MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT IN RCMP WORKPLACES: WHAT HELPS AND WHAT HINDERS

by

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Abstract

This study investigated what helps and what hinders RCMP officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work. Experiencing workplace engagement is becoming increasingly meaningful and important for both workers and employers in the new economy. The study is important to the field of counselling, and related fields such as organizational psychology, in terms of both theory and practice, as it concretely expands our understanding of the experience of workplace engagement for workers. In this study, the participants consisted of 14 male RCMP officers and 11 female RCMP officers. Participants were all posted in the Greater Vancouver area at the time of the study, although officers had previously been posted at a variety of locations throughout Canada. Officers were individually interviewed using a semi-structured, open-ended interview consistent with Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique.

In total, 370 critical incidents were elicited from the 25 participants. Critical incidents helping officers experience meaningful engagement in their work totaled 197. Critical incidents hindering officers in experiencing meaningful engagement in their work totaled 173. The critical incidents were then grouped into 19 categories based on the nature of the incident and the meaning the incident held for the officer. To address reliability in categorizing incidents, two independent judges categorized a sampling of incidents. In both cases judges agreed with the researcher's categorization in over 90% of incidents. Four participants were also presented with their own critical incidents, and asked to categorize them. Again participants agreed with the researcher's categorization in over 90% of incidents.

The main categories identified in this the study were supervision, police incidents, perceived organizational support, transfer, personal circumstances, and peers. In each of these categories both helping and hindering critical incidents were identified by participants. This study provides a detailed description and analysis of the critical incidents that help or hinder RCMP officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work.

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Acknowledgements

"If we have stood tall, it is because we stand on the shoulders of giants."

Sir Isaac Newton

Before proceeding I want to honor a few giants. These individuals have stood tall in their respective fields, in my life, and in the completion of this project and my degree. I have been enriched in my life and in my learning, as a result of their support, wisdom, and good will.

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CHAPTER1: INTRODUCTION

"Meaningless! Meaningless! Says the Teacher
Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!
What does a man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun?...
So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me...
A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink, and find satisfaction in his work.
This too, I see, is from the hand of God."

King Solomon

King Solomon, as legend would have it, was one of the wisest men who ever lived. After building a magnificent ancient city with great vineyards, pools, and a temple, and after acquiring great riches, he came to the conclusion noted in the above passage. Even as King he found his work meaningless and grievous to him while noting that finding satisfaction in one's work was from the hand of God. Thousands of years later we still wrestle with finding meaning in our work and in our lives. Many still find their work grievous to them. Some, perhaps even from the hand of God, are able to find satisfaction in their work, and make meaning of their lives and existence.

Since ancient times the nature of work has continued to evolve with the development of new technologies, and in the context of historical and cultural change. In the field of counselling psychology our understanding of work, career, and vocation has continued to develop and unfold as organizations, economies, cultures and individuals are studied, researched, and explored. The theoretical constructs with which we conceptualize issues in the area of career have also been expanded and refined through years of research and theorizing. King Solomon used notions of meaninglessness, grievousness, and satisfaction in speaking of work. These

constructs may still apply today as we increase our understanding of how they, and other constructs relating to work and career, may be better connected, integrated and understood. To this end, this study will consider the construct of workplace engagement, a construct which subsumes experiences such as meaning and satisfaction amongst other things. To better understand workplace engagement, and the critical incidents that help or hinder people from being meaningfully engaged in their work, a sample of police officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) will be studied. To better understand some of the unique characteristics of the RCMP, and police officers, it is important to look a little more closely at their experience as it certainly influences their experience of meaningful engagement in their work.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Murders, rapes, thefts, and assaults are tragedies the police may confront on any given day. Investigating crimes often requires police officers to attend gruesome scenes, with serious crime investigations typically carrying on long after the officers depart the crime scene. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have been Canada's national police force for over 125 years. Beginning with horses and rifles, today the tools of the policing trade are high-tech computers and complex machines that can provide information from how much alcohol is in a person's blood to their unique DNA code. As technology and the nature of police work has evolved, so too has the RCMP as an organization. Today more than ever before the membership of the RCMP is changing to reflect the diversity of people in Canada. As the make-up of the RCMP changes, their management practices have also changed. The nature of

police work is changing, the RCMP culture is changing, and RCMP leadership styles are changing. Although other organizations are also changing, it is important to understand some of the distinct issues in the RCMP, as it is a unique and significant organization in Canada.

RCMP Dynamics

Violent crime and trauma are aspects of policing that receive a great deal of attention in the media and in the research literature (Violanti, 2001; Hodgins, Creamer, & Bell, 2001; Brown, Fielding & Grover, 1999). While these aspects of policing are indeed serious and deserving of such attention, other issues in policing can get lost in the shadows. In addition to higher profile matters, the RCMP currently faces issues present in many other large organizations. Harassment complaints, grievances, internal investigations, and public complaints are but a few of the internal issues that consume a great deal of the organization's time and energy. Transfers, the promotion system, and budgets are also often contentious issues in the RCMP. With changing demographics many organizations, both public and private, are finding themselves with a shortage of skilled workers. This results in organizations having to make more concerted efforts at both recruiting and retaining workers. The RCMP is not exempt from such demographic and labour market pressures; however, the RCMP, up until now at least, has found that retaining employees is not a big issue. According to Cal Corley, a Chief Superintendent in Human Resources Directorate, "The RCMP's problem is not employee retention. We are keeping employees. However the challenge is to keep them from leaving their hearts and minds at the door when they come to work" (personal communication, June 21, 2001). The

problem for the RCMP is "engaging" employees in their work over time - creating an environment that invites workers to bring their hearts and minds to work. To this end the RCMP has created a Workplace Wellness/Workplace Engagement initiative, intended to address a number of workplace issues. This research project will explore the experience of meaningful engagement in work, and provide relevant information to the RCMP so that they might act with greater thoughtfulness and wisdom in moving ahead with their Workplace Engagement initiative. This study is important to the field of counselling psychology, and other domains such as organizational theory, as it will expand the understanding of workplace engagement, which will have implications for both theory and practice. The study is important to the RCMP as it will explore in detail many of the career issues currently facing police officers. Though RCMP officers are the group being studied, the findings are intended to inform other workplaces as well. To situate the RCMP, and other workplaces, in a current context an examination of the new economy is an appropriate starting point.

<u>The New Economy</u>

The economic, social, and political factors shaping the RCMP are not unique to the RCMP or to policing. To put the issues in the RCMP in context, economics, social, and political trends in North America and around the world need to be considered. As the Canadian economy becomes increasingly globally competitive, new pressures are put on organizations to become efficient, competitive, and able to change and adapt to uncertain times. According to Bachman (2000), "To succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy, organizations need to ensure that their workers are performing to the highest standards. Providing a work environment that

is conducive to high levels of performance is one way in which organizations can set themselves apart from their competitors" (p.i). Not only do organizations need to change to remain competitive in the new economy, they must change to successfully and competitively recruit and retain skilled employees. Workplaces need to be healthy or employees will change organizations. Unlike previous decades, jobs are easier to come by in the new economy, especially for skilled workers. Creating a healthy workplace will help earn an organization the title of employer of choice. Building a committed workforce affords organizations, including police forces, a competitive advantage (Somers & Birnbaum, 2000).

To understand how an organization like the RCMP might need to change to remain competitive in the new economy, while creating healthy and balanced workplaces, requires a sophisticated understanding of economic trends, organizational trends, and of the current status of the RCMP, in terms of where it is at compared to where it wants to be. The RCMP is changing and needing to become increasingly efficient and competitive, while at the same time becoming the employer of choice – so it can recruit and retain skilled employees. For both economic and moral reasons the RCMP is changing to create healthier, more balanced workplaces. Ideally these changes will result in increasingly satisfied and healthy employees, employees who are emotionally and psychologically committed to their organization while realizing some balance in their work and family lives.

Research Problem

The problem for the RCMP, and other organizations, is how to create healthy workplaces, which will meaningfully engage workers. To move towards creating

healthy workplaces, one of the key pieces of information the RCMP, and other organizations, need to know is what engages employees such as police officers in their work, and what is it that makes them feel disengaged. In exploring this question, any number of workplace issues may be raised. The issues raised can then be examined for both their content and meaning, to consider what events are occurring in the RCMP, and in the careers of RCMP officers, that contribute to workers feeling engaged or disengaged in their work, and what do these issues reveal about the RCMP as an organization.

Significance of Research

For the field of counselling psychology, this study will further expand and explore the construct of workplace engagement. This is significant for both theory and practice in counselling psychology and other fields such as organizational psychology, as workplace engagement becomes increasingly important for workers, and the organizations who employ them. The construct has received little attention thus far in the research literature. This study will break new ground in understanding workplace engagement, and the critical incidents that contribute to or detract from feeling meaningfully engaged in one's work. Because the construct of workplace engagement has yet to be fully explored, this study will contribute to a greater understanding of what workplace engagement means, and how workplace engagement might connect to other constructs in the field of counselling psychology, organizational psychology, and related fields.

Ideally, this knowledge will also help the RCMP make organizational changes that result in healthier workplaces, and an increased sense of workplace engagement

for RCMP employees. With healthy workplaces and engaged employees, the RCMP is better able to remain competitive and to become the employer of choice for police officers in Canada or around the world. This project will inform psychologists and career counsellors working with RCMP officers on issues relating to workplace engagement. My own experience as an RCMP officer also leads me to believe this project is important for several reasons. First, the community policing model the RCMP has adopted is based on the principle of problem-oriented policing. Whereas in years gone by the police patrolled and waited for calls to come in, today officers are expected to identify community problems and be proactive in working with the community to solve the problems. In my experience, community policing requires initiative, creativity, and energy. I have witnessed some police officers actively and eagerly pursuing this approach to policing, while others seem to simply avoid finding any problem that might result in them having to expend more energy or engage with the public. I myself have had times in my career where I felt very engaged by my work and self-generated a number of arrests. Other times it has seemed like coming to work was the last place in the world I wanted to be, and I know my productivity and satisfaction were much lower. My assumption is that being actively engaged in one's work is a positive thing, resulting in greater job satisfaction and increased performance. I also assume that if an officer is feeling disengaged - they are leaving their heart and mind at the door when they come to work - this is not helpful for either the officer or the RCMP. My assumption is that being disengaged from one's work is inconsistent with job satisfaction and experiencing meaning in one's career.

Research Question

Having determined the importance of RCMP officers, and other workers, experiencing meaningful engagement in their work, it then becomes important to understand what contributes to RCMP officers feeling either engaged or disengaged in their work. **This study will take a qualitative approach to answering the research question, "What are the critical incidents contributing to or detracting from RCMP officers being meaningfully engaged in their work?".** To more fully understand these critical incidents, and the contexts in which they occur, this study will explore the meanings RCMP officers make of these critical incidents. The research question will be answered through an expanded critical incident study.

Situating the Researcher

On June 25, 1990 I was sworn in as a regular member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. After performing administrative duties in Toronto for a short term, I began basic police training at the RCMP Depot in Regina, Saskatchewan. On March 28, 1991, in front of my family and fiancé, I proudly donned my red serge to receive my police badge and identification card. Appointed to address the audience on behalf of my troop, I commented "The scarlet tunic we wear is symbolic of our pride as members of one of the most respected law enforcement agencies in the world. We are all aware of the Force's rich heritage and tradition of service to the people of Canada. Each one of us will strive to maintain that tradition and live up to the highest standards of those before us". Experiencing the privilege of speaking on behalf of my troopmates, who I had become very close to, and in front of my family, I felt a sense of connection, support, and a humbling pride. Reflecting on the history of the RCMP,

which I was now richly a part of, initiated in me an experience of transcendent connection with not only the RCMP, but with the very history of Canada. It is hard to describe this experience. Even as I reflect on it now, strong waves of emotion pass through me. Today I remain humbled by the awesome opportunity I have been afforded to proudly carry the badge of the RCMP, to serve my country as a police officer, and to influence an organization that spans the globe and has existed for over 125 years.

My first posting was to general duties in Richmond, BC. While at Richmond Detachment I had the opportunity to work uniform patrol, plainclothes duties, and in an analytical review unit. As my policing experience broadened I became more aware of the RCMP culture. I noticed many motivated and energetic co-workers. I also noticed co-workers who were frustrated, angry, and disillusioned with the Force. Several of the officers went on extended periods of "stress leave", or left the Force either voluntarily or otherwise. Their absence created more work for those of us who remained, and who were already working near our maximum output levels. It seemed certain units or sections had more officers struggling than other units. In speaking with my former troopmates, it seemed certain whole detachments suffered from quite poor "morale", while other detachments were quite sought after by members.

Receiving training as a harassment investigator and mediator exposed me to several very troubling workplace scenarios. In one workplace of about 20 employees, there had been numerous harassment complaints made, numerous grievances filed, several of the employees were on stress leave, and it had even been reported there were physical confrontations taking place. I was struck by how serious the situation

had become. In speaking with several of the employees I was also struck by how deeply painful this was for them, and how damaging this work situation had become in their lives. At the request of the RCMP Human Resources Branch I worked with a community psychologist to design and conduct a group intervention for this workplace that had been labeled "toxic". The intervention was not particularly successful, and years later this workplace still faces significant challenges. I was left with an understanding of the toll workplace toxicity places on employees. I experienced first hand the challenge of addressing workplace toxins, and trying to make positive change in the workplace. Through this endeavour I came to understand the complexity of such situations.

The factors impacting this workplace were numerous. Issues such as trust, loyalty, and conflict in the workplace become entwined with stress, leadership styles, and a lack of perceived support from the organization. In this particular workplace technology was and is used extensively, and has even been used as a communications weapon in conflicts. In this setting contract and part-time workers interacted with casual and full time workers, which has potential to contribute to fractions in group dynamics. Older employees worked side-by-side with younger employees, each having their own styles, values, and status. On top of all these dynamics, workers were dealing directly and first hand with all the traumas suffered by the community, and reported to the police. Many of the part-time or casual employees actually would not accept offers of full-time employment from this unit, as they did not want to be immersed in the negative and destructive energy that was present. Several of the employees were seeking work in other settings. The employees in this unit

possess a specific and sophisticated skill set, which required extensive training to obtain. It was difficult to recruit and retain these employees despite the fact they were fairly highly paid. Many of the employees who stayed felt trapped, and forced to stay for a variety of reasons. Just showing up to work required a variety of coping strategies.

While this scenario is severe and complicated, it is not as rare as one might think. The RCMP recognizes it has a challenge in its workplaces. To this end, the RCMP initiated a Workplace Wellness/Workplace Engagement program. I have been fortunate to be involved as a team member in this initiative. The RCMP recognizes the need to not only address toxins in its workplaces, but to nurture healthy workplaces. The question then is how does an organization like the RCMP do this? How does the RCMP create healthy workplaces that attract new employees, retains current employees, and meaningfully engage workers in their careers? The answer to this question is multi-faceted, multi-layered, and dynamic. My role in the RCMP's Workplace Wellness/Workplace Engagement Initiative, while I am in university, is to find out what is it that engages RCMP officers in their work, and what is it that makes them disengage. This information is critical to the RCMP so it can move ahead with its workplace initiatives in an informed and scientifically sound manner.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Where then does one even begin a literature review on meaningful engagement in the workplace? There are countless factors affecting RCMP workplaces, many of which were delineated in the previous chapter. Perhaps an obvious starting point is to reflect on the research question, "What are the critical incidents contributing to or detracting from RCMP officers being meaningfully engaged in their work?". The two key research areas to consider are workplace engagement, and police work. Police issues are fairly clear, but what about the variety of factors contributing to workplace engagement? In an effort to present a large body of research in a comprehensive and integrated manner, this literature review will first speak to the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of this study, then set a context for the economic and cultural environment in which the RCMP, and other organizations, currently operate. From there, specific issues affecting workplace engagement will be reviewed. An examination of the policing literature will follow. Finally a number of individual studies will be reviewed which address specific aspects of this study.

<u>Conceptual Underpinnings</u>

Before proceeding it is important to first, for a moment, consider the term 'workplace engagement'. Workplace engagement is a descriptive, metaphorical term used to describe an experience occurring (or not) in the workplace. The term may possess some face and descriptive validity as it speaks to a human experience that, arguably, most people can relate to in their own way. Making extensive efforts to define a metaphorical and descriptive term could result in spurious discussions and in

fact take away from the felt resonance the term may hold for most readers. At the same time, leaving the term undefined may decrease its usefulness. In this study each participant presented with their own lived-experience of what it meant for them to be meaningfully engaged in their work.

Having acknowledged workplace engagement is not easily definable, and includes individual lived-experience, the term has been loosely and creatively used in different ways in the research literature. There is no standard or widely accepted definition. One purpose of this study is to explore what the term workplace engagement means for the participants. In eliciting their experience of workplace engagement this study will speak to what concepts fall under this construct, and what concepts do not, for RCMP officers. At a conceptual level the construct of workplace engagement may include sub-constructs such as motivation, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty. The converse of engagement is dis-engagement. This construct could conceptually include sub-constructs such as stress, burnout, boredom, or disinterest. The purpose of this study is not to get caught up on any of the individual sub-constructs that may contribute to experiencing workplace engagement or disengagement at the conceptual level, but to consider the higher order construct of workplace engagement, and how RCMP officers experience engagement or disengagement in their work. Recognizing the construct of workplace engagement may include several sub-constructs, it is important to then consider the theoretical foundations of the construct, and some of the key sub-constructs.

Theoretical Foundations

There exists a dearth of literature or theory on workplace engagement. The few studies that exist will be reviewed, however there are key theoretical foundations which certainly inform research on workplace engagement. Motivation theory, for example, contributes to an understanding of workplace engagement, though workplace engagement as a construct is more expansive than just motivation. In commenting on motivation at work Katzell and Thompson (1990) stated, "Work motivation is defined as a broad construct pertaining to the conditions and processes that account for the arousal, direction, magnitude, and maintenance of effort in a person's job"(p.144). Katzell and Thompson (1990) go on to delineate both exogenous and endogenous theories of work motivation. Within exogenous theories they identify incentive/reward theory, where certain forms of behaviour at work result in a reward, reinforcement theory, where there are positive rewards for good work and negative rewards for bad work, and goal theory, where people are thought to perform better when goals are defined that are difficult, specific, and attractive. Two other exogenous theories the authors note are personal and material resource theory, where it is postulated constraints on a worker's ability or opportunities to attain their work goals are demotivating, and group norm theory, where "People are motivated to perform well when their work group facilitates and approves of it"(p. 146).

Katzell and Thompson (1990) further identified endogenous theories of motivation to include expectancy-valence theory, where people expect their effort will result in good performance, equity theory, where people are motivated by their need for fair treatment, and attitude theory, where people who have favourable

attitudes towards their jobs, work, and organizations will be more highly motivated. Two other endogenous work motivation theories the authors identify are intention/goal theory, where a person's performance is determined by the goals to which he or she is committed, and attribution/self-efficacy theory, where if people believe the causes of their performance are stable, internal, and intentional their sense of self-efficacy will be raised, and thereby they are likely to have higher performance standards.

Motivation continues to be an active area of study not only within psychology, but also in the business literature, with the Harvard Business Review dedicating its January 2003 edition to the topic of motivation. In this edition Britt (2003) examines motivation amongst soldiers, and in fact makes connections between motivation and his concept of job satisfaction and workplace engagement. Britt comments "The greater the obstacles to high performance, such as work overload, the lower the (army) rangers' morale and level of job satisfaction...we discovered that the most committed and personally invested rangers, the ones who ranked work-relevant values as most important, ranked morale and job satisfaction lower in the face of insurmountable impediments. Simply put, the rangers who cared most about their work were the most demoralized when they were thwarted from doing their best"(p. 16). Britt suggests employees most engaged in their work reported the lowest levels of job satisfaction when their work roles were ambiguous. Britt concludes his article by commenting "There's a common misconception that job engagement-high motivation to work-is a personality trait and that motivated people will throw themselves with equal enthusiasm into pretty much any job. But research

consistently shows that even the most committed employees will rapidly become demotivated if they cease to find their work meaningful or they can't succeed at it"(p. 17). Britt's study is particularly interesting as it is focused on soldiers who, like police officers, wear uniforms, and work in a very hierarchical organization and in often intense settings.

A second theoretical leg on which the concept of workplace engagement stands is job satisfaction. Discrepancy theories of job satisfaction, according to Rice, McFarlin and Bennett (1989) propose "Job satisfaction is determined, in part, by the discrepancies resulting from a psychological comparison process involving the appraisal of current job experiences against some personal standards of comparison (e.g., what workers want, feel entitled to, see others getting, have experienced in the past, etc.)"(p.591). The authors suggest both positive and negative discrepancies may be experienced depending on the specific combination of job facet and standard of comparison being considered. In their study Rice McFarlin and Bennett (1989) found smaller discrepancies are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction.

Motivation theory and job satisfaction theory are two key foundations for understanding workplace engagement. While this study explores the critical incidents that help RCMP officers feel meaningfully engaged in their work, it also explores the critical incidents that hinder RCMP officers from experiencing meaningful engagement in their work. In this regard, there are key theoretical constructs such as organizational stress and burnout which may contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of the dynamics that may hinder RCMP officers from feeling engaged

in their work. Stress and burnout are large domains in themselves, and they are not the focus of this study, however a few key issues in these areas are worth noting.

In reviewing and critiquing the current and historical organizational stress theories Kahn and Byosiere (1992), as cited in Cooper Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001), noted, "There are several points of convergence among the different frameworks, in particular the notion that stress entails a sequence of events that includes (a) the presence of a demand, (b) a set of evaluative processes through which the demand is perceived as significant and taxing in terms of its impact on individual resources or requiring from the individual something other than normal functioning, and (c) the generation of a response that typically affects the well-being of the individual."(p. 16). In reviewing stress models relating to transactional elements, Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001) comment "All of the above models are based upon the fundamental premise that strain occurs when there is a misfit, mismatch, or imbalance between the demands of the situation and the resources of the individual"(p. 19).

Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001) examined organizational factors relating to stress and found that psychological strain is often due to the culture and management style adopted within an organization. Specifically they noted how hierarchical, bureaucratic organizational structures may permit little participation by employees in decisions affecting their work. They comment that "Lack of participation in the decision-making process, lack of effective consultation and communication, office politics, and no sense of belonging have all been identified as potential organizational stressors"(p. 48). While noting these potential stressors they also comment none function universally as stressors, and that "The impact of these

variables depends on the meaning and importance attached to them by the individuals; hence it is critical to explore individual perceptions and values relating to organizational processes"(p. 49). This study is intended to do exactly that; to identify the variables that constitute workplace engagement, or disengagement, and explore the meanings RCMP officers make of these incidents.

Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001) identify burnout as a special form of organizational strain. After reviewing and critiquing several definitions of burnout Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001) offer the following definition for burnout, "An extreme state of psychological strain and depletion of energy resources arising from prolonged exposure to stressors that exceed the person's resources to cope"(p. 84). While this definition is solid, the authors reference an earlier definition of note from Cherniss (1980) who described burnout as a process of disengagement in response to job related stressors. While certainly burnout, and organizational stress, may contribute to disengagement, there may be other factors besides burnout or stress contributing to RCMP officers feeling disengaged in their work. This study is intended to explore what those factors might be, and what specifically happens that contributes to officers feeling either engaged or disengaged in their work.

In addition to theoretical foundations, other important concepts inform this study on workplace engagement. As these concepts and studies are reviewed, they are being considered in light of the present historical, social, political and economic paradigms. Most relevant to this study is the role of the new economy in workplace engagement.

The New Economy

Much has been written describing and reflecting on the "new economy" (Baigent & Acar, 2000; Dess & Picken, 2000; Rousseau & Arthur, 1999). It has been suggested that the new economy entails a movement away from hierarchies, and a breakdown of many traditional boundaries (Feller, 1995). Krumboltz and Coon (1995) suggest many of the old rules are crumbling, rigid job descriptions are now seen as a hindrance, and multiple levels of supervision appear redundant. They suggest responsibilities are being assigned to teams of diverse individuals rather than hierarchies. The new economy is seen as more than just an economic or demographic reality. It is a potent force influencing governments, organizations and individuals. According to Savickas (1995), "As the modern career ethic fractures, it may be replaced by a postmodern work ethic rooted in a new perspective on the occupational role, one that emphasizes connectedness and social contribution" (p. 18). The new economy impacts more than just corporate North America. Its forces shape the lives and thinking of nearly every current and future worker.

Non-profit oriented private and government organizations are equally effected by the forces at work in the new economy. Ericson and Haggerty (1997) posit that "informationalism" has even resulted in changes in policing. They suggest police spend relatively little time dealing directly with crime, and consider police more as knowledge workers in a system designed to provide the public with information about risks in areas relevant to the police's jurisdiction. They further suggest this shift on the occupational culture and the self serves to undermine individual autonomy and

discretion. If these claims are accurate, the new economy has the potential to impact police officers in deep and significantly negative ways.

The new economy not only has implications for society and organizations like police agencies, it impacts on the field of counselling psychology. Herr (1999) has written a comprehensive and detailed book examining the current social, political and economic contexts in which both individuals and the field of counselling psychology must operate. He states, "Regardless of its specific focus, the social structure of a particular community or nation creates the circumstances in which people develop as human beings, as workers, as parents. The social structure shapes the possibilities for choice, determines the knowledge available to people about their opportunities, and reinforces the acquisition of specific types of behavior. It is within their physical, social, and cultural environments that people negotiate their personal identity, belief systems, and life course"(p.5). The RCMP is its own community, with its own social structure, operating largely in Canada. Herr does not see human development as occurring in a cocoon, and draws attention to environmental factors influencing the lives and careers of people. Herr goes on to say, "Counselors in all settings must be open to new metaphors about the needs for counseling, or the emerging content of counseling, or new ways to create and implement counseling strategies that respond to the emerging challenges facing their clients and that are ethical and effective"(p. 342). Clearly the environment created by the new economy affects individuals and organizations, and requires the field of counselling psychology to respond with creativity and awareness.

In light of the new economy, it is increasingly important for organizations to find ways to meaningfully engage their employees. Organizations are now being called to creativity in finding ways to engage workers, and to earn their loyalty, commitment, and support. Meaningfully engaging workers today is not just something that is nice for organizations to do. It is necessary for organizations if they want to successfully and competitively recruit and retain skilled workers. Creating engaging and healthy workplaces is also good business, resulting in fewer insurance and worker's compensation claims, decreased absenteeism, and higher productivity (Kalbfleisch & Wosnick, 1999). Somers & Birnbaum (2000) suggest building a committed workforce can provide organizations with a competitive advantage. Given the RCMP as an organization must operate in this new economy, what are the factors affecting the meaningful engagement of RCMP officers in their work?

<u>Workplace Engagement</u>

There is very little actual research on workplace engagement, though the term is now popular, and widely used. As discussed, the term is built on the theoretical foundations of work motivation and job satisfaction, and the use of the term often is connected with one or both of these constructs.

In researching the connection between business outcomes and employee engagement Harter, Schmidt & Hayes (2002) define employee engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (p. 269). Harter, Schmidt & Hayes' study was a meta-analysis of the relationship between employee satisfaction-engagement and a number of business unit outcomes such as customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee turnover and accidents.

Harter, Schmidt & Hayes found increasing employee satisfaction-engagement may increase these business outcomes. These findings are not surprising and fit with both previous research in the area and common sense. Harter, Schmidt & Hayes' study did not address any of the critical incidents that may lead employees to feel either engaged or satisfied with their work. They also closely link engagement with satisfaction. This present study holds a more inclusive notion of engagement though it certainly includes satisfaction.

Aside from the above study little research exists that speaks directly to workplace engagement. Studies exist that deal with topics such as employee satisfaction (Thomas, Dose & Scott, 2002), loyalty (Turnley & Feldman, 1999), and commitment (Riketta & Landerer, 2002). Certainly these issues may relate to workplace engagement, however they are distinct areas which inform the larger construct of workplace engagement. This study does not consider these areas specifically but rather looks at the critical incidents that lead police officers to be meaningfully engaged in their work in the broader sense. To keep the focus of this research on the bigger picture then this review will proceed by looking at the larger issues such as work/family balance and policing– which contributed to the original conception of this research project.

Work/Family Balance

By far the most influential study guiding the RCMP's current Workplace Wellness/Workplace Engagement Initiative is that of Duxbury & Higgins (2001). Their study, commissioned by Health Canada, gathered data from over 30, 000 Canadian workers, including over 4000 RCMP employees. Their study required

participants to complete a 12 page questionnaire, which asked over 60 questions on a variety of topics relating to balancing work, family, and lifestyle. Amongst their numerous findings thus far in their data analysis include the following relating to this present study;

1. Employee commitment to the RCMP is higher than other organizations

2. Employees find their work interesting and challenging

3. Employees are generally satisfied with their pay

4. 33% of employees feel having a family limits advancement in the organization

5. 40% of female police officers have not yet started a family because of their careers

6. Frustration with work environment is the top cause for intent to leave organization

7. Lack of recognition is the second leading cause for intended departure

8. Work-life conflict increases with rank

9. 29% of police officers are considering leaving Force to find more balance

10. 50% employees do not experience the RCMP as supportive of work-family balance

Considering the sample size and detail in this study, and the fact the RCMP and the federal government sponsored this study, it is hard to not pay attention to these findings. This study suggests the RCMP culture is in need of change if the RCMP wants to promote healthy workplaces, and to remain an employer of choice in Canada. It is worth a second look at these findings to ponder the gravity of them for a

moment. Simply the statistic that 40% of female police officers have not yet started a family because of their careers, is gripping. The RCMP influences such important decisions in the lives of its members such as the decision to have a family. Twenty nine percent of the RCMP is considering leaving the Force to find more balance. Concretely, this statistic means over 5000 RCMP employees are currently considering leaving the RCMP to find more balance in their lives. These types of statistics clearly identify the need for this present study in order to better understand the actual critical incidents officers experience in their work that may affect their level of meaningful engagement in their career.

<u>Police Research</u>

Not only do police forces face stressors similar to those found in any large organization, they face workplace challenges unique to police work. A number of studies have examined such issues. An early study by McGinnis (1985) on police career development in a sample of Canadian police officers identified the importance of understanding the "intricacies and dynamics of the relationship between individual members and the force as an organization" (p. 155). McGinnis used a questionnaire, which included the Job Descriptive Index, to measure satisfaction with officer's work, supervision, co-workers, pay and promotions. He found major differences in satisfaction on all indices when conducting a career stage analysis. This finding is important to this present study, as it emphasizes the importance of studying meaningful workplace engagement throughout the career span. The factors that meaningfully engage members, or dis-engage them, certainly may change throughout the span of a career lasting up to 40 years.

In a complimentary study Burke (1989) studied 522 Ontario police officers in five career stages, ranging from one year to twenty five years and over. Using questionnaires, Burke found constables in the mid-career stage reported the most negative work setting, greatest stress and least job satisfaction. While these findings are enlightening, they provide little insight in to the nature or meaning of the events that resulted in such findings.

In another sophisticated study, with a sample of 527 Australian police officers, Hart, Wearing & Headey (1995) examined both the positive and negative work experiences contributing to police officers' well-being. Using a combination of inventories and measures they actually found police officers report less psychological distress and greater well-being than the average person in the community. Amongst their more interesting findings is that police officers are not typically either satisfied or dissatisfied with their operational tasks – they can be both satisfied and dissatisfied simultaneously. The example they provide is an officer investigating child abuse. The officer may experience psychological distress at the nature of the investigation, but also feel satisfaction from being able to do something about the situation. Their study also found the organizational context in which people work is more important than the work itself in determining their psychological outcomes (p. 14). In their discussion Hart, Wearing & Headey recommend police departments place greater emphasis on improving their organizational health.

In a study directly examining attrition in members of the RCMP, Linden (1985) found members of the RCMP reported enjoying police work more than ex-members, however the differences were not great. What Linden did find was a

substantial difference in morale ratings, with the morale of ex-members extremely low at the time they left the Force. Linden states his "Data suggests the reasons for leaving the Force may not be related to the work as such, but to other factors that resulted in a lowering of morale to the extent that separation from the Force was seen as the only solution" (p. 88). Linden's claim cannot be reasonably substantiated by the findings of his, or any one, study alone. Nonetheless his study revealed specific data on factors affecting morale. He found relationships with peers and supervisors, and policies regarding transfer and promotion more strongly related to attrition than factors related to actual performance of police duties. As a police officer this finding resonates with my observation and experience of the Force. One last finding of Linden's is that 74% of female ex-members, and 56% of male ex-members report having experienced discrimination or harassment from other members. As a proud member of the RCMP, this is an awkward and painful finding for this researcher to acknowledge. Sadly, no organization including a police force is exempt from such shameful actions towards its employees.

One policing study conducted from a more post-modern framework was done by Dick (2000). She used personal accounts from 35 police officers to explore how the institutional context of policing influenced the ways in which acute stressors were experienced. Dick found "the beliefs contributing to the experience of felt distress related to the way in which policing, as both an identity and an activity, is constructed through the police organizational structure" (p. 226). Dick presented case studies using Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy with police officers. She suggests her study supports the view that the meaning officers attribute to stressors is key in

determining felt distress. She further suggests meanings are at least in part socially constructed in the context of the police organization. This notion is central to this present study. While this research study will elicit critical incidents relating to meaningful engagement in the workplace, the meanings these critical incidents have for the officers is what is most important. Without understanding the meanings critical incidents have for the officers, the incidents themselves are purely anecdotal. This current study is not designed to explore the social construction of the meanings officers attach to critical incidents, however the researcher assumes that all meaning is at least in part socially constructed, and that the RCMP as an organization certainly influences the meaning making processes of its members.

Another study conducted using qualitative research methodology with police officers was done by Plomp (1997). She used existential phenomenology to explore the lived experience of Canadian police officers. The key theme she identified was that of confronting unfixable suffering. Specifically she looked at four aspects of confronting unfixable suffering; existential loneliness, angst, thrownness and ambiguity. Plomp illustrated her findings through stories from the police officers. She identified existential loneliness as an affective reaction to circumstances where personal connection was thwarted in some way. Angst was defined as the experience of anguish and dread connected with experiencing insecurity, impotency or helplessness. By thrownness Plomp means the experience of being thrown in to the world, where one is confronted with the reality of experiences one has not had the opportunity of choosing. A sense of fate and helplessness are connected to the experience of thrownness. Ambiguity was typified by dissonance in roles such as

being a protector and defender of the law while being a helper. Being in the role of helper and feeling helpless was another type of ambiguity. Plomp's study provides a rich and detailed description of the lived-experience of being a police officer. It can be assumed the themes she has identified reflect the experience of the police officers interviewed in this study. The focus of Plomp's study was clearly different than the focus of this present study, however both studies interviewed police officers about aspects of their experience of policing and these studies compliment one another.

Supplemental Studies

Having explored the research on this study's dominant constructs of workplace engagement and policing it is important to now consider a variety of studies that offer more specific relevant information to this study from a variety of perspectives. For example Major, Klein & Ehrhart (2002) recently conducted a study on work time and interference with family. The study was conducted with 513 employees of a Fortune 500 company using survey data which was analyzed using multiple regression analysis and structural equation modeling. They found "long work hours are associated with increased work-family conflict and, at least indirectly, with psychological distress" (p. 433). Specifically they found long work weeks were associated with depression or other stress related health problems and that this was connected to both somatic complaints and "additional problems at home and at work-such as marital problems, poor job performance, absenteeism, or turnover" (p. 434). Certainly long hours are common in police work, and the potential impact this may have on police officers must be considered. Poor performance, absenteeism, and turnover are the very things the RCMP are trying to avoid with its employees.

Another study addressing employee turnover, among other variables, was conducted by Lee, Carswell and Allen (2000) who conducted a meta-analytic review of occupational commitment. They found occupational commitment was unrelated to gender, number of dependents, or marital status. This finding is especially interesting in light of Duxbury and Higgins (2001) previously discussed data which reveals female RCMP wrestling with family related issues and their careers. Another finding of Lee, Carswell & Allen (2000), that has connection with Duxbury and Higgins' research, is that occupational commitment was most strongly related to occupational turnover intention. If Duxbury and Higgins finding that 29% of RCMP are considering leaving the Force to find more balance is accurate, then this finding clearly has implications for the RCMP's ability to elicit occupational commitment, and presumably meaningful engagement, from its employees.

Another study which clearly articulates the impact of work-family balance on employees was conducted by Frone (2000) who examined the connection between work-family conflict and employee psychiatric disorders. Using hierarchical logistic regression analyses Frone found work to family and family to work conflict were positively related to having a mood, anxiety, or substance abuse disorder. Specifically he found family to work conflict was more strongly related to psychiatric disorders than work to family conflict. This study offers explicit findings which are consistent with, Klein & Ehrhart (2002) as previously discussed, and clearly emphasizes the seriousness of work-family conflict for both the employee and the employer.

Given the RCMP's proud and long history it is not surprising it has developed its own organizational culture over its 125+ years. The RCMP spans across Canada and around the world in a variety of different roles. Even within the organization micro-cultures exist that may be influenced by a host of factors such as geographic location, the nature of the duties being performed, and by the leaders and employees who work together. Sheridan (1992) suggests "an organization's cultural values influence its human resource strategies, including selection and placement policies, promotion and development procedures, and reward systems. Different strategies result in psychological climates that foster varying levels of commitment and retention among employees working in different organizations" (p. 1037). Certainly this present study acknowledges the importance of organizational culture on its employees and will speak to specific issues in this regard in the findings.

At this point it is time to look toward the design of this study, then move in to those findings. The setting for this study has been set, the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the study laid, and the literature informing the development of this study has been reviewed. Issues around workplace engagement have been explored as have issues around policing and work-family balance. What has not been addressed in the scientific literature thus far is an exploration of the specific critical incidents that contribute to or detract from RCMP officers being meaningfully engaged in their work. To fill this gap and explore this issue this present study will use an expanded critical incident methodology.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The choice of a research method depends on the nature of the research question. My research question does not involve hypothesis testing, the discovery of immutable truth, or an exact description of reality. My question, "What are the critical incidents contributing to or detracting from RCMP officers being meaningfully engaged in their work?", focuses on the lived-experience of RCMP officers as it relates to their subjective, felt sense of engagement with their work. Asking what meaning RCMP officers make of these critical incidents considers the context and interpretations made by the officers. Polkinghorne (1991) suggests "the purpose of research using qualitative procedures is to produce full and integrated descriptions of an experience or situation under study...qualitative designs seek to derive explanatory concepts and categories from the data" (p. 163). Later Polkinghorne states, "The function of research in counselling is to develop clear descriptions of categories that organize human experience and action into meaningful and useful patterns" (p. 181). The critical incident method allows for both patterns and categories to be formed based on the lived experiences of the officers interviewed.

My goal as the researcher is not to factor myself out in an effort to get at pristine truth. As the researcher, I will be engaged in a hermeneutic dialogue with each of the research participants. My goal is to elicit rich and detailed descriptions of the participant's experience, then to develop clear descriptions of categories that organize their experience into meaningful and useful patterns.

An expanded critical incident methodology was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, the method allows for concrete critical incidents to be elicited and examined. As the construct of workplace engagement has not yet been well defined or articulated, this method will allow for specific examples of workplace engagement, or disengagement to be illustrated. This will flush out this construct and shed light on how it is experienced by police officers. This method allows the RCMP to know exactly what happens in the organization to help or hinder its officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work. Should the RCMP want to make changes in an effort to more fully engage its employees, it will have specific information upon which to base its actions.

This method was also chosen as it allows for reflection on the meaning of the critical incidents experienced by officers helping or hindering workplace engagement. As noted earlier with stressors, not all factors helping or hindering workplace engagement may be universal. So, just as it is important and necessary to know what critical incidents affect workplace engagement, it is just as important to know what meaning officers make of these incidents to have a full and more colorful understanding of the dynamics of workplace engagement.

History of Method

The critical incident method was originally developed by Flanagan (1954). Flanagan stated, "The critical incident technique consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p. 327). This study examines the practical problem of

meaningfully engaging RCMP officers in their work. As a result of this study broad psychological principles will be developed for use in more effectively engaging RCMP officers in their work.

Building on Flanagan's method, and the subsequent studies using his method, Woolsey (1986) wrote a seminal article on the critical incident technique. In her article Woolsey defined five steps for a critical incident study; determining the aim of the activity to be studied, setting plans, specifications, and criteria for the information to be obtained, collecting data, analyzing the thematic content of the data, and reporting the findings. Woolsey's method, along with Flanagan's seminal contributions to this method, have formed the basis for a number of critical incident research studies. Examining several of these studies will allow a more complete understanding of how this method has been applied to specific research problems, and the contexts in which it has been effectively used.

Critical Incident Research Studies

Amundson and Borgen (1987) used the critical incident method to examine the factors that helped or hindered people in their experience of coping with unemployment. In their study they interviewed 93 participants, and identified distinct factors that helped or hindered participants in coping with unemployment.

Again, in 1998, Amundson and Borgen used the critical incident method, this time to explore the factors that help or hinder members of job search groups. In this study they interviewed 77 participants, using an open-ended interview approach. They identified 501 helping, and 44 hindering incidents, which they classified into 19 categories.

McCormick (1995) used a critical incident method to study the facilitation of healing for First Nations people living in the province of British Columbia. Using a method based on Flanagan (1954) he interviewed 50 participants, and elicited 437 critical incidents. He found fourteen categories of incidents that facilitated healing for his participants.

Wong (200) utilized an expanded version of Flanagan's (1954) critical incident method to study what helped and hindered in multicultural supervision. She interviewed 25 participants and elicited meaning units, which she grouped into four different broad categories. Wong expanded the critical incident method to include subjective experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. She states, "In the expanded version of Critical Incident Technique, critical incident should be defined as an event, which has a significant positive or negative impact on the individual. This critical incident may involve three components, which are: (a) antecedent conditions, (b) the event, and (c) the consequence. Each of these components may include thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and relationships." (p. 56). Wong's use of an expanded critical incident technique informs this study, as it takes a more comprehensive look at each critical incident.

Logan (2000) used the critical incident method, as defined by both Flanagan (1954) and Woolsey (1986), with police officers to study crisis negotiation. He interviewed 22 police negotiators and elicited 717 critical incidents. He grouped the critical incidents into fourteen categories. This study illustrates the usefulness of this method in exploring aspects of police work.

Most recently Borgen, Amundson & McVicar (2002) utilized the critical incident method in their research study exploring the experience of unemployment for fisheries workers in Newfoundland. The researchers conducted 53 critical incident interviews, using an open-ended interview approach, which later moved towards a focus on specific critical incidents. The researchers elicited 373 critical incidents, which they classified into twelve categories. This study, along with above studies, shows the variety of uses of the critical incident method and that this method continues to be effectively utilized in a variety of populations including with police officers.

<u>Meaning</u>

As noted in Wong's (2000) study the critical incident method can be expanded to include a consideration of the meaning critical incidents hold for participants. In this present study I do not believe the critical incidents can be viewed without exploring their context and meaning. Taking a critical realist perspective I believe there are critical incidents to be documented, categorized, and analyzed. I also believe that making meaning of these incidents is an interpretive process. I do not believe it is possible for me as the researcher to bracket out my biases in interpreting meaning. I have therefore done my best to articulate my assumptions on the research topic, and document my lived-experience as an RCMP officer who has experienced the phenomenon being studied. All efforts have been made to accurately represent the participant's experience, and the meaning of their experience to them, knowing full well that the meaning making process is littered with interpretations. Specific validity checks were done to speak directly to this issue.

In summary then, this study will use an expanded critical incident methodology. It is a critical incident study as critical incidents will be sought from the participants. It is expanded as the critical incidents may also include psychological states, feelings, and attitudes. More emphasis will be placed on the meaning of the critical incidents than in some traditional critical incident studies. The critical incident method adopted will be based on Woolsey's (1986) model.

Method

Woolsey (1986) lays out five steps for a critical incident study; determining the aim of the activity to be studied, setting plans, specifications, and criteria for the information to be obtained, collecting data, analyzing the thematic content of the data, and reporting the findings. This study will follow Woolsey's methodological steps.

Determining the aim of this study was a process of observation, self-reflection, and discussion. Woolsey (1986) states, "The most effective statements of aims use simple everyday language to convey an obvious meaning" (p. 244). The aim of this study is to explore the meaningful engagement of RCMP officers in their work. In everyday language the aim is to find out what incidents result in officers pouring their hearts and minds in to their work, and what incidents result in officers leaving their hearts and minds elsewhere when they come to work. Participants were oriented to the aim of the study through the use of such language. In being asked about critical incidents that engaged them in their work officers were asked things like, "What events or incidents happened that lead you to feel meaningfully engaged in your work? What things happened to make you feel you want to pour your heart and mind into your work? What events or incidents make you want to show up for

work, to work hard, and to enjoy your work, to go the extra mile or dig a little deeper?". Similarly, for incidents that hindered officers from feeling engaged in their work they were asked about incidents or events that "disengaged them, made them not want to be at work, not want to work hard, incidents that turned them off their work or made them want to mentally and emotionally check out". The aim of the study is straightforward. The process, however, becomes more involved.

The next step is setting the plans, specifications, and criteria. For this study the observers will be RCMP officers, who will be reporting on themselves. Prior to the interview officers were oriented to the study, fully informed of the research question, the aim of the study, and the type of questions they would be asked. Participants were asked question such as; "At different periods in your career, what events have occurred to make you feel meaningfully engaged in your work at the time?", "What events made you feel disengaged?", "Why did a certain event result in you feeling either engaged or disengaged?", "How did you interpret that event?", "What contextual factors influenced your interpretation of that event?". The interviews elicited specific critical incidents, while allowing for exploration of the meaning of these events for the participants.

Woolsey (1986) states "The major purpose of a critical incident study is to provide complete coverage of the content domain" (p. 245). To this end a wide range of RCMP officers were included in the study. They were each asked to report on their self-observations throughout their career span. All participants in the study were serving RCMP police officers. The RCMP is such a diverse population it is not possible to accurately represent all its members in this study. That is not the intent of

the study to begin with. The participants did however cover a broad range of officers from different backgrounds. Participants were recruited through the physical and electronic posting of a letter at several detachments throughout the Greater Vancouver area. This letter is attached as Appendix "A". Once potential participants identified themselves, they were provided a consent form, which outlined the purpose of the study and articulated their rights as participants. The consent form is attached as Appendix "B".

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Kvale (1996) states "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 the explicit descriptions and meanings as well as to what is "said between the lines". The interviewer may seek to formulate the "implicit message", "send it back" to the subject, and obtain an immediate confirmation or disconfirmation of the interviewer's interpretation of what the interviewee is saying" (p. 32). The participants were asked questions such as, "Think of a time when you felt meaningfully engaged in your work. What were the critical incidents that contributed to your experience?" and "Think of a time when you did not feel meaningfully engaged in your work. What were the critical incidents that contributed to your experience?". Both "factual" incidents were explored as well as the meaning these incidents held for the participants. The interviews were an open dialogue focused on the aim of the study. As participants described the critical incidents the interviewer took notes. Follow up questions were asked to explore what was being said between the lines at times. Many critical incidents held multiple meanings for the participants. In these cases

participants were asked "What was most meaningful to you about that event?".

Open-ended prompts such as "Can you tell me more about that?" were also used to

simply explore the participant's experience in more detail. The interviews were

focused first on the critical incidents, then on the meaning of the incident, with

clarifying and follow up questions being asked throughout. In almost every interview

participants looked back on their career and began describing incidents affecting their

level of engagement beginning from when they joined the Force through to the

present. This allowed for a flow to the interview, and made for a natural process of

reflection over time.

The interviews were all audio tape recorded and eight of them were

transcribed. Transcription results in the interview being decontextualized. I do not

believe this can be avoided when moving from the spoken word to written words.

For this reason audio tapes and the interviewer's notes were used extensively in

conducting the research and working with the data. The audio tapes and the

interviewer's notes were always used when analyzing any of the interview data.

Analyzing the data is the fourth step. This study analyzed thematic content

through a process of inductive reasoning. Specifically, categories were formed by

grouping together clusters of incidents that are connected to one another. At first 300

incidents were grouped into 19 categories. At this point the categories obtained thus

far were reviewed with the research supervisor and discussed in light of descriptive,

construct, and interpretive validity. From there, the remaining 70 critical incidents

were categorized with no new categories needing to be created. In forming clusters

and categories the meaning of the critical incidents were considered along with the

nature of the incident itself. Underlying meaning structures were seminal to the categorization process. Recognizing that this process is subjective, two independent judges were asked to sort ten percent of the incidents into categories, to see whether they would classify the incidents in a manner consistent with the researcher. Woolsey (1986) suggests a 75-85% agreement is acceptable. Both judges agreed with the classifications of incidents by the researcher in over 90% of the incidents. In cases where there was disagreement or confusion, agreement was achieved after discussion, and providing the judges with background information about the incident. Judges were provided with index cards containing a random sampling of incidents. The cards identified the incident and also contained a brief description of the event and/or a direct quote from the participant. As most incidents were told in story form, the cards were not able to capture the full context of the event, thus some background information about the critical incidents needed to be provided to the judges on occasion.

In an effort to speak to the interpretive validity of the study a sample of four participants were presented with the critical incidents as identified and described by the researcher. The researcher then explained the categories that had been identified, and the participant was asked to place each of their critical incidents in to a category. Again there was agreement in over 90% of cases. Where there was disagreement, the participant's categorization of the incident was taken as valid, and the incident shifted categories. In all cases where this occurred, after clarification, the researcher agreed with the categorization. All participants involved in this validity check also commented on the categories themselves. Each participant felt all their incidents fit

into one of the categories described, and no new categories were required. All participants commented that they resonated with each category even if none of their incidents fell into a certain category.

To further check on the resonance validity of the categories, three RCMP officers who were not involved in the study were presented with the categories, and asked for comment. Each officer resonated with all categories, and none commented on any potential category that might be missing. Each officer commented on every category and was able to think of their own critical incidents from their career that would fit into each category. Finally, later, the categories will be considered in light of previous research findings in the area.

The last step is reporting the findings. Each category has been given a self-explanatory title. Rich, vivid, and detailed descriptions have been provided for all categories. Example incidents have been provided for each category and direct quotes from participants have been provided for each category. The findings will be further integrated and discussed in the context of the current research literature.

Rigour

The critical incident method, as utilized in this study, demonstrates high levels of both reliability and validity. First the reliability of the study is present in the accurate and detailed description of the research process, so that this study could be clearly replicated. Reliability is also addressed through the use of independent judges to categorize a sampling of events. The high rate of agreement illustrates consistency and objectivity in the classification of incidents.

This study further demonstrates at least three types of validity. First, construct validity exists for the categories, as each category has been thoroughly described, and clearly established. As with Wong's (2000) study, "The descriptions of critical incidents measure what the researcher purports to measure, because the participants are given clear and specific instructions to report only incidents relevant to the purpose of the study. Construct validity is also demonstrated by the fact that all participants are qualified to observe the designated activity and they make similar observations"(p. 50). Construct validity has also been articulated in terms of how the findings fit with previous research in the area.

The second type of validity for this study is descriptive validity. This has been accomplished through accuracy in the recording and transcribing of interviews. In addition, the field notes made by the researcher during all interviews were accurate and descriptive. Maxwell (1992) states descriptive validity concerns itself with what the researcher reports having seen or heard. I do not believe exact descriptions of reality are possible, given the limits of language and the host of biases every researcher possesses. I do believe the validity of this study could be called into question however if the interviews were not clearly and accurately recorded. Similarly, the researcher's field notes were based on what the researcher deemed significant. The notes were intended to add detail and color to the description provided during the interviews. Checking categories and findings with the participants, independent raters, and other police officers also strengthens descriptive validity.

Interpretive validity must also be evaluated in this study. Not only is this study concerned with attaining accurate descriptions of the targeted critical incidents, it also examines the meaning of these incidents to the participants. Maxwell (1992) states "The term "interpretive" is appropriate primarily because this aspect of understanding is most central to interpretive research, which seeks to comprehend the phenomena not on the basis of the researcher's perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situation studied" (p. 289). Maxwell suggests interpretive accounts are grounded in the language of the participants, and should rely on their words and concepts as much as possible. This type of validity will apply more poignantly to participant's accounts of the meaning the critical incidents held for them, though interpretive validity will also fit for the categories. To this end the sampling of participants asked to classify their incidents into categories speaks directly to the interpretive validity of the study. The high rate of accuracy and agreement in the classification of events between researcher and participants demonstrates a high degree of interpretive validity for this study.

Participants

Participants for this study were sought from a number of RCMP detachments in the greater Vancouver area. All participants were volunteers and were given an informed consent form which clearly detailed the aim of the study. In total 25 RCMP officers were interviewed. There were 14 male officers interviewed and 11 females. One male participant was from an East Indian heritage. Two of the male participants and two of the female participants were from a French Canadian heritage. There were 11 constables, 8 corporals, and 6 sergeants. In the RCMP, constable is the entry

level rank, corporal is the next level up, followed by sergeant. The participant's years of service in the RCMP ranged from 3 years to 28 years, with mean years of service being 15.3. The participants were from 8 different detachments, though it should be noted many had served at a number of different locations and done a number of different police duties in their service, all of which they commented on in articulating their critical incidents. In total 370 critical incidents were elicited from the 25 participants.

Process Summary

To summarize and make clear the research method it can be understood as follows:

1. Volunteer participants obtained and arrangements made for interviews.

2. Participants given informed consent form and oriented to the study.

3. Open-ended, semi-structured interviews conducted to elicit critical incidents and explore the meanings of the incidents. Researcher made notes during the interviews. All interviews audio recorded.

4. Eight of the audio tapes sent for transcribing.

5. Audio tapes and researcher's notes reviewed at length to identify critical incidents from the interviews. 370 critical incidents identified.

6. First 300 critical incidents grouped into 19 categories through process of inductive reasoning.

7. Categories were shown to, explained, reviewed and discussed with research supervisor.

8. Remaining incidents analyzed, and fit into the existing 19 categories with no new categories needing to be created.

9. Forty random critical incidents presented to two independent judges for classification in to categories.

10. Four participants asked to review their critical incidents and categorize them. Participants also asked to comment on resonance of categories for them.

11. Three RCMP officers who were not participants were asked to review the categories and comment on their resonance with categories.

12. Findings reported.

The critical incident method used in this study has allowed for rich and detailed data to be obtained from participants. The incidents have been analyzed and grouped into categories which provide a clear and meaningful thematic understanding of what helps or hinders RCMP officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work. Now it is time to look specifically at the incidents and categories themselves.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Twenty-five RCMP officers were interviewed in the course of this study. Three hundred and seventy critical incidents were elicited from the officers. All 370 critical incidents have been analyzed, from which nineteen categories were formed. Each category is presented and described below, with examples of critical incidents given for each category. Table 1 has been provided to graphically display the categories, the total number of incidents in each category - broken down into engaging and disengaging incidents, and the number of participants who reported at least one critical incident in a given category. The categories will be presented in order from categories with the most contributing participants through to the least.

Before proceeding to examine the nineteen categories, it is important to understand the categorization process. In formatting the categories each incident was examined for two key factors; the nature of the actual critical incident, and the meaning that incident held for the officer. Most incidents fell into a category based on the nature of the incident. For example, every incident reported by members as a transfer of duties or locations was easily placed in to the category of Transfers. Thirty three critical incidents of transfers were reported by members. Most incidents were grouped in this manner, based largely on the nature of the incident. A smaller number of incidents however were categorized based more on the meaning the incident held for the officer. For example, one incident involved an officer engaging in a high speed pursuit where he caught the suspects. What was documented on his file however was that he swore on the police radio during the pursuit. While the pursuit was quite engaging for the officer, the comment from his supervisor negated

the positive engagement of the pursuit, and resulted in the officer feeling rather disengaged by the whole matter. The critical incident involved a police incident, which is one of the categories, but in speaking with the officer what was most meaningful to him about this incident was the disengaging comment he received from his supervisor. For this reason, this critical incident was placed in the Supervision category. In instances where an incident might potentially have fit in to more than one category based on the nature of the incident, the incident was placed in the category based on the dominant meaning the incident held for that officer. Where such instances were reported by the officers they were asked questions such as, "What was most meaningful to you about that incident? or What was the most important aspect of that incident to you?" Such questions allowed the incidents to be categorized based on what was important about that incident to the officer.

The category of critical incidents labeled perceived organizational support was formed based on critical incidents where the dominant meaning theme was that of perceived organizational support. Unlike a category such as transfer or equipment where the connection between incidents is more concrete, the category of perceived organizational support is made up of critical incidents of various sorts which resulted in the member feeling either supported or unsupported by the RCMP. Consistent with an expanded critical incident methodology, meaning was used throughout the analysis and can be seen most notably in categories like supervision and perceived organizational support. The categories, and how they were formed, will be understood more clearly through examining them individually in more depth.

Table 1: Critical Incident Categories

Category	Engaging Incidents	Disengaging Incidents	Total Incidents	Contributing Officers	% of Total Incidents
Supervision	52	57	109	23	30
Police Incidents	31	10	41	18	11
Transfer	23	10	33	15	9
Personal Circumstances	6	23	29	14	8
Perceive Organizational Support	5	28	33	13	9
Peers	11	16	27	11	7
Asked to do Duties	16		16	10	4
Volume of Work		8	8	8	2
Promotion	13	2	15	7	4
Psychological Support	9	2	11	7	3
Community Involvement	10	1	11	7	3
Training	8		8	7	2
Member Injustice		5	5	5	1
Socials	5		5	5	1
Equipment	2	5	7	4	2
Charges Dropped		3	3	3	1
Public Thanks	3		3	3	1
Helping Over Call of Duty	3		3	2	1
Work Interfering		3	3	2	1

<u>Supervision</u>

By far the largest category of critical incidents is Supervision. This category includes critical incidents where an officer's supervisor said or did something which resulted in the officer feeling either engaged or disengaged in their work. Officers reported 52 critical incidents where their supervisor said or did something which resulted in them feeling more engaged in their work. Officers reported 57 critical incidents which resulted in them feeling less engaged in their work based on something their supervisor said or did. In total 109 critical incidents were reported which involved an interaction with a supervisor. All but two of the participants reported incidents in this category. Critical incidents involving supervision accounted for 30% of the total number of critical incidents in this study.

Disengaging critical incidents involving supervisors were the largest grouping of incidents. Critical incidents in this category ranged from supervisors simply not doing their jobs —such as reading an officer's paperwork, through to incidents of blatant sexual harassment. Critical incidents in this category also ranged from supervisory inaction —such as hardly ever being in the office or not taking action to address conflict on a team, through to oppressive supervisory involvement – watching an officer's every move, reading every piece of paper or checking up on the member in an unmarked police car. Incidents in this grouping also ranged from more impersonal incidents such as getting a new supervisor in a section with no experience in the type of work the section does, through to very negative personal incidents such as a supervisor engaging in actions such as repeatedly pinching an officer's rear end.

Examples of specific critical incidents will help paint a better picture of this category. For instance the disengaging power of a supervisor's comments can be seen in the following quotes officers reported hearing from their supervisors. A comment to a female officer back when females were newer to the RCMP, "Nobody wanted you here. I got stuck with you". A comment to another female officer when moved to a specialty section, "We're just taking our token woman". A comment from a unit commander to one of his junior supervisors as the unit commander leaves the office at 4:00 p.m. while the team stayed to work overtime on a search warrant, "If anything goes wrong, it's on your shoulders". This officer stated he lost respect for this boss as he felt he didn't care about the people who worked for him. One last example is a comment from a supervisor to an officer arriving in BC from another province, made in front of her co-workers, "Your five and half years service in Saskatchewan is like two here in the lower mainland". This officer reported she felt her policing experience was invalidated in front of her peers and junior officers who also heard the comment. These critical incidents illustrate how comments from a supervisor result in the officer feeling less engaged in their work.

There are other examples of critical incidents that typify themes within this category. Supervisory inaction is seen in a reported incident where there were physical altercations between officers and the supervisor refused to take any action to stop the behaviour. This officer reported, "I really hated my job in the time I was dealing with them"(the officers and the supervisors). Another female officer was the target of ongoing sexual comments from her supervisor. She stated, "Enough is enough. I've told him several times to stop". This harassment resulted in a conflict

with this supervisor that remained unresolved. The officer feels she was denied courses due to the conflict. She states this resulted in her feeling very angry and wanting to be transferred.

Two final examples typify themes within this category. First is a supervisor holding closed door meetings to gossip about other members in the section. The officer who experienced this felt the supervisor was always wondering what others thought of him. The officer felt this action resulted in a split in the team when some officers refused to participate in the supervisor's gossip sessions. And finally, an officer reported a critical incident where, after putting a great deal of voluntary time into an officer safety program, he was not chosen for a specific officer safety course in favour of the supervisor's favourite officer. This officer stated he felt this form of "nepotism" was very disengaging, and he experienced or witnessed such "nepotism" regularly.

The common theme in the above critical incidents are an interaction with a supervisor which resulted in the officer feeling less engaged in their work. Whether through a comment, action, or even inaction supervisors clearly play a key role in contributing to officers feeling disengaged in their work. Thankfully supervisors conversely play a key role in officers feeling more engaged in their work as well. One officer commented, after reflecting on a number of different supervisors he had worked for, "My desire to work was very strongly influenced by who I worked for". Now it is time to look at the next grouping of incidents which is supervisory related critical incidents resulting in officers feeling more meaningfully engaged in their work.

This category includes critical incidents where an officer's supervisor said or did something which resulted in the officer feeling more engaged in their work. Officers reported 52 critical incidents of this nature. Incidents in this category range from supervisors who simply gave the officer lots of freedom to do their job through to supervisors who were very positively involved in the lives of their members. One officer commented about her supervisor, "He was like a father figure". She stated this supervisor accepted women in the Force, he was actively involved in the community, and encouraged his officers to do like wise. The officer commented that this supervisor would even have officers to his house at Christmas time. Clearly this officer felt engaged in her work, and supported personally and professionally by her supervisor.

Several critical incidents typify themes within this category. Not surprisingly, some of these incidents have a direct inverse correlation with many of the disengaging supervisory incidents documented above. For example, as opposed to feeling abandoned by a supervisor, officers reported several incidents were they felt very supported by a supervisor. In one reported critical incident an officer had to discharge his firearm at a vehicle that was trying to run him over. The officer stated his first thought was, "They're going to fire me". To his pleasant surprise he found his two immediate supervisors both backed him completely, with his immediate supervisor saying, "They have to go through me to get to you". This resulted in this officer feeling very supported and engaged in his work. The officer further commented, "I've used those same words now as a supervisor". This incident is a

clear example of how supervisory support results in an officer feeling more engaged in their work.

Three other salient critical incidents that involve officers feeling supported by their supervisors are worth noting. In one case an officer, who was a supervisor herself, had to suspend an employee. The employees in that unit went over her head to the officer-in-charge of the unit, however the officer-in-charge supported the decision made, and the officer who made the decision felt very supported by her supervisor. In this case this officer had been tasked with managing a troubled workplace, and as a result of the support she received she felt empowered to make necessary decisions knowing she would be supported.

In contrast to a disengaging critical incident where a supervisor would check up on officers in an unmarked police car, one officer reported an engaging critical incident where her supervisor would come out on the road to simply talk with her. She stated, "They cared about me". She felt her supervisor cared about her life in general, not just her work duties. Again, in contrast to a noted disengaging critical incident, an officer reported an engaging critical incident where a supervisor specifically called certain officers on their inappropriate behaviour at work. The supervisor held meetings to address the damage that was done, and as a result this officer felt her trust had been restored in the organization.

Other critical incidents that typify this category include supervisors believing in the officer and acting on this by taking actions such as allowing an officer to work on a special project. For example, one officer reported an incident where their supervisor released·them from their normal duties to work a high profile theft case

with another unit. This officer felt this action by her supervisor demonstrated confidence in her abilities, and she found this very engaging. In a similar but more general vein, officers reported incidents where they felt very empowered by their supervisors to simply do their jobs. One officer reported his boss, "Just let me fly at it". The inference in these incidents being the supervisor was supportive but not overly involved in micro-supervision type behaviours.

In a somewhat surprising critical incident, one officer reported working for a very demanding supervisor. He stated, "He wanted things done right, and he didn't want to ask twice". This same supervisor was however not harsh in his comments or actions towards his members which resulted in this officer feeling he had to try harder and do things better. This officer found himself quite engaged in his work as a result of this supervisor.

Other key critical incidents are exemplified by a supervisor tearing up an officer's pass requesting leave, in light of the voluntary overtime this officer had put in. The supervisor simply gave him the time off. The officer indicated this action felt fair, and felt his extra efforts were in this way recognized. Another officer returned to work only four months after having a child. Her supervisor let her go home to breast feed and attend to her child when necessary. This officer felt supported by her supervisor and thereby engaged in her work

Two final critical incidents from this category are important to note. In one incident a supervisor came to a unit with little experience in the work that unit performed. A similar incident was reported in the disengaging supervision category, however in this incident the officer stated the supervisor lacked job knowledge but

cared about his employees – "He was a good man". His caring was meaningful enough to outweigh his inexperience and as a result this officer felt engaged in his work under this supervisor. And finally, an officer reported an incident where they were transferred to a new unit after undergoing a difficult internal investigation. Upon arrival the supervisor stated he was aware of the matter, however it was in the past and it did not matter to the supervisor. The supervisor never mentioned it again, and this officer was able to freely engage in their work under this supervisor. This comment from a supervisor stands in opposition to several comments noted in the disengaging supervision category, and highlights how a supervisors words, or actions, can play a very significant role in helping or hindering officers from feeling meaningfully engaged in their work.

<u>Police Incidents</u>

The second largest category of critical incidents involves critical incidents where officers were engaged in their duties. In this category it is the nature of the police duties or police incidents that resulted in the officer feeling more or less meaningfully engaged in their work. There are 31 incidents officers identify as contributing to increased workplace engagement, and 10 incidents which resulted in officers feeling less meaningfully engaged in their work. In total this category covers 41 critical incidents, or 11% of all reported incidents. Eighteen different officers contributed to this category. It is important to remember that police officers engage in a variety of duties and perform diverse functions. In understanding the label for this category this fact must be remembered as police incidents could include events such as conducting an audit of the police exhibit locker or teaching a drug awareness

course at a local school. This category includes incidents where officers were simply involved in the course of their duties, and as a result of the nature of the duties officers felt either more or less meaningful engagement in their work.

There are over three times as many reported critical incidents of officers feeling more engaged in their work as a result of the nature of their duties than of officers feeling less engaged in their work as a result of the nature of their duties. The clear inference here being that police work is most often innately engaging for police officers. Reported incidents in this grouping range from simply enjoying routine traffic enforcement through to involvement in shootings and murders.

One officer reported a critical incident in which he attended an assault in progress where a teen on drugs was beating a nun. The officer arrested the suspect and stopped the assault. The officer stated, "It felt very satisfying because that is the type of thing we were trained for". Another officer was called to a break and enter in progress which resulted in two foot chases. The officer caught both suspects even though he later learned he broke his ankle in the first chase. He states he found the incident very rewarding as it brings out the ability to overcome and inspires, "The thrill of victory". The officer states he never missed a day of work, even with his broken ankle.

Another critical incident that exemplifies the comradery involved in police work was reported by an officer who attended a bush party. He stated he experienced an "us versus them" feeling, resulting in everyone on his shift being involved and a spirit of teamwork resulting. Another officer reported an incident where she conducted an undercover buy of contraband alcohol from a bootlegger. The officer

simply said doing this type of police work was exciting for her. Similarly one officer was posted to National Security Investigation Section during the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001. He stated he worked long days, on challenging projects and simply found the nature of the work engaging. He stated, "I just hate terrorists", and to him his work was by its very nature engaging.

Other more high profile police incidents were also reported by participants. One officer reported investigating a case involving U.S fugitives with hostages, grenades and machine guns. This officer stated, "If it's big, I like being a part of it". Another officer reported critical incidents involving the protection of internationally protected persons such as Fidel Castro, Henry Kissinger, and the Shah of Iran while visiting Canada. What this officer found engaging about these incidents was the responsibility of holding your post. He also spoke of a sense of pride in being involved in such protective operations. Another officer articulated an incident where he arrested a murderer. He stated it was "an incredible feeling". He stated it felt great getting the murderer off the street for both the victim's family and for the community.

Two final critical incidents in this category illustrate how police work engages officers. First is an incident where an officer on routine patrol heard a baby crying and found a child in a box. It was later determined the child was about 6 hours old. The officer took the child to the hospital and conducted an investigation to find the mother. The officer never found the mother but took an interest in the child. When adoptive parents were found for the child the officer asked if he might stay in touch with the child. The parents declined this offer, and the officer said he understood and

was okay with their decision. Though a difficult matter to deal with, the officer reported this as an engaging incident that was meaningful to him.

A final critical incident in this grouping was reported by an officer who had to shoot a young person while on a call. The officer knew the young person fairly well from previous dealings, and had talked with him often. In referring to what happened the officer stated, "Somebody had to do it. I was glad it was me because I was mentally prepared for it". The officer was an Emergency Response Team member and had extensive training for such serious situations. Though clearly a very troubling scenario the officer reported it was indeed a part of the job. The matter has now become a source of strength for this officer, and maintained his motivation for working out and staying sharp. Though not common, such scenarios are indeed a part of policing that is not often acknowledged.

Within this category there were ten incidents reported that resulted in officers feeling less engaged in their work. Incidents in this grouping ranged from dealing with negative people through to frustrating investigations and receiving negative press in the media. One officer reported attending bar closings where "Dealing with miserable people all the time you seem to take part of it with you. It can change your social life after a while". Another officer cited an incident of a heckler at a local Starbucks. She stated she does not enjoy the verbal abuse on the job and finds the lack of respect disheartening.

Two incidents were reported that involve helping people. In one an officer was investigating a high profile missing person case, and could not find the missing person. The officer stated, "I felt so sorry for her family. I felt I wasn't doing justice

to the file but I couldn't see what else I could do". The officer stated the file caused her grief. Another officer reported an incident where a person wouldn't come to their door after calling 9 1 1. She stated, "When you're there to help people you naturally assume they want to be helped, so when that doesn't happen you get the negative feelings".

One last incident to typify this category involved a media liaison officer receiving negative media coverage. The officer stated the reporter was a difficult person, and painted her badly, "That was probably an all time RCMP low for me". It is clear from these examples that police work includes critical incidents in the course of duty that both contribute to and detract from RCMP officers feeling meaningfully engaged in their work.

Transfer

This category is compiled of 33 critical incidents in which an officer was transferred. Twenty three incidents of being transferred were experienced by officers as engaging. Ten incidents of being transferred resulted in officers feeling less meaningfully engaged in their work. Fifteen different officers contributed to this category, which accounts for 9% of total reported incidents. While this category is quite concrete and clear, it is important to look at examples to better understand the meaning officers made of the transfers in order for them to feel either more or less engaged in their work due to being transferred.

Engaging incidents in this category ranged from transfers that simply resulted in new learning through to transfers that felt like a reward either for hard work, or for enduring an unpleasant posting. Most engaging incidents in this category had to do

with new learning opportunities. One officer commented about a transfer she experienced, "Anything new and challenging seems to keep me excited about work, and to keep me happy to put out my best performance". Another officer was transferred to a high profile computer related project where he felt very challenged. He stated his motto was, "Go harder. Go longer. Failure is not an option". This officer commented he found the challenge very motivating.

Other officers experienced transfers as a reward. One officer after being transferred to a Strike Force Unit felt it was a great opportunity, though they had worked hard to get it. They felt, "Work hard and things go your way". Another officer was finally transferred to a specialized unit for which he had done specific schooling. He felt he was finally able to use his skills, and thereby found the work rewarding and engaging. Even temporary transfers were experienced by some officers as engaging. One officer received a six month transfer to a narcotics unit and felt it was a break from his regular duties, and the whole experience was very encouraging.

Though most transfers were seen as engaging, ten critical incidents involving transfers were reported which resulted in officers feeling less engaged in their work. These types of incidents ranged from transfers feeling like a step back in one's career through to unwanted or forced transfers. For example, one officer who had worked in a smaller detachment, where he had done a number of serious crime investigations such as homicides, was disengaged by a transfer to a large urban detachment where he had no opportunity to take serious files. He felt the work at the new detachment was "McDonalds style policing", and it seemed ridiculous to him after having done

more serious police work. Similarly another officer was forcibly transferred from a general investigation unit back to general duties. She stated, "It was a kick in the stomach" to go back to uniform after working more serious cases.

The experience of being involuntarily transferred was clearly disengaging for several officers. Typical feelings in these cases were around why others weren't chosen to be transferred instead. The feeling of being in the new posting against one's will also typified this experience and clearly resulted in officers feeling less meaningfully engaged in their work.

Personal / Life Circumstances

This diverse category encompasses critical incidents involving personal situations that affect an officer's felt sense of meaningful engagement in their work. This category includes incidents involving one's family, personal circumstances, or life situation. Six such incidents were reported which helped officer's sense of meaningful engagement in their work, twenty three incidents were reported which hindered their sense of workplace engagement. In total fourteen officers contributed to this category, which encompasses 8% of total reported incidents.

Positive critical incidents within this category range from pursuing continuing education through to involvement in local community activities. For example, two officers reported incidents involving pursuing higher education. One officer posted to a smaller detachment stated, "My social life was almost non-existent, so it filled a void". Another officer took a leave from the RCMP to pursue his education for a time. He reported enjoying the learning and flexibility, and returned to the Force more engaged in his work. Other typical incidents in this category included being

involved in a local community sports team where officers reported feeling more a part of the community and thereby more engaged in their work in that community.

Twenty three disengaging incidents were reported within this category. The vast majority of incidents in this grouping involved family situations, though incidents ranged through to being involved in car accidents and having friends commit suicide. In the family area, reported incidents included frustrations with last minute shift changes when the officer had young children at home she was responsible for. One officer reported that prior to having children her work was all encompassing, after kids work was less important. She stated, "There's more to life than work". Another officer commented how she felt guilty about having a baby, "The guys make you feel guilty. There's no doubt about it – you're sitting at home doing nothing while we're working". Other officers commented on going through a divorce, and how difficult it was to stay focused on work during this time. Yet another officer commented on how long hours at work took a toll on his family life. When he wanted a promotional transfer to another location, his wife stated she and the kids would not go, so he did not take the move.

Other incidents in this group included two officers experiencing having a friend commit suicide. Both found it difficult to make sense of matters, and to stay focused on work. One officer reported their spouse died. Though he received a great deal of support from the RCMP, it was a traumatic experience to go through. One officer, who was working in a break and enter section at the time, reported having her house broken into. She reported feeling helpless and very upset by the incident. And finally, one officer reported being in a serious car accident where she was off work

for nine months. She stated people presumed she was off on stress leave, and no one informed her peers why she was off. For her this was a very disengaging experience. As can be seen from the noted examples this category includes diverse incidents with the common theme being personal circumstances impacting on the felt sense of meaningful engagement in the workplace.

Perceived Organizational Support

This category consists of incidents which resulted in officers feeling either more or less meaningfully engaged in their work as a function of feeling either supported or unsupported by the organization. The category includes critical incidents involving higher management, organizational policy or organizational processes. The previous category of Supervision dealt with interactions with direct supervisors. While certainly there may be a connection between these two categories, they are fundamentally distinct. Perhaps the distinction is best illustrated through the previously noted critical incident where an officer discharged his firearm at a vehicle which was trying to run him over. He thought that "They" were going to fire him, yet his immediate supervisors were very supportive and actually commented that "They" had to go through them to get to the officer. This category is about the "They". The category is made up of 33 critical incidents, and was contributed to by 13 officers. There are five incidents where officers felt supported by the organization, and 28 incidents where they felt unsupported by the organization. This category represents 9% of the total number of incidents. As with each category it can be more fully understood through considering examples of relevant incidents.

Disengaging critical incidents in this category far out number engaging incidents. Disengaging incidents, where officers perceived a lack of support from the RCMP, range from more general, impersonal incidents such as a perceived lack of sufficient resourcing through to specific events such as not receiving support from the RCMP when being sued for duty related actions. Issues around the promotion system and releasability for training and transfers were also noted in this category. Specific examples best illustrate this category.

The RCMP's promotion system has been under revision in recent years. Officers commented on their critical incident experiences in the promotion process, "After twenty years they were telling me I didn't know what I was doing, and I shouldn't be there". This officer stated it was a humiliating experience to go through. Another officer commented, "Now people don't do police work, they do P.R.P. (self-assessment) entries". This officer felt other officers don't want to go to calls like armed robberies or domestic disputes because they do not look particularly good on an assessment, whereas "meaningless" public relations activities help get officers promoted. The promotion process clearly resulted in these officers feeling less meaningfully engaged in their work.

Other critical incidents that typify this category involve general duty officers feeling let down by the organization. One officer cited a critical incident where he was picked to go on a United Nations Peacekeeping mission, however he was deemed not releasable due to staffing shortages where he worked. The officer was frustrated by this as his perception was that officers from places like Ottawa get to go on two or three U.N. Missions. The officer stated that general duty is touted by management as

the backbone of the Force, yet general duty members lose out on such opportunities. This same officer also noted how general duty officers were taken off the street for bicycle squad duties. He states the management loves bike squad because they get good press, yet the workload now must be increased for the remaining general duty members. This officer stated that he has lost joy and pride in performing general duties as a result of such incidents.

Critical incidents involving training were also reported by officers. One officer stated he felt there were fewer courses being offered to officers due to budget restrictions. This officer felt this resulted in restricted opportunities for him to learn and progress. Another officer cited an incident where he was denied a course because he had court scheduled for half a day during the course. He saw the process as; you work hard, you get charges and court time, you lose out on courses and other less hard working people get the courses and thereby get ahead. He stated, "You do your job and everyone else gets the credit". Another officer noted an incident where a spot on a course he felt he deserved went to a member of an affirmative action group. His comment was, "Why work hard?".

Two other key incidents in this category involve officers involved in court cases. In one incident an officer was sued for assault which was alleged to have occurred while the officer was on duty. The officer stated he received no support from anywhere. He felt alone, and very frustrated. A second officer reported going to trial on a firearms matter where the suspect was being supported by a national firearms association. The officer states she was worried for her personal safety and received very little support from the RCMP in the matter. Clearly what was most

meaningful to these officers about these matters was the lack of perceived support from the RCMP.

Though fewer in number, there were five incidents where officers did indeed feel supported by their organization, and thereby more meaningfully engaged in their work. These incidents reflect different experiences involving issues similar to those in the above grouping of disengaging incidents. For example one officer noted a critical incident with the promotion process where she felt her higher management wanted her to be successful. She states she was given leave to study for the interview, and that in a second cycle of the promotion process points were given for seniority. She felt, "Service and experience now counts!". In another incident an officer was promised a transfer after reluctantly serving at a post for two years. The organization lived up to its word and transferred the officer at the two year point.

One other critical incident is worth noting in this grouping. An officer reported an incident where his detachment commander worked very hard to increase resources on the road. The officer noted the detachment commander himself went on the road to take calls and back officers up on calls on occasion. He felt this high level manager, as a representative of the organization, was working with general duty officers to get the job done. He stated, "He wasn't separate from us, or above us". For this officer, this was an engaging incident and increased his sense of being meaningfully engaged in his work.

Peers

Critical incidents involving peers accounted for 7% of reported incidents. Eleven engaging incidents combined with 16 disengaging incidents make for a total

of 27 critical incidents which involved an officer's peers. Eleven different officers contributed to this category which encompasses incidents where an interaction with a peer contributed positively or negatively to an officer's felt sense of meaningful workplace engagement.

Engaging critical incidents in this category range from the experience of comradery on a Watch through to individual peers doing specific things for an officer. Several officers commented on experiencing a sense of comradery on a team. Comradery resulted in officers simply feeling encouraged to come to work, through to feeling an increased sense of officer safety out on the road. One officer reported such comradery and teamwork on her Watch that even poor performers who were sent to their Watch were turned around. Another officer witnessed keen and motivated officers not only on her team but on other teams as well and found this very engaging. She felt motivated to work for opportunities stating, "No one is going to take care of your career except you". This officer was engaged by the professionalism she witnessed amongst her peers. This strong sense of motivation was also noted by an Emergency Response Team (ERT) officer who found himself very positively engaged by his high performing ERT peers.

Other incidents in this grouping include officers reporting feeling engaged in their work through opportunities to participate on constable committees where they were actually able to accomplish meaningful changes at their detachments. And finally officers reported engaging incidents where peers helped them in some way such as simply showing an interest in their life or offering them a ride somewhere. One officer was helped through a difficult internal investigation by a senior constable.

This officer stated his sense of abandonment was lessened, and that "Somebody actually cares about what happens to me". Clearly this interaction with a peer was very meaningful and engaging for this officer.

Not all interactions with peers were engaging for officers. Disengaging incidents with peers ranged from serious gossiping through to being physically assaulted by one's peers. One notable theme within this grouping is that of not being backed up by one's peers. Three incidents of this nature were reported and all three officers found the situations very distressing. In one case an officer dropped her notebook in a suspicious vehicle, which she later had to search to retrieve her notebook. The suspicious vehicle was in a drive-in theatre and her peers wouldn't go in to help her. She stated, "They would have gone in for any of their male co-workers". In summing up her feelings on the incident she succinctly stated of her peers, "People can be fucking cruel".

Other key incidents in this grouping include conflict between peers on a team. One officer reported experiencing intense conflict on a team where there was a lot of complaining, and rampant gossip. The officer stated there was an affair on the team. This officer stated they took a leave of absence from the RCMP shortly after this situation unfolded. One final and serious example in this category is an officer who was physically assaulted by her peers. In describing the incident she stated, "I was frightened for my life". In describing the impact it had on her she stated, "I was totally destroyed. I couldn't even talk to people at work. I didn't want to go to work". Obviously this incident had a seriously negative impact on this officer's sense of being meaningfully engaged in her work.

Asked/Given Duties or Project

The distinguishing feature of this category is that officers were specifically asked to do something, or given a meaningful project, based on their performance, experience or a supervisor's belief in their abilities. All sixteen reported incidents in this category were experienced by officers as engaging. This category accounts for 4% of all reported incidents, with 10 different officers contributing to this category. Incidents in this category range from being asked to lay a wreath on behalf of a detachment at Remembrance Day ceremonies through to being asked to take on a major project for the Force.

Notable incidents in this category include officers specifically being asked to go to specialty sections. One officer who reported such an incident felt his hard work was being recognized by his supervisors and management, and that he was seen as competent to work in a section requiring much more independence. Being asked to take on leadership roles was also experienced as engaging by officers. One officer was given a leadership role on a tactical troop. He felt his previous military experience was being valued and he found his leadership role "very engaging".

Being asked to speak publicly was also reported as being engaging. When asked to speak at events on their areas of expertise officers felt "It's nice to give what you know". Officers reported feeling valued for their expertise. And finally, being asked to take on a major project was experienced as engaging. When asked to do things like design a response model for events such as September 11th, or to coordinate events like the Law Enforcement Torch Run, officers reported feeling high levels of engagement in their work. One officer commented, "It's incredibly

fulfilling to work law enforcement at multiple levels. You weren't just stuck with the ugly, you were balancing it with community". All officers in this category found being asked to do a major project or take a key position a meaningfully engaging experience.

Volume of Work / Resourcing

This category consists of eight critical incidents where officers reported feeling disengaged due to feeling overwhelmed with work, or frustrated due to short staffing. Eight different officers contributed to this category, which accounts for two percent of overall incidents. Incidents in this category range from feeling overwhelmed with work through to feeling unable to do good work due to staffing shortage.

Examples of critical incidents in this category include one officer reporting he had to take a holiday day just to come in to the office and catch up on his paperwork. He stated he was being overworked. Other officers reported coming into the office on days off to catch up on paperwork. One officer felt he just couldn't get ahead on the paperwork, which he stated was quite draining and discouraging. Another officer commented on how she dreaded coming back to work after being off, due to the volume of paperwork awaiting her.

Other incidents in this category centered around staffing shortages. One officer stated their Watch should have eleven officers on the road when in fact they often had only four. This was seen as resulting in officers not being able to do proper investigations, which was experienced as frustrating. One officer who was a supervisor felt frustration as staffing levels were often out of her control, yet she had

to turn officers holiday and training requests down as she needed the officers on the road taking calls. On the other end of this scenario an officer reported consistently having his holiday requests turned down due to staffing shortages, then being sent a harsh note for having too much holiday time accrued. Clearly the staffing shortages result in working officers having to take more calls, and thereby having to do more paperwork. Both these scenarios are frustrating for officers who find themselves less meaningfully engaged in their work by this experience.

<u>Promotion</u>

This category consists of 15 critical incidents of officers being promoted. Thirteen of these incidents were experienced as engaging, two as disengaging. Seven different officers contributed to this category, which accounts for 4% of all reported incidents. Similar to the Transfer category, the nature of the critical incident is quite clearly defined however to more fully understand the meaning officers make of being promoted, specific examples need to be considered.

Critical incident promotions that were experienced as engaging by officers ranged from simply feeling relieved from the stigma of not being promoted after a certain length of time through to feeling quite proud and engaged over getting promoted. One officer commented, "It was about time", feeling they had paid their dues after 18 years as a constable. Another officer commented on the challenge of learning new skills as a supervisor, "My thirst for knowledge keeps me going". Other officers found the increased responsibility engaging, commenting they felt empowered and found the responsibility both rewarding and satisfying. One officer

stated being in a position where other officers came to them with questions simply made them "Feel like a somebody".

Not all critical incidents in this category were experienced as engaging. One officer reported her experience of being promoted as "Welcome to hell". This officer was not well received by her subordinates, and found other officers wouldn't even speak to her. She stated there was a perception female officers were scored differently on the promotion exams, which was not true. She found people at her new posting hostile. Another officer felt she sold her soul for a promotion. She took a desk job as she did not get a general duty position. She stated, "I was the best person for that job. I didn't get it because I was female. That's the bottom line". Clearly, for these two officers their promotion experience did not help their experience of meaningful engagement in their work.

Psychological Support

This category consists of critical incidents involving psychological support offered to officers through either the RCMP's Member Assistance Program, or a Force psychologist. The category includes nine engaging incidents, and two disengaging incidents, for a total of eleven incidents. Seven different officers contributed to the category, which constitutes three percent of all reported incidents. Critical incidents in this category range from not receiving psychological support when it would have been helpful through to receiving meaningful and significant help from a Force psychologist.

In the engaging group, incidents included officers going to see a psychologist as a requirement of their duties, such as undercover operators annual psychological

assessment. One officer simply stated it was reassuring, and that the psychologist was a "good guy". Other officers stated that seeing a Force psychologist was "priceless", as "work does affect you". Another officer commented on the value of attending a critical incident stress debriefing after a shooting. The officer stated it was helpful, and reduced some troubling symptoms. One officer had been to a Force psychologist earlier on, and when a friend of his committed suicide he had a pre-existing relationship with the psychologist, which the officer said was helpful. Lastly, one officer reported experiencing very disturbing dreams after a peer was killed on the job. This officer stated he sought help from a Force psychologist early on, and therefore didn't need to take any time off. He stated he had no family around and that it was too hard to talk with another officer. For this officer the involvement of a Force psychologist helped him stay meaningfully engaged in his work even after such a terrible tragedy.

The two disengaging incidents in this category involve not receiving support when it would have been helpful. One officer reported attending a suicide call where a young person had shot their head off. No psychological services were offered to the officer, with the only comment being, "You're okay, right?". The officer stated she felt compassion for the mom and is still in touch with the family. Another officer stated they were offered no psychological follow up after a particularly traumatic event. He stated, "It would have been nice to know you're still there". The critical incidents in this category reveal that receiving psychological support can be very helpful, and thereby engaging, whereas not receiving support when needed can be very disengaging.

Involvement with Community Programs

This category is connected with the Police Duties category. In fact it could be considered a sub-category of Police Duties, as each incident in this category involves officers performing their job duties. What distinguishes this category is that what officers contributing to this category found most meaningful about their reported critical incidents was being involved with a specific community program. Seven officers contributed eleven critical incidents to this category, accounting for three percent of total incidents. Examining specific critical incidents again allows for a better understanding of what officers found meaningful about involvement with community programs.

Five critical incidents in this category focus on officers involved with community programs through local schools. One officer stated how she enjoyed wearing her red serge to schools, believing it may have a positive impact on a young person in some way. Another officer enjoyed conducting school talks, feeling he was able to change attitudes in a positive direction. One officer smiled a great deal as he shared the story of how he took guitar lessons in the school with the kids, in an effort to build relationships. He stated not only was he able to break the ice, but they asked him to be in the school's talent show. The officer stated the whole ordeal was fun, and very satisfying. Another commented on his school involvement, "It keeps me away from the harsh, traditional policing environment".

Other engaging incidents in this category including being involved in the Cops for Cancer program, building a skateboard park with and for local community kids, and coordinating a Ski Watch program. Another officer reported an engaging

incident as coordinating his detachment's auxiliary policing program. He stated, "It's more motivating to work with external partners because they're so positive about the RCMP". And finally one officer reported an engaging experience teaching the D.A.R.E. program at a local school. The one disengaging incident in this category comes from the same officer who stated she had to fail one kid, which was difficult to do. Overall it is clear that involvement with community programs is very engaging for many officers.

Training

Critical incidents in this category involve officers participating in training related activities. Eight critical incidents were reported. All were engaging. Seven officers contributed to this category, which accounts for two percent of total incidents. Incidents in this category range from officers being responsible for the training of cadets, through to officers participating in long term international training initiatives.

Three officers reported experiencing meaningful engagement in their work as a result of being assigned a cadet to train. Comments from these officers reflected the fact they themselves learned, as did the cadets. One officer commented he received a course in order to teach him skills for training a cadet, which he valued. One officer commented on participating in training scenarios on his Watch, which he stated was interesting, helpful, and engaging. Another officer spoke of experiencing training times at Watch briefings. He stated he felt as though he was being paid attention to. He commented, "They say G.D. is the backbone of the Force, but usually you get treated as the back end". For this officer training time was valued and engaging.

Lastly, one officer reported an incident where he traveled to the United States on a longer term training project. He stated it was an engaging experience as he felt he was able to make a contribution while also learning a great deal himself. Training is consistently experienced as engaging for these officers.

<u>Injustice / Negative Behaviour Involving Other Officers</u>

This category consists of incidents where the negative behaviour of another officer negatively impacted an officer. Five incidents were reported, by five different officers, accounting for one percent of overall incidents. All incidents were disengaging. Incidents in this category range from witnessing a work inequity through to witnessing a fellow officer assault a handcuffed person.

Examples from this category include witnessing another officer abuse their sick time. This officer stated it had a negative impact on everyone, as other officers had to do more work. Another officer reported being pulled from a course at the last minute so a poor performing officer could be sent. He was told the other officer needed a "confidence builder". This officer felt an injustice occurred, and as result he didn't want to be at work. In fact this officer stated he very uncharacteristically then took a "mental health" day. Another officer commented on an officer who was charged with a crime and suspended being fully paid at home while other officers had to do extra work. Again this felt unfair and frustrating. And finally one officer reported witnessing another officer assault a handcuffed, drunk person. This officer commented that this act was not necessary and degrading for everyone. All these incidents were disengaging for the officers who reported them.

Social Functions

This category consists of incidents involving social functions with other officers. Five critical incidents were reported, by five different officers. All incidents were experienced as engaging. This category accounts for one percent of total incidents. Though this category, and the remaining five categories, represent a proportionately smaller number of overall incidents each category is distinct, and important to recognize as contributing to officer's experience of meaningful engagement in their work. Each category, however small, articulates a meaningfully different and unique aspect of workplace engagement for RCMP officers.

All five incidents in this category involved parties of some sort with co-workers. One officer reported a sense of comradery through attending breakfast parties after night shift. Another reported attending Watch parties where she simply had fun. This officer reported bonding at such parties with her coworkers, and getting to know their partners and families. She stated her Watch became a tight group and developed mutual respect for one another. Another officer reported at their Watch's parties everyone went. She experienced a feeling of comradery and that "You could talk to them, and they understood". She actually felt afterward if you weren't at work, you were missing out. Clearly such activities contributed to officers feeling engaged in their work.

Equipment

This category encompasses critical incidents involving officer's equipment. Five disengaging incidents were reported along with two engaging incidents in this category. Four different officers contributed to this category, which accounts for two

percent of total incidents. Incidents in this category ranged from frustration with old detachment buildings through to getting helpful new equipment. This category is closely connected with Perceived Organizational Support, as equipment is supplied by the organization. In their comments officers also spoke of feeling either supported or unsupported by the organization as a result of the equipment they were supplied. The category is however clearly definable as all incidents had to do specifically with equipment required to perform their job. This category could be seen as a sub-category of Perceived Organizational Support.

Two officers reported feeling less engaged in their work due to having to work in old buildings. These officers felt nothing was being done by management about their poor working conditions. Two other officers commented on their police vehicles. One noted that general duty officers were issued natural gas vehicles which are slower, need to be filled up more often, and take longer to fill up, whereas plainclothes officers and managers got regular gas cars. Another officer commented on his police vehicle simply being in serious disrepair, and management not fixing it.

On the positive side, two officers reported feeling more engaged in their work due to receiving good equipment. One officer noted receiving cargo pants and external carriers for his bullet proof vest. He stated he felt looked after. Another officer spoke of a detachment he worked where there were good cell phones and flashlights in all the cars, and the cars actually worked. He stated, "It made your time at work a hell of a lot easier. You could do your job, and you felt you had the support". Equipment can help or hinder officers from feeling meaningfully engaged in their work.

Charges Dropped

The three incidents in this category all involve criminal charges being dropped against suspects. Three different officers reported such incidents. All incidents were experienced as disengaging. In all three cases charges the officer had forwarded against suspects were dropped for some reason. In one case Crown simply forgot to notify necessary witnesses for trial and the matter was dropped. The officer found this very discouraging. Another officer reported an incident where he arrested two known suspects in the same vehicle when they both had a Court order not to communicate with one another. Crown dropped the charges as they couldn't prove the suspects were communicating – even though they were sitting alone together in the same vehicle. This officer commented, "We try so hard to do our jobs, the judicial system just doesn't seem to back us up a lot of the time". Having charges dropped is certainly disengaging for officers.

Thanks From Public

This last category entails three incidents, from three different officers, where they received thanks from the public. One officer simply reported a member of the public being very affirming. Another officer reported receiving cards and letters from the public from time to time. And finally, one officer reported receiving a reward from the community. Though all officers were humble about their experiences, they all felt the incidents were rewarding and contributed to them feeling meaningfully engaged in their work.

Helping Over & Above Call of Duty

Two officers reported a total of three incidents where they helped a person over and above the call of duty. All three incidents were experienced as engaging. One officer was called to check on a person suffering from Multiple Sclerosis. She found this person had very few visitors so this officer continued to come and check on this person. The officer found this contact very rewarding. This same officer also attended a sudden death call where an elderly male lost his wife. The man had no other family, so the officer spent extra time with him. The officer felt it made a difference, and later received a thank you letter. Another officer went out of his way to help a young addict. The officer liaised with the addict's family, Crown, and Social Services. The officer got the person into rehab, which actually helped. He stated the whole effort was "Very rewarding". All three of these incidents were engaging for the officers.

Work Interfering With Time Off

This category entails incidents where work impinged on officer's time off. The three incidents in this category did not have to do with over work, but rather having to sacrifice time off for work. The incidents included being on-call while at a small detachment. This officer stated, "Your own time wasn't your own". Another officer reported his pager regularly going off on his days off with work related issues. And the third incident in this category was an officer having to attend Court on days off, then not even being required to give evidence. In each case the officer's time off was breached by work, and the officer found the incident disengaging. Two officers reported these three incidents which account for one percent of all incidents.

Gender

The intent of this study was not to explore gender differences for male and female police officers, in terms of workplace engagement. Nevertheless there did appear to be some interesting differences. Table 2, below, documents the categorical breakdown of critical incidents by gender. Of particular interest were the categories of Supervision, Police Incidents, Personal Circumstances, Peers, and Member Injustice.

Fourteen male officers and eleven female officers participated in this study. In interpreting these results it is important to remember that all the nineteen categories have been presented to both male and female RCMP officers, some of whom were participants in the study, and some of whom were not participants in the study. Every RCMP officer, both male and female, who has been presented with these categories has stated they resonated with all the categories to a greater or lesser degree.

As the researcher, and an RCMP officer myself, my sense of it is that the categories of Supervision and Peers may have been influenced heavily by one female participant who reported several conflicts with different supervisors as she has moved along in her career. Similarly this participant reported several conflicts with her peers at each detachment she was posted at. For the categories of Police Incidents and Member Injustice I suspect if the number of participants interviewed was increased and equally balanced between genders, the differences in these categories would decrease. The one category where there does appear to this researcher to be a notable gender difference is in Personal Circumstances. Many of the disengaging incidents

for this category were reported by female officers who were reporting issues involving their children or families. Future research in this area may better illustrate the nature of these differences in this category.

Table 2: Critical Incident Distribution by Gender

Category	Female Engaging	Female Disengaging	Male Engaging	Male Disengaging
Supervision	27	35	25	22
Police Incidents	13	9	18	1
Transfer	13	5	10	5
Personal Circumstances	1	16	7	5
Perceived Organizational Support	4	8	1	20
Peers	3	13	8	3
Asked to do Duties	7		9	
Volume of Work		3		5
Promotion	8	2	5	
Psychological Support	5	1	4	1
Community Involvement	5	1	5	
Training	4		4	
Member Injustice				5
Socials	3		2	
Equipment		2	2	3
Charges Dropped		1		2
Public Thanks	2		1	
Helping Above Call of Duty	2		1	
Work Interfering		2		1

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Having examined in detail the findings of this study, the task now becomes contextualizing these findings, and considering their implications. This process will begin by once again reflecting on the research question, and considering whether or not it has been answered. From there the findings will be considered in light of the relevant existing literature in the field. This process will also serve as a final validity check – are the findings consistent with previous research? It is also important to reflect on the implications this study will have for the field of counselling psychology and for the RCMP. To close this study, implications for future research will be discussed, and the limitations noted.

Research Question

This study explored the research question, "What are the critical incidents contributing to or detracting from RCMP officers being meaningfully engaged in their work?" Twenty five RCMP officers were interviewed and 370 critical incidents obtained. To present the incidents in a coherent and logical manner, the incidents were grouped into nineteen categories, each representing a thematic component of meaningful engagement for these officers in their work. Clearly, through the research process, the elicitation of the incidents and the thematic analysis of the incidents, the research question has been answered, and answered in detail.

Fit With Literature

One key study informing this research, and noted in the literature review, was Duxbury & Higgins (2001) study on work/family balance. No findings from this present study were inconsistent with their research, though the studies looked at

different issues. This present study did in fact affirm a few of their results, such as the specific finding that RCMP officers find their work interesting and challenging. This present study's category of Police Duties clearly affirms this finding, that police work is innately engaging for officers. Duxbury and Higgins also found RCMP officers were generally satisfied with their pay. Though this present study did not ask about pay specifically, it is interesting to note it was not mentioned once by any officer. Earlier mythology may have been that people worked for, and were engaged by, money as a prime motivator. Clearly pay is not an issue for RCMP officers in terms of meaningful workplace engagement at this time. This study also touched on female officers feeling guilty about having a child, which connects with issues Duxbury and Higgins identified. The gender differences noted in the category of personal circumstances illustrate this connection. So, while these studies were different they indeed compliment one another.

This study is also consistent with much of the research on policing. For example, Linden's (1985) previously noted study found relationships with peers and supervisors, as well as policies around transfer and promotion were strongly related to attrition as opposed to the performance of police duties. This current study affirms the significance of supervisors, peers, transfers and promotions in workplace engagement. A big leap in logic is not necessary to see how these issues may connect with attrition rates, as noted by Linden.

Plomp's (1997) study, which identified the lived-experience of police officers as confronting unfixable suffering, is consistent with this present study. Though not identified as a specific theme in this present study, critical incidents in which officers

confronted unfixable suffering were clearly noted. Just a few examples are the officer who found as baby in a box, the officer who witnessed people dying at a car accident, the officer who had to shoot a young person, the officer who attended the call of a teen beating a nun, and the list could go on. Officers in this study reported numerous incidents that Plomp would identify as confronting unfixable suffering, and presumably they experienced similar feelings to the officers in Plomp's study.

Two major categories identified in this study, Supervision and Perceived Organizational Support, are worthy of further consideration in light of recent research in these areas. Several very recent studies have been published on perceived organizational support. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature on perceived organizational support. They noted three antecedents to perceived organizational support; fairness or procedural justice, supervisor support, and organizational rewards – including job conditions. This present study confirms these findings, and in fact adds clarity to them in terms of how they might apply to the RCMP. Fairness and procedural justice were noted in a number of categories such as Training, Transfer, and in a number of individual incidents in the category of Perceived Organizational Support. Supervisor support was clearly addressed in the Supervision category, and organizational rewards and job conditions were in categories such as Equipment, Training, and of course in Perceived Organizational Support.

Another recent study examined in more detail the connection between perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational support. Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski and Rhoades (2002) conducted three studies

which found; perceived supervisor support was positively related to temporal change in perceived organizational support, the relationship between perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational support increased with the supervisor's perceived status in the organization, and that perceived organizational support mediated a negative relationship between perceived supervisor support and voluntary employee turnover. They concluded, "The result follows from organizational support theory, holding that perceived supervisor support leads to perceived organizational support, which in turn, reduces turnover by strengthening felt obligation toward the organization and affective organizational commitment" (p. 570). Though this study was not conducted with police officers, it articulates the importance of the connection between supervision, perceived organizational support, and employee turnover as well as affective commitment to the organization- concepts germane to this study.

One last study important to note examined perceived organizational support amongst police officers. Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Lynch (1998) studied patrol officers to determine how the strength of socioemotional needs affects the relationship between perceived organizational support and work performance. They suggest socioemotional needs may be seen as respect, caring, and approval. They further suggest perceived organizational support may fill these needs. They suggest officers with high socioemotional needs may then feel increasingly obligated to the organization when these needs are met for them through perceived organizational support. In fact they found police officers with strong socioemotional needs, but not those with weak needs, showed a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and performance, as measured by driving under the influence

arrests and speeding citations (seen as discretionary actions). They conclude that perceived organizational support fulfills a variety of socioemotional needs and that perceived organizational support is connected with high performance in officers with stronger socioemotional needs. This study illustrates the importance of the perceived organizational support amongst police officers, which is confirmed by this present study. This present study sheds light on the specifics of perceived organizational support within the RCMP.

The present study is consistent with related literature in the field. It sheds colorful light on several specific issues in areas such as supervision and perceived organizational support. This study thereby demonstrates strengthened validity, and offers specific and meaningful insight into what helps and hinders RCMP officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work.

Unique Findings

Not only is this study consistent with the literature in the field, it also offers several new and unique findings. By its very nature, being a qualitative piece of research, it offers a unique perspective on several issues such as supervision and perceived organizational support. Almost all previously noted studies in these areas are from a quantitative paradigm. These studies typically use inventories or scales of some sort to assess perceived support. While certainly these methods have value, they do not provide the rich and detailed descriptions this study does on what supervisors or the organization actually does to contribute to an employee's sense of perceived support. This study adds to the body of knowledge in this area an understanding of the types of incidents that happen that lead police officers to be

more or less meaningfully engaged in their work. This type of information can and will be used to inform supervisors and leaders in the RCMP about how their actions can affect their employees, and to offer suggestions on how they might act differently.

Other unique findings identified in this study include the importance of peers in workplace engagement. Again, most research in this area looks at supervisors or managers. This study illustrates the key role peers play in helping or hindering officers from being engaged in their work. This study also makes a subtle but important connection between meaningful workplace engagement and officers confronting unfixable suffering. While this area needs further exploration, officers did report incidents in which they confronted unfixable suffering when asked about meaningful engagement in their work. This study thereby makes connection between Plomp's (1997) work on confronting unfixable suffering, and the experience of meaningful engagement. Related to this is the finding on the importance to RCMP officers of receiving timely and appropriate psychological support. Here too, this study makes a connection between psychological support and workplace engagement.

A major contribution of this study is in regards to expanding and clarifying the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the construct of workplace engagement. This study shows the many factors that contribute to a sense of workplace engagement. Whereas previously much focus was put on perceived organizational support and supervision, the construct is now expanded to include at least seventeen other dimensions. In future research on workplace engagement a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the construct will be available. The construct is now

more robust than previously held, with a more detailed and integrated understanding of the concept of workplace engagement.

Implications for the RCMP

As a result of this study, which the RCMP funded and supports, the RCMP now has a comprehensive and scientific understanding of what helps and hinders its officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work. As the RCMP moves ahead in its efforts to create healthy and engaging workplaces it now has more information to consider in making decisions, creating policies, and developing programs. The good news is that the RCMP is already doing a lot of things right. There were more engaging incidents reported (197) than disengaging incidents (173). The issue for the RCMP then is how to build on its strengths and address those areas where it could improve.

One key area that addresses both strengths and areas for improvement is training. The RCMP offers a number of courses on leadership, supervision, field coaching, conflict resolution, and ethics to name a few. This researcher has been personally involved in teaching each of these courses. To keep the Force's training on the cutting edge, and to ensure leaders and supervisors are trained in a way that promotes the building of engaging workplaces, findings from this study, especially the supervision category, need to be considered for how they might inform future course work. For example, Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), in their book *Primal Leadership*, outline key competencies they identify as constituting emotional intelligence. They discuss self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (empathy), and relationship management as key competencies. In examining

disengaging critical incidents involving a supervisor it is almost immediately clear where the supervisor failed to display one or more of these emotional intelligence competencies in their dealings with the officer. On the other hand, many engaging critical incidents involving supervision are excellent examples of supervisors displaying one or more of the emotional intelligence competencies.

Another area this researcher believes the RCMP may wish to consider in light of this study's findings is its own internal communication strategies. A key word in the category of perceived organizational support is "perceived'. Sometimes perceptions can be changed through providing people with more information. One example of this may be old detachment buildings. If officers perceive their discomfort in their surroundings is being ignored, or they are simply acknowledged then forgotten about, these officers may perceive the organization as not supporting them in their work. Even if a detachment commander recognizes and supports their concerns and takes action steps to address the situation, officers may still feel unsupported if they are unaware of the efforts being taken to remedy their situation. Informing officers of action being taken and, where possible, even including them in the process will likely result in officers feeling the organization recognizes their plight and is working to make their lives better. This approach may sound like common sense, but if it were applied in more scenarios such as those mentioned in this study, perhaps officers' perceptions of being supported may change even if circumstances do not.

The RCMP takes its officers seriously, and believes in creating and nurturing healthy and engaging workplaces for its employees. This is evidenced by a number

of efforts by the Force such as its Workplace Engagement initiative, and by its support and funding of this research. Given the RCMP's interest and efforts in this area it is anticipated further steps will be taken to improve its workplaces, supervisors, leaders and officers. This study will provide the RCMP concrete data to make informed decisions as the Force takes shape over its next 125 years.

Implications for Counselling Psychology

As a field counselling psychology involves itself with issues around career, vocation, and meaning. Given the new economy it is essential the field stay informed about issues such as workplace engagement in the new millennium. This study provides current and specific data on the experience of meaningful engagement in RCMP workplaces. The study is Canadian, and thereby provides unique data about the Canadian policing experience. Counselling psychology is now in a better position to understand meaningful workplace engagement for RCMP officers and to utilize this information in further research, education, and practice.

RCMP officers, as evidenced by this study, access the services of counselling psychologists in the community. This study will provide counselling psychologists working with RCMP officers more information with which to understand the RCMP and the experience of its officers as it relates to workplace engagement. Policing is a challenging profession in which officers are faced with trauma, confronted with unfixable suffering, and are asked to forge a meaningful existence in a bureaucratic and sometimes frustrating organization. The resilience of most police officers under these circumstances is truly inspiring. The more information studies such as this can

provide psychologists, the better equipped psychologists will be to meet the variety of needs of RCMP officers in their community.

This study found a connection between workplace engagement and the environment in which officers do their jobs. Environment including concrete things like detachment buildings, but also social aspects of environment like peers, Watch parties and social events. And let us not forget that the RCMP is still a hierarchical organization where most employees still wear uniforms and carry guns at work everyday. Herr (1999) draws attention to how people negotiate their identity and forge belief systems within a social structure. Herr also notes how human development occurs within a community. The RCMP is an organization with a long history of traditions, such as Regimental Dinners and Regimental Balls, and it could be seen as its own community and social context. Given some people can spend up to forty years of their life immersed in this setting, it is important the field of counselling psychology better understand how organizations like the RCMP impact on the development and identity of its officers.

This study found a connection between personal circumstances and workplace engagement. This study also found a connection between career development issues, such as transfers and promotions, and workplace engagement. In their article Amundson, Parker, & Arthur (2002) comment on how counselling psychology can no longer separate personal from career concerns. They state, "Career counsellors need to be able to help clients direct their own careers across both occupational and organisational arenas, and in keeping with the pace of environmental change". In discussing a self-organizing approach to career they note how "People make sense of

the world of work through their subjective interpretation of their own career experiences". This present study has examined those very subjectively interpreted career experiences of RCMP officers. The field of counselling psychology will need to continue to pay attention to such data, to assist people in pursuing meaningful careers, and forging meaningful lives.

Specific attention is due the connection between this study's finding on the role of supervision in workplace engagement, and the role of supervision in the field of counselling psychology. There is a very large body of research on the role of supervision in counselling. Peake, Nussbaum and Tindell (2002) wrote a recent article on clinical and counselling supervision trends. They note how the nature of counselling supervision has changed recently due to the influence of managed care, and the push for brief therapeutic interventions. They go on to speak to evolving models of supervision, and the need for training in the field of supervision. They conclude their article with an extensive list of supervision references broken down into the areas of empirically supported treatments, legal and ethical issues, treatment issues, supervision in special settings, multicultural issues, and collateral dimensions of supervision. This present study, of course, considers supervision as it relates to workplace engagement. Both these aspects of supervision may inform one another. The RCMP may benefit from a more thorough understanding of issues such as ethics and multicultural issues in supervision. The field of counselling psychology may benefit from better understanding the role supervision may play in engaging counsellors and therapists in their work.

This study will have implications beyond counselling psychology alone. It will inform organizational theory, which concerns itself with issues like workplace engagement. In terms of applied settings the findings will have impact on settings such as the military, fire departments, and hospitals where workers serve in front line type emergency settings. Though clearly the RCMP has its distinct characteristics, these have been noted, and it is believed the findings will make a meaningful contribution to understanding the experience of workplace engagement in a variety of settings.

Limitations

While this study provides rich and detailed data on what meaningfully engages RCMP officers in their workplaces there are some limitations to the study. First off, the study was conducted using RCMP officers from the lower mainland of British Columbia who held a rank between constable and Sergeant. No officers of the Staff Sergeant rank or above were interviewed. This study does not claim to generalize from a specific sample to a specific population, and the findings may or may not fit for police officers from other agencies, locations or for police officers holding higher ranks.

As noted earlier, this study did not purpose to explore gender differences between RCMP officers in terms of their experience of meaningful engagement in their work. Not only were potential gender differences not explored, neither were differences between participant's cultural background or race. As the RCMP becomes increasingly diverse as an organization, understanding the unique

experiences of officers from different genders, races, and cultural backgrounds will become increasingly important.

This study was focused on the critical incidents that contribute to or detract from officers experiencing meaningful engagement in their work. The study did not consider personality traits of participating officers, or factors such as optimism or resilience in participating officers. This study makes no inferences about such factors, which may or may not affect an officer's experience of meaningful engagement in their work.

RCMP officers who were off on medical or "stress" leave were not included in this study, simply because none volunteered. In terms of understanding what critical incidents might contribute to disengagement at work, this population may have some important experiences to share. Having noted that, some of the officers who were interviewed had previously taken time off for stress or related medical or emotional conditions. Based on this researcher's knowledge of the RCMP, and data from this study, it is speculated that even if these officers were interviewed their experiences would fit into the existing categories.

<u>Future Research</u>

Future research in this area may examine the role of personality factors and factors such as optimism and resilience in police officers as it relates to their experience of being engaged in their work. As the researcher and interviewer I was inspired by the resilience of a number of the officers I interviewed who were heartily engaged in their work despite having experienced any number of disengaging incidents of various sorts. Other officers were indeed gripped with a sense of

bitterness or discontent due to their experiences in the RCMP. Exploring these differences would allow insight into factors affecting resilience in RCMP officers.

Cultural background is another factor that was not specifically addressed in this study. The RCMP is quickly becoming a culturally diverse organization. The RCMP also embraces federal employment equity guidelines which look to ensure the RCMP is culturally representative of the community and country at all levels and ranks. A greater understanding of any cultural differences in meaningful workplace engagement would continue to move the RCMP ahead in this area.

This study's qualitative paradigm allowed for rich and detailed data on meaningful engagement in RCMP workplaces. To marry this qualitative data with current and meaningful statistics on officer turnover, promotion, discipline, sick time, and home life would very enlightening. Some common sense hypotheses could be made on connections between these areas, however the connections might not be as hypothesized, especially if factored into such a study were variables such as personality and resilience. Further study in this area would allow for a more integrated and holistic understanding of workplace engagement.

Exposure to traumatic events, and the role of confronting unfixable suffering are factors that might be further examined in future research relating to workplace engagement for police officers. The RCMP is an employer for its officers, and officers may face issues in the RCMP that employees at any other company might face. Unlike many companies however, police work requires its officers to engage in the world in often challenging and disturbing ways. Police officers are not machines. When exposed to bullets they bleed, when punched or spit on they react, and when

exposed to traumas and unfixable suffering officers do not escape unscathed psychologically or emotionally. Despite often incredible resilience, being confronted with suffering, trauma, and evil takes a toll on officers. Sometimes the toll is not obvious, immediate or what one might expect. The toll may not only have implications for officers emotional and psychological health and well-being but also implications for how officers feel and behave in the workplace, even at an 'unconscious' level. RCMP supervisors are cops, not psychologists, yet they must supervise in an environment where their officers are immersed in events that exact a psychological and emotional toll on them. Supervisors and leaders themselves may have spent many years in the policing environment, resulting in supervisors themselves feeling the effects of moral distress and the ensuing compassion fatigue. Future research exploring such dynamics would be very meaningful and important to police officers at all levels, and to the families of police officers.

Implicit in the dynamic of supervision is the role of power. The RCMP is a very hierarchical, structured organization where people are often seen as having differing degrees of power. Most RCMP officers even wear on their uniform a symbol of their rank, and power, for all to see. This is not to mention the power differential between gender, races, and officers from differing backgrounds. Future research in this area may address issues of power through using alternative research methods such as discourse analysis, or methods based on feminist or critical theory.

As for this police officer and researcher, this study has been truly meaningful and engaging and it is hoped it will make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the

field of counselling psychology and to the betterment of RCMP workplaces and

police officers throughout Canada.

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Appendix A:

Research Advertisement

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& Research Methodology

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Development,
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Counselling Psychology
Tel: (604) 822-5259
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RCMP Workplace Research Study

Sergeant Jeff Morley is seeking RCMP officers as volunteers to participate in a University of British Columbia research study. To volunteer for the study you must have a minimum of two years service in the RCMP.

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Jeff Morley to complete a doctor of philosophy degree in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of events that help or hinder RCMP officers from being meaningfully engaged in their work. Simply, what events contribute to RCMP officers feeling their hearts and minds are fully invested in their work, or feeling disinterested and dissatisfied in their work. Secondly, what meanings do RCMP officers make of these events in their lives and in their careers.

Study Procedures: If you choose to participate in this study you will be interviewed by Jeff Morley, about the events that lead you to feel meaningfully engaged, or disengaged, from your work as an RCMP officer. You will be asked about what meaning these events hold for you in terms of your life and your career. You will be invited to discuss events that have happened throughout your entire policing career. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided a copy of the transcript, and invited to provide further information or to clarify information provided previously. The information will then be analyzed by the co-investigator for patterns and meanings. You may then be asked to provide feedback on the analysis. The total amount of time that will be required of you to participate fully in the study is approximately three hours.

Confidentiality: Any information you provide, including audio cassette and interview transcripts will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number, and kept in a locked filing cabinet. While the transcribed interview data is on computer, they will be password

Appendix B:

Consent Form