, which they described as the "soft" people-oriented skills and as a result, they experienced a sense of redundancy and worthlessness.

The thriving and resilience literature talked about the requirement for a "career-resilient" workforce (Waterman et al., 1994). These authors suggest that employees need to take responsibility for developing the skills that organizations need. They used the term "career-resilient" to represent the notion that employees need to be aware of their

own skill strengths and weaknesses and should develop a plan for enhancing their own performance and long-term employability.

Along a similar theme, the career literature (Brousseau et al., 1996; Inkson & Amundson, 2002; Savickas, 2003) discussed the need for employees to prepare themselves for a career involving frequent changes in employers as well the nature of the work performed. Many of the participants in the current study talked about being aware of the changing technological aspects of their job, and the need to develop the skills that would allow them to keep pace with the demands of their job. Indeed, many of the participants in the current study described the process by which they set out to improve their computer skills in particular and the feelings of proficiency and control that resulted from their ability to master the task.

### **Impact of the Interviews**

Another purpose of the current study was to explore whether being interviewed and having an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of coping well would impact the participants' sense of coping well. The results of the two scaling questions that were asked at the start and at the end of the first interview following the critical incident component formed the basis of the data concerning the impact of the interviews.

The majority of the participants who participated in the study indicated that they were not impacted by the interview process itself. However, four participants did experience a positive change in their perception of their situation after the interview. All four cited the opportunity to express their feelings and talk about their experiences at work, and the resulting insight that they were coping well as the main factors that contributed to this positive outcome.



These results could also be explained by some of research concerning the participant/researcher relationship (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000; Butterfield et al., 2009; Weingarten, 1998). These researchers content that the research process is not a neutral experience, but rather, an interactive process where both the researcher and participant are engaged and changed in ways that cannot always be anticipated.

The three participants who experienced a decrease in their perception of coping well score after the completion of the interview indicated that the interview heightened their awareness of some of the negative changes that they have experienced such as the loss of good managers. Their responses may be explained by the stress and coping literature (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993, 1998; Summerfield & McCrae, 2000) that suggests that emotion-focused coping occurs when individuals determine that they have no means of changing the negative situation that is causing stress.

### Summary

Not only are the results of the current study consistent with the literature in relevant fields, but they also offer several important additional findings. First, the results of the current study offer an important framework from which to understand the process of positive coping. This has important implications for employees' ability to achieve high performance in the work environment. Although the participants in the current study self-identified as coping well with change, their experiences at different times over the course of their career revealed that the majority struggled emotionally, psychologically, and sometimes physically to handle events occurring in their work lives. All but perhaps one of the participants described coping responses that were similar to burnout. And yet, despite these negative accounts of coping, the participants continued to meet the

requirements of their job, and in some cases performed above the expected standard (thrived).

Carver's (1998) model of psychological thriving provides perhaps the best theoretical framework from which to understand the probation officers' process of coping with adversity. As stated earlier, he theorized that when individuals experience negative physical or psychological outcomes in response to an adverse event or experience, they have at least four coping options: 1) a continued downward slide in which the negative effect is compounded and the individual succumbs (succumbing), 2) the person survives but is diminished or impaired in some respect (survival), 3) they return to the previous level of functioning (resiliency), and 4) the person surpasses the previous level of functioning (thriving).

Many of the probation officers described experiences reminiscent of burnout (succumbing), doing their job while exhausted or ill (survival with impairment); meeting the requirements of the job (resilience); and performing above the expected standard (thriving in response to a challenge). Although I would be hard pressed to describe all of the participants in the current study as thriving, their ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences, and to adapt to the demands of their changing work environment certainly suggests the presence of psychological resilience.

Lazarus' (1968) transactional model provides further clarification of the officers' coping responses. His model informs us that adverse events or highly stressful circumstances are usually characterized by both the possibility of harm (threat) and the opportunity for gain (challenge). Although these conditions differ from each other conceptually, they often co-occur. By definition then, thriving is best understood as a

response to challenge (thriving represents gain) rather than a response to threat (minimization of loss). So, overcoming adverse circumstances occurs when individuals perceive the situation to be a challenge and thereby, an opportunity for gain. Researchers (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000) in the field of positive coping appear to concur. They posit that by engaging in problem-focused coping and by reappraising adverse situations as positive, individuals under chronic stress can increase and sustain positive affect, a quality that is inherently linked to productive outcomes.

Another finding from the current study is support for the notion that workers who are not currently coping well with change can learn how to cope better. Based on the list of 10 categories of self-sustaining strategies created from the critical incident component of the current study, it is possible to develop interventions that would aid probation officers who are currently struggling with change, and perhaps even those who are coping well but want to cope better. Second, by its very nature, the study adds to the body of knowledge in the area by providing rich and detailed descriptions of what the helping factors actually do to contribute to the participants' perceived sense of coping well. This type of information could be very useful in terms of informing organizations and supervisors about how their actions could affect their employees, and offers suggestions on how they might act differently.

Another key finding was the importance of colleague and supervisor support in terms of influencing positive coping ability. Both colleague and supervisory support play a pivotal role in providing critical emotional support. When the participants viewed their relationships with their colleagues as positive and perceived them to be supportive, their ability to adapt to organizational change improved. When supervisors demonstrated that

they valued the participants and cared about their well being, the participants were less resistant when changes were implemented and their ability to cope well with the change improved.

Consistent with the criminal justice literature (Holt, 2000; Nellis & Chui, 2003; Trotter, 1999), the results of the current study highlighted the negative impact that rapid paced, ongoing change can have on workers. The participants in the current study described feeling overwhelmed by too much change and not being able to keep pace with certain job demands. This may explain why the emotions and experiences that some of the participants expressed in the phenomenological component of the interview so closely matched the experiences of people experiencing burnout and depression. These results shed a light on the toll these kinds of changes can have on otherwise highly functioning individuals and may offer insight into why productivity rates decline and resistance to change increases.

Finally, another important finding was the importance of maintaining control over decision-making. This was not a surprising finding given similar outcomes in the criminal justice literature (Hogan et al., 2006; Lambert, 2004; Wright et al., 1997), the burnout literature (Leiter & Maslach, 2001), and the stress and coping literature (Dewe & Trenberth, 2004; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Studies in these fields suggest that job autonomy and participation in organizational decision-making and policy development contributes to workers' job satisfaction and problem-focused coping. Conversely, the lack of participation in decision-making is a factor that contributes to emotion-focused coping and burnout.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

While this study provides rich and detailed data on the self-sustaining strategies and helping factors that contribute to probation officers' ability to cope well, there are some limitations to the study. First, the Phenomenological and Critical Incident methodologies used in the current study produced a large volume of data that required a significant amount of subjective decision-making, especially in relation to the coding of themes and categories. In order to address this limitation, the potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the participants' stories were addressed by incorporating a number of credibility checks into the study. The high level of agreement between independent judges, and the affirmation about the accuracy of the data during the second interviews with the participants suggests that the data sorting decisions were sound.

Additionally, the critical incidents elicited during the current study were self-reported and not observed. Given that participants were asked to recall specific events based on their memory of the event, the potential for vague reports or recall bias could have impacted the reliability of the results. However, vague reports or recall bias were not issues in the current study. Participants provided concise, clear, rich, and detailed information about the critical incidents they described. Further, the majority of critical incidents were shared experiences and the similarity in the descriptions provided by the 20 participants helped to affirm their accuracy.

Finally, the pre-post test scaling questions present the potential for response bias. Given that I was the researcher that conducted all of the interviews with the participants, and also asked the scaling questions, inter-rater neutrality could be an issue in that the participants may have responded in order to please me. Further, all of the participants in

the study were probation officers who self-identified as coping well and as a result, the sample may have been skewed in favor of a positive coping response.

### **Implications**

#### Implications for Workers/Organizations

As a result of the current study probation officers and their organization may now have an increased awareness of the many ways in which change can have an impact on workers and their work environment. Specifically, that the impacts and challenges associated with change can result in a high number of negative psychological and emotional outcomes. This information may provide organizational leaders with an important knowledge base from which to make decisions, create policies, and develop programs that will contribute to a healthy and productive workplace for their employees.

A further implication for both probation officers and their organization is that there is hope for those officers who are not currently coping well with change, to be able to cope better. A number of participants who reported that they had not always coped well with change offered their insights on what happened to allow them to begin to cope better with change. Their experiences suggest that not only is learning how to cope well with change possible, but probable if based on the reported self-sustaining helping categories.

The final implication arising out of the current study is that the ability to talk about their experiences increased the probation officers' awareness of coping, influenced a change in their perspective about their ability to cope well, and resulted in a better understanding of what they needed to do in order to affect better coping. These helpful factors included talking to friends and family, other professionals, work colleagues, and supervisors. The results of both of the scaling questions, the helping critical incidents

and the wish list items form the basis of support for the notion that having someone listen to a person's story or experience of an event can increase their ability to cope well with change.

### Implications for Counselling Psychology

The field of counselling psychology concerns itself with issues pertaining to career, vocation, effective coping, and meaningful living. Given the dynamic nature of the current economy it is important that the field remains informed about issues pertaining to the factors that help and hinder workers in coping well in their work environments. This study provides specific information on the experience of coping well in probation workplaces. Given the limited amount of research that exists on probation officer work environments and more specifically, Canadian probation officers, this study provides unique data about the Canadian probation officer work experience. This study may add to the counselling psychology research literature by providing a better understanding of the unique strategies and factors that contribute to probation officers' ability to cope well with change in their work environment.

This study may also provide clinicians working with probation officers more information with which to understand them and the kinds of specific stress-invoking elements that are common in their workplace. Their coping experience is complicated and it is important for clinicians to remember that even though probation officers may appear to be coping well, they may also be experiencing negative emotions and that both positive and negative emotions need attending to for interventions to be the most efficacious (Carver, 1998; Park, 1998).

The results of the current study suggest that for some participants the interview itself; reflecting on their experiences and being able to talk about them, was helpful in terms of creating awareness that they were coping well. The results have important implications for both clinicians and researchers. Researchers should be mindful that the research interview can have an impact, and clinicians should be aware of maintaining a balanced approach between listening and implementing helping strategies or skills training.

The National Institute (NHI) in Canada (Health Canada, 2004) suggested that certain elements make-up a healthy work environment. These include physical, social, personal, and developmental organizational support. The American Psychological Association (1999) undertook a similar initiative and added that organizational workplaces are healthy when they incorporate health promotion activities, offer employees assistance programs, have flexible benefits and working conditions, treat employees fairly, and offer programs for employee development, health and safety, and the prevention of work stress. Similar workplace health studies (Allen, 2005; Connolly & Myers, 2003; Kelloway & Day, 2005) suggest that the designation of a healthy workplace is not based upon the absence of job stressors but rather the presence of organizational resources that help employees cope with job and life stress. These are important findings when considering that the majority of participants mentioned that these factors were either missing or offered in a watered down version in their workplace and therefore, hindered their ability to cope well.

The results also suggest that there is a need for counselling support for this group of individuals. It became evident based on the phenomenological results of the current study that the participants experienced emotional, psychological, and physical impacts as



a result of the unique environment in which they work. Based on their descriptions, when discussing the impacts of change, many appeared to experience symptoms consistent with stress, burnout, and even depression. The organization's ideological policy changes also caused many participants to consider new career directions. Counsellors, once they familiarize themselves with the unique aspects of the probation officers' work environment and the nature of the work that they do, may have an important role to play in helping the officers sort out the complex and difficult issues that arise from these kinds of changes.

Finally, the results of the current study support assumptions in the career literature (Super, 1980) that people work in order to express their self-concepts and for job satisfaction. The current study affirms this notion, but goes further in terms of making the point that the motivation behind why people choose and then remain in a career is very complicated, and based on a myriad of different experiences, beliefs and training. The results indicate that there is potentially an important role for counselling psychologists for better understanding this unique group's career adjustment needs and supporting them in making informed career decisions.

#### Implications for Future Research

The current research examined the self-sustaining strategies that seasoned probation officers use to cope well. A natural offshoot for future research would be to examine the coping strategies that younger probation officers use to cope well in order to illuminate the differences that might exist between the two groups. Given the participants' comments in the current study about new probation officers, there are indications that significant differences do exist.

It would also be interesting to know how the probation officers who self-report as coping well differ from probation officers who would self-report as not coping well. I am aware that a difference between the two groups does exist because during the recruitment portion of my research, a number of probation officers stated that they felt they were not coping well enough to participate in the study. I was struck at that time by their awareness of not coping well, and wondered why they did not engage interventions or strategies to improve their coping ability. Awareness of their experiences could help to increase the knowledge about what interventions would be effective in helping officers cope better or well with change.

Future research might also examine the role of personality factors, and factors such as optimism and resilience in probation officers as it relates to the experience of coping well in their work environment. In my role as a researcher, I was often inspired by the resilience of the participants who remained committed to their work and to their clients despite having experienced a number of negative events at work. Understanding the qualities and factors that contribute to their resiliency, could not only add to effective strategies for helping probation officers cope well, but could add to the literature on positive coping and thereby contribute to a more holistic understanding of the coping process.

Cultural background is another factor that was not addressed in the current study. Probation Services is fast becoming a very culturally diverse organization. A greater understanding of any cultural differences that might influence the strategies that officers use to cope well with change would not only add to understanding the coping process of probation officers, but further, could increase the organization's ability to develop

effective and meaningful coping intervention strategies and programs for these diverse populations.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Introductory Letter

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Vivian Dzedzora and I am investigating the ways in which probation officers have handled change(s) that affect their work. This research is part of my Ph.D. work in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and will result in a doctoral dissertation that will be housed in the UBC library and available to the public upon request. It is a study that is personally meaningful, as I have worked in a correctional environment in various capacities for more than two decades. As a prior federal parole officer, I too was required to adapt to change in my work environment.

I am seeking adult, male and female probation officer volunteers who have experienced change(s) that affected their work, and who feel that they are coping well in dealing with those changes. Participants will be asked a series of questions in a face-to-face interview, for instance: What is your experience of being a probation officer? What does being a probation officer mean to you? What does “coping well” as you experience workplace change mean to you? What is the nature of some of the changes you have been experiencing that impact on your work life? Tell me about your work situation. What is your experience of the work changes you have faced? What has helped you in coping well with these changes? What has hindered you in doing well with these changes? There will also be some demographic questions to help with interpreting the data.

There will be two interviews, the first of which will last approximately two hours, and the second that will last about one hour. Both interviews will be audio-taped. The tapes will later be transcribed and given a code number in order to ensure your anonymity. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study. The information obtained will be kept confidential. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials.

The purpose of the first interview is to collect information about the changes you have experienced and the ways in which you are dealing with them, specifically what has helped you and what has hindered you. You will also be asked about your experience of being a probation officer. The second interview is to have you review the way in which the information collected has been organized to ensure it properly reflects your experience. It is my sincere hope that this research will capture the strategies of probation officers who are coping well when faced with change and that the information obtained through this research will shed a light on new ways to assist other probation officers who are facing change.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may decide to participate or not, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.

This letter is being forwarded to you in confidence by your Union (BCGEU) who has not shared with me, the names and addresses of any probation officers receiving this letter.

Only those probation officers who contact me for more information or to indicate their interest in participating in this study will become known to me. Your Union (BCGEU) will not be provided with the name of probation officers who participate in this study.

If you decide to participate in this study, or would like more information, please contact me. If I am not available you are welcome to leave me a confidential voice-mail message and I will return your call as soon as possible. The principal Investigator for this project is my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Bill Borgen. He can be reached at the University of British Columbia by calling (604) 822-5261.

Thank you in advance for your time and interest, and I look forward to working together with you.

Yours truly,

Vivian Dzedzora, M.A., R.C.C.  
Ph.D. Student  
Counselling Psychology Program  
University of British Columbia

**Appendix II: Recruitment Poster****A Study Exploring  
Probation Officers and Their Work Environment: Coping Well with Change**

**Vivian Dzedzora, MA, RCC, is conducting her Ph.D. dissertation research in Counselling Psychology as part of a large-scale study at the University of British Columbia. Vivian is investigating probation officers who have experienced changes affecting their work, and who feel they are coping well with these changes.**

**The purpose of this research project is to give probation officers who have experienced change(s) that affect their work, and who are handling these changes well, an opportunity to describe their experiences. It also provides probation officers with an opportunity to discuss what has helped or hindered them in doing well when facing these changes.**

**The principal investigator and supervisor for this research project is Dr. Bill Borgen, (604) 822-5261, Professor in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia.**

**We would be interested in hearing your experience of changes affecting your work IF:**

You have experienced changes that have affected your work

AND

You are an adult male or female probation officer who is currently working or who was working within the last six months

AND

You are willing to talk about your experience of changes that have affected your work in a confidential one-to two-hour interview.

If you would like to participate, or would like further information about this study, please contact Vivian Dzedzora, Ph.D. student.

### **Appendix III: Informed Consent**

#### Consent Form

“ Probation Officers and Their Work Environment: Coping Well with Change ”

Principal Investigator: Dr. Bill Borgen, Professor & Faculty Advisor  
University of British Columbia  
Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education  
(604) 822-5261

Co-Investigator: Vivian Dzedzora, Ph.D. Student  
University of British Columbia  
Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Vivian Dzedzora for the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. The results of this research will be included in a dissertation that will become a public document in the University library once it is completed. The results of this research may also be published in appropriate professional and academic journals.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this research project will be to explore what strategies probation officers employed to help them handle change well, what hindered them from doing so, and whether there were resources that would have been helpful but were unavailable. In addition, I will explore how probation officers experience being a probation officer, and how they make meaning out of their career as a probation officer.

#### Procedures

This study will require two interviews. The first one will be approximately two hours long. It will consist of introducing the participant to the purpose of the study and obtaining signed consent. Participants will be asked to describe their experience of change(s) affecting their work and the nature of these changes using an open-ended question format. They will then be asked specific strategies that helped and hindered them in dealing with these changes, and whether there were things that might have been helpful to them but were not offered. Participants will also have an opportunity to discuss how they experience being a probation officer and how they make meaning out of their career. The final part of this first interview will collect demographic information about the individual.

The second interview will last 30-60 minutes and will consist of a review of the categories discovered by the researcher. Both interviews will be tape recorded, transcribed and given a code number to ensure confidentiality. Upon completion of the study these tapes will be erased. The total time will be approximately three hours within a three to six month period.

#### Confidentiality

Any information identifying individuals participating in this study will be kept confidential. Upon signing the informed consent, participants will be given a code number to ensure the maintenance of confidentiality. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials in any reports of the completed study. All research documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at the University of British Columbia. Computer data files will be password protected.

#### Compensation

There will be no monetary compensation to participants.

#### Contact for Information About the Study

If you have any questions or would like more information about this study, you may contact Vivian Dzedzora.

#### Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

#### Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraws from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Thank your for your willingness to participate in this study.



**Appendix V: Interview Guide**  
**Phenomenological Research Questions**

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview start time: \_\_\_\_\_

Phenomenological/Contextual Component:

Preamble: As you know I am investigating the ways in which probation officers have successfully coped with change in their work environment. This is the first of two interviews that will occur. The purpose of the first part of this interview is to gather information about your experience of being a probation officer, and what your career means to you.

As a way of getting started, perhaps you could tell me about your experience of being a probation officer.

What does being a probation officer mean to you?

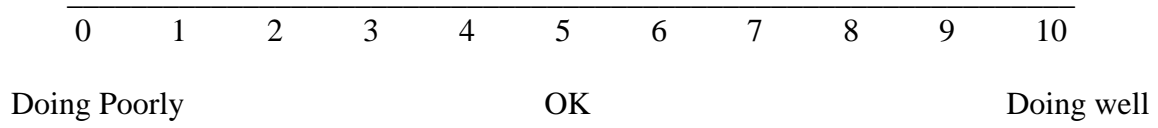


## “Coping Well” Strategies Being Used

### Coping Well

Preamble: Now I would like to ask you about your experience of change and how you are coping with these changes. You volunteered to participate in this study because you identified yourself as having experienced change in you workplace and that you are coping well with it. What does “coping well” mean to you?

On a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 is doing very poorly, 5 is OK, and 10 is doing very well, where would you place yourself?



What is your experience of change?

What meaning do you attribute to your experiences of change?

### Critical Incident Component

Transition to Critical Incident questions: You stated that even with all these changes, you rated yourself as a 5-6 (or whatever the participant rated him- or herself in question 1 (b) above).

What has helped you in doing well with the changes that have affected your work?  
 (Probes: What was the incident/factor? How did it impact you? “Persistence is helping. How is it helping?” Can you give me a specific example where persistence helped?)

Helpful Factor & What It Means to Participant (What do you mean by ...?)	Importance (How did it help? Tell me what it was about...that you find so helpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of Incident.)

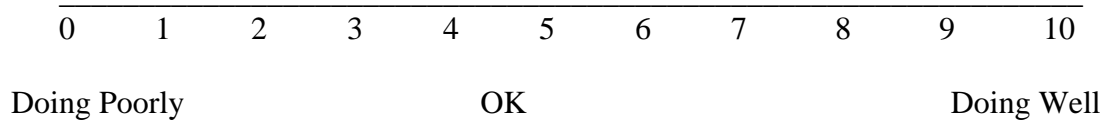
Are there things that made it more difficult for you to do well? (Alternate question: What kinds of things have happened that have made it harder for you to do well?)

Difficult Factor & What It Means to Participant (What do you mean by ...?)	Importance (How did it hinder? Tell me what it was about...that you find so hindering.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of Incident.)

Summarize what has been discussed up to this point with the participant as a transition to the next question: We've talked about what's helped you to do well (name them), and some things that have made it more difficult for you to do well (name them). Are there other things that would help you to continue doing well? (Alternate question: I wonder what else might be helpful to you that you haven't had access to)

Wish List Item & What it Means to Participant (What do you mean by...?)	Importance (How would it help? Tell me what it was about...that you would find so helpful.)	Example (In What Circumstances might this be helpful?)

Now that you've had a chance to reflect back on what's helped and hindered, where would you place yourself on the same scale we discussed earlier? The scale is from 0 – 10, where 0 is doing very poorly, 5 is OK, and 10 is doing very well.



What has made the difference?

Have you always managed to cope well with change?

(Circle one)    Yes                      No

If not, when did this change for you?

What happened that caused you to begin handling change well?



**Demographic Component**

Occupation

Number of years in this occupation

Job level

Length of time in current job level

Number of years in BC Corrections

Length of service in Corrections

Age

Sex

Income level (household)

Country of birth

If not Canada, (a) length of time in Canada; and (b) First language

Marital status

Family status/parental status

Education level

Interview End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_