Research Brief

Five Minute Intervention (FMI) skills acquisition by correctional staff: The role of manager buy-in

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AIM

To examine correctional staff perceptions of manager buy-in for FMI, and how this relates to their responsiveness to the initiative in the form of acquisition of FMI-related skills.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Correctional staff completed assessment measures prior to commencing FMI training (n = 480) and again at a specified interval after training (n = 49). At each assessment, staff were asked to rate their perceptions of manager buy-in and completed a series of situational judgement tests (SJTs) relating to their knowledge for and endorsement of FMI-related skills in staff-inmate interactions.

Results indicated slightly favourable perceptions of manager buy-in prior to FMI training among staff on average. Ratings of manager buy-in had a small but statistically significant positive correlation with SJT scores prior to training. Staff perceptions of manager buy-in did not show significant change when assessed before and after training. A blocked regression model analysis indicated that both perceptions of manager buy-in prior to training, and change in those perceptions over time, were not significantly associated with the magnitude of change in SJT performance after training.

We concluded that while perceptions of manager buy-in had some relationship with endorsement of FMI-related skills, for many staff these perceptions did not appear to be a significant precondition for acquisition of those skills during and after training. The influence of manager buy-in on both acquisition of FMI-related skills and application of those skills may be more pronounced in the event that training is accompanied by concerted and sustained increases in promotion of the initiative by senior staff. There was promising initial evidence that FMI training was associated with increased SJT performance, and future research intends to further examine factors that may impact upon acquisition and maintenance of FMI-related skills.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been growing interest among correctional agencies and researchers about how to foster prison conditions that are conducive to rehabilitation. A key theme is the recognition of the role that all correctional staff have in creating and promoting rehabilitative prison climates. Relationships between staff and inmates, which most commonly involve everyday interactions with custodial officers as compared to specialist therapeutic staff, have been identified as a major contributor to experiences of prison social climate (Liebling, 2004; 2007). In turn, a positive prison climate has been associated with a range of outcomes for people in prison, including their readiness for treatment, the magnitude of therapeutic gains from behaviour change interventions, and post-release reoffending (e.g., Auty & Liebling, 2020; Day et al., 2011; Harding, 2014; Sauter et al., 2019; van Der Helm et al., 2014; Woessner & Schwedler, 2014; see also Tonkin, 2016; van Ginneken & Palmen, 2023). Consistent with this, support for prosocial identity and change at both the individual officer and staff culture levels have been described as preconditions for engagement in therapeutic and other rehabilitative processes among people in prison (Galouzis et al., 2023).

The centrality of staff interactions in inmates' experiences of prison climate also indicates substantial potential for them to act as direct agents of change. An example of this is Five Minute Interventions (FMI). In brief, FMI is a training program initially developed in the United Kingdom, that promotes a relational approach whereby all correctional staff can turn everyday conversations with inmates into opportunities to enact and model prosocial change. FMI training provides staff with a set of skills they can draw on during routine interactions to encourage self-reflection, consequential thinking, self-efficacy, and motivation for change (for more detailed overviews of FMI see Barkworth et al., 2021; Kenny & Webster, 2015; Tate et al., 2017; Vickers-Pinchbeck, 2019). FMI has been adopted by CSNSW and has undergone progressive implementation across all correctional centres in NSW since 2020.

It stands to reason that the success of a major correctional agency initiative such as FMI may be influenced by the 'buy-in', or extent to which the initiative is perceived to be supported and promoted, of senior management. It has previously been argued that development of rehabilitative prison conditions is bolstered by a top-down approach initiated by senior operational leadership that then permeates through all staff (e.g. Blagden et al., 2016; Mann, 2019). One relevant factor is the role of management in influencing staff culture. Such influence may be direct, such as by communicating and modelling the agency's mission and values, or indirect, such as by impacting on staff experiences of their role more broadly. Research has indicated that staff perceptions of manager support are strongly associated with job stress and satisfaction (see Butler et al., 2019, for a review), which in turn have been found to interact with their tendencies towards rehabilitative orientations and attitudes towards people in prison (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Farkas, 1999; Lerman & Harney, 2019; Shannon & Page, 2014). How staff experience their job at a given correctional centre is also significantly related to how inmates view the climate at that centre (van Ginneken et al., 2020), suggesting that organisational drivers of stress and satisfaction for staff could impact upon the environmental conditions for rehabilitative efforts such as FMI. Manager buy-in may also be expected to feed into more instrumental considerations, including the extent to which FMI-related activities are formally incorporated into staff routine and professional development, as well as time and other resource allocations for such activities at a centre.

AIMS

Previous studies have provided anecdotal indications that perceptions of manager buy-in may be relevant to application of FMI by correctional staff. A qualitative evaluation by Barkworth and colleagues (2023) found that a number of staff identified the importance of encouragement and enthusiasm from managers as a facilitator to their ongoing implementation of FMI. Conversely, staff described being discouraged by insincere promotion of FMI or actions that were contrary to FMI skills and principles by senior staff (Barkworth et al., 2023). Other feedback from staff indicated that a common barrier to using FMI was the perception that it was not supported by others, and associated this with views that senior staff could do more to model FMI and visibly encourage its use (Chalmers et al., 2023).

The aim of the current study was to conduct a more comprehensive and empirically robust examination of how correctional staff view manager buy-in in the context of FMI, and how this is associated with responsiveness to the training and initiative overall. To achieve this, we assessed prospective relationships between how staff perceive manager buy-in before and after FMI training, and objective indicators of their acquisition of FMI-related skills. We anticipated that perceived manager buy-in both before and after the period of FMI training would be associated with greater situational judgement in line with FMI-related skills, by encouraging engagement in the initial training as well as ongoing maintenance and development of those skills over time.

METHODS

The sample for this study was 480 correctional staff who had commenced FMI training at one of six correctional centres in NSW. The average age of staff was 45.1 years (SD = 11.45), and 31% were women. Among staff, 80.6% held frontline roles as correctional officers, 10.2% had roles in delivery of programs and services and related case management, and 5.0% were Corrective Services Industries (CSI) staff, with the remainder (4.2%) performing administrative roles within correctional centres. Of the group of correctional officers, 15 (3.8%) were senior officers holding commissioned ranks.

Staff were recruited for this study as part of a larger project examining uptake and maintenance of FMI-related skills before and after training. In brief, staff were asked to complete a series of situational judgement tasks (SJTs: see Lievens et al., 2008) at the commencement of FMI training sessions, and were followed up by email with a second series of SJTs at a specified time after training. SJTs consisted of brief vignettes involving inmate-staff interactions, and staff were asked to select one or a series of responses to the situation. SJTs were then scored based on how the responses aligned with FMI-related skills and practices, which were developed and agreed upon through consultation with CSNSW trainers and other subject matter experts. Staff were randomly assigned to complete 6 SJTs of a series of 20 before training, and a different set of 6 SJTs after training. Staff were also randomly assigned to complete post-training measures 1, 3, 6, 9, or 12 months after initial training. In this sample, a total of 49 staff completed the post-training component prior to the data censoring period for this study[1,2].

For the purposes of this study, staff also completed a brief self-report survey measure of their perspectives of manager buy-in at pre-training and post-training assessments. The measure was

[1] At the time of analysis, 212 staff had received post-training follow-up assessments. This corresponds to a response rate of 23.1%.

[2] Due to different timeline requirements for the current study compared to the larger SJT project, only staff who had completed post-training measures 1, 3, or 6 months after training were included in this study.

developed by the authors for this study, with reference to other established tools and literature relating to FMI, attitudes towards prisoners, rehabilitative orientations, and perceptions of management in correctional climates (e.g., Barkworth et al., 2021; 2023; Lambert et al., 2017; Melvin et al., 1985). Following processes of item development and selection, 8 items were retained for the measure. These were intended to gauge perceptions of manager buy-in as they relate to motivation to support inmates' rehabilitation (*"managers at this prison help inmates change for the better"; "managers at this prison seem motivated to help offenders rehabilitate"; "managers at this prison seem motivated to build good relationships with offenders"*); specific endorsement of FMI (*"managers at this prison encourage staff to use FMI"; "managers at this prison are enthusiastic about FMI"; "managers at this prison promote FMI among staff"*); and general manager support (*"for the most part, managers at this prison support its workers"; "for the most part, management at this prison takes care of its workers"*). Staff were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Survey data were merged with staff establishment records to obtain additional variables about staff position and demographics for the purpose of analyses. Associations between ratings of manager buy-in and factors of interest at a single point of measurement were analysed using a series of correlation and independent t-test statistics, in addition to multivariable regression analyses in order to adjust for relevant covariates. Analyses of change between pre-training and post-training assessments were conducted with the subsample of staff who completed both assessments only, and applied techniques that adjusted for the dependence of observations across assessments, including paired sample t-tests, repeat measures ANOVA, and multivariable generalised linear models.

FINDINGS

How do staff perceive manager buy-in?

Before conducting the primary analyses for this study, we first examined the psychometric properties of our measure of manager buy-in. An exploratory factor analysis for staff responses at pre-training (n = 480) identified a single factor with an eigenvalue of more than one (eigenvalue = 5.3), which explained 61.48% of variance in total responses on the eight items. In total, the items also showed strong internal consistency, returning a Cronbach's alpha of .925. We concluded that for the purposes of analysis, responses to all items on this measure may be interpreted as a single index of manager buy-in, and no items were excluded.

Ratings on the manager buy-in items were rescaled and summed to give a total score of manager buy-in, with a potential range between 0 and 32. Prior to FMI training, the mean score was 19.69 (SD = 6.44), indicating a slight tendency towards favourable perceptions of manager buy-in. More than a quarter (27.5%) of respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement with items on average. Figure 1 shows the distribution of manager buy-in scores among all staff at pre-training.

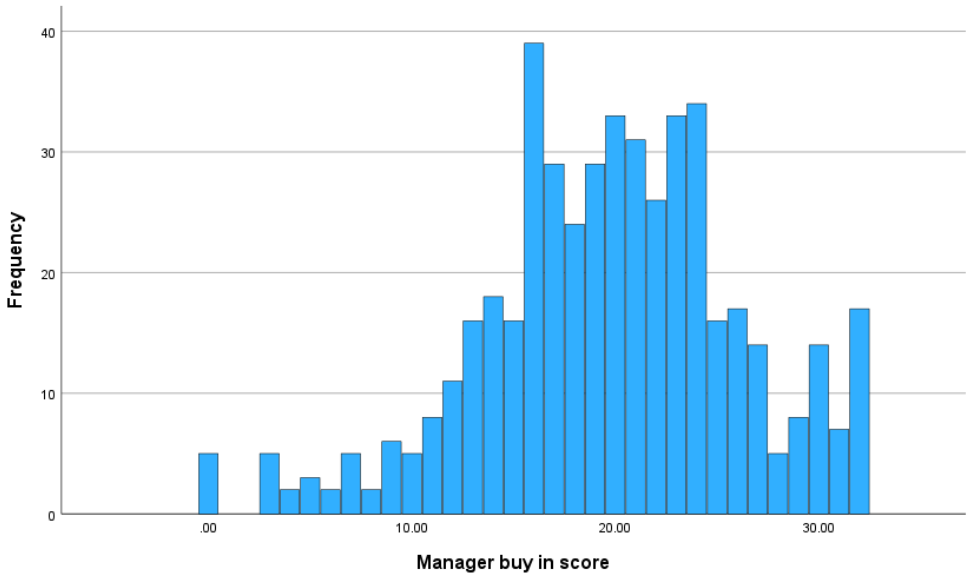

Figure 1. Distribution of manager buy-in scores at pre-training assessment

Perceptions of manager buy-in before FMI training were not significantly associated with staff members' age (r = -.004; p = .94) and were comparable for women (M = 19.88; SD = 6.09) and men (M = 19.38; SD = 6.56; F = .58; p = .44). Among those staff with identified frontline roles (n = 460), there was non-significant variation in manager buy-in ratings between correctional officers, services and programs staff, and CSI staff (F = .84; p = .43; see also Table 1). However, commissioned correctional officers (M = 23.00; SD = 4.22) tended to give significantly higher ratings compared to non-commissioned officers (M = 19.53; SD = 6.42; F = 4.28; p = .039).

Table 1. Ratings of manager buy-in across frontline staff group at pre-training and post-training assessments

Staff role	Pre-training			Post-training		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Correctional officers	387	19.49	6.33	20	21.77	6.64
Services and programs staff	49	20.22	6.22	12	21.77	4.34
Corrective Services Industries	24	18.16	6.37	3	28.00	4.00

Ratings of manager buy-in also differed significantly as a function of which correctional centre the staff member was deployed to at the time of FMI training. Across the six correctional centres surveyed, average scores ranged between 14.40 and 26.00 (F = 7.913; p < .0001). A follow-up multivariable regression model indicated that significant differences in manager buy-in scores persisted across correctional centres after adjusting for covariates that may cluster across locations, including the age, gender, and role of respondents (Wald x2 = 25.19; p < .0001).

Are perceptions of manager buy-in associated with SJT performance?

For the purposes of analysis, staff responses on the 6 SJTs given at pre-training and post-training were coded so that each item received a score of between 0 (fully incorrect responses) to 1 (fully correct

responses), giving a total SJT performance score with a range of 0 to 6. Prior to FMI training, the mean SJT score was 3.11 (SD = 1.31), indicating slightly better than 50% correct responding on average.

As can be seen in Figure 2, perceptions of manager buy-in showed limited covariance with scores on SJTs at pre-training, with a slight tendency towards SJT scores increasing as ratings of manager buy-in increased. Consistent with this, there was a significant positive correlation between the measures at pre-training ($r = .155$; $p < .0001$), which can be interpreted as an association of weak effect size[3].

Figure 2. Scatter plot showing correspondence between manager buy-in score and SJT score at pre-training assessment

An additional multiple regression model was conducted to examine whether ratings of manager buy-in were associated with SJT scores at pre-training after adjusting for covariates. The results of this model are given in Table 2. It can be seen that perceptions of manager buy-in explained significant unique variance in pre-training SJT scores, after controlling for staff role, demographics, and location. Other significant predictors of SJT included gender and role category.

Table 2. Multivariable regression statistics showing predictors of SJT performance score at pre-training assessment

Variable	Wald x^2	df	p
Manager buy-in rating	9.20	1	.002
Staff role	15.72	1	<.001
Correctional centre	9.42	5	.09
Gender	10.07	1	.002
Age	.60	1	.44

[3] Bivariate correlations can be interpreted so that Pearson r values of between 0 – .29 indicate a weak or small association; values of between .3 – .49 indicate a moderate association; and values of over .5 indicate a strong or large association (Cohen, 1988).

Do staff perceptions of manager buy-in change following FMI training?

Staff perceptions of manager buy-in were expected to be relatively dynamic and subject to change over time, with potential flow-on effects for their influence on staff attitudes and performance. In particular, ratings may be hypothesised to change as a result of FMI training, either through the effect of training on how staff view their workplace and culture, or changing awareness and promotion of FMI among managers. Consistent with this, indicative data[4] suggested relatively moderate test-retest reliability for the manager buy-in measure that declined over time, with values of r = .61 at one month and r = .42 at three months.

The average manager buy-in score at post-training assessment was 21.80 (6.13), which compares to an average of 22.14 (SD = 5.61) among those staff who completed both pre-training and post-training measures (n = 49). A repeat measures ANCOVA indicated that perceptions of manager buy-in did not differ significantly before and after FMI training on average, after adjusting for variation in the timing of post-training assessment (F = .67; p = .417).

Are perceptions of manager buy-in associated with acquisition of FMI-related skills?

Among the sample of staff who completed both pre-training and post-training assessments, there were indications that performance on SJTs improved after FMI training. Mean SJT performance score was 4.35 (SD = 1.14) after training, which compared to an average of 3.30 (SD = 1.27) before training for staff in this sample. A repeat measures ANCOVA indicated that the average magnitude of change in SJT scores was significant (F = 6.20; p = .017) after adjusting for the timing of post-training assessments.

The following analyses aimed to assess whether perceptions of manager buy-in predicted the extent to which staff skills acquisition performance, as measured by SJT scores, changed after FMI training. To achieve this, we adopted a blocked regression design. The first block assessed whether pre-existing ratings of manager buy-in predicted the magnitude of change in SJT scores before and after training. Predictor variables entered into the model included pre-training manager buy-in score, in addition to covariates of pre-training SJT score[5] and timing of post-training assessment, whereas post-training SJT score was entered as the outcome variable. In the second block, post-training manager buy-in score was entered as an additional predictor variable to assess whether change in perceptions of manager buy-in explained unique variance in SJT outcomes.

Results of this model are given in Table 3. Critically, the results indicated that perceptions of manager buy-in prior to FMI training were not significantly predictive of how responsive staff were to the training, in terms of acquisition of FMI-related skills as assessed by the SJTs. Further, changes in perceptions of manager buy-in over time also did not significantly covary with the magnitude of change in SJT scores between pre-training and post-training assessments.

[4] These results are considered indicative only due to low available sample sizes at different times of post-training assessment; correspondingly, significance values may be considered unreliable and are not given.

[5] By adding pre-training SJT score into the model, the outcome becomes statistically equivalent to a residualised change score, or the magnitude of change in SJT score between pre-training and post-training assessments.

Table 3. Results of blocked regression model for predictors of SJT performance score at post-training assessment

Variable	Block 1			Block 2		
	B (SE)	t	p	B (SE)	t	p
SJT score (pre)	.37 (.12)	3.04	.004	.37 (.12)	3.03	.004
Manager buy-in (pre)	-.03 (.03)	-1.10	.27	-.02 (.03)	-.55	.58
Assessment timing	-.08 (.09)	-.88	.38	-.08 (.09)	-.89	.38
Manager buy-in (post)	-	-	-	-.02 (.03)	-.75	.46

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine correctional staff perceptions of manager buy-in for FMI training that has been introduced to NSW correctional centres as part of a major statewide initiative over recent years, and how this relates to their responsiveness to training in the form of acquisition of FMI-related skills. To do this we constructed a new measure of manager buy-in which incorporated items relating to specific endorsement of FMI, rehabilitative orientation, and general manager support. Validation analyses indicated sound psychometric properties of the measure, with all items loading onto a single factor of general manager buy-in. These results could suggest that how correctional staff view senior managers as promoting rehabilitative objectives, or their communication of such objectives, may be relevant to their broader perceptions of being supported by management (e.g., Lambert et al., 2017). It is also possible, however, that many staff had difficulty distinguishing items as they pertain to specific compared to general support by management.

At baseline, staff perceptions of manager buy-in were slightly favourable on average prior to FMI training. Ratings were relatively invariant across idiographic factors and were not related to staff gender, age, or category of frontline role. Among correctional officers, however, commissioned officers tended to give significantly higher ratings compared to non-commissioned officers, which may be attributable to different interactions with and definitions of who they consider to be senior management across groups.

Perceptions of manager buy-in were also found to differ significantly as a function of which correctional centre staff were deployed to. This finding gives promising indications of the construct validity of our measure, in that ratings appeared to reflect shared experiences of a common management group within that correctional centre to some extent. Future research would be beneficial to explore sources of variance in shared perceptions of manager buy-in across prisons, optimally using more advanced hierarchical analytical techniques (e.g. Howard et al., in preparation; van Ginneken et al., 2020).

We found that ratings of manager buy-in had a significant positive correlation with endorsement of FMI-related skills, as assessed by SJT performance, prior to training. This association is likely to be a complex one involving bidirectional or interactive effects. For example, perceptions of manager buy-in may encourage staff to endorse and exercise skills that are conducive to rehabilitation; in turn, staff who tend towards more rehabilitative orientations and practices may perceive greater support from senior managers who exhibit similar orientations. However, we note that the effect size of this association was small, indicating that for many staff exercise of FMI-related skills was not strictly contingent on perceptions of manager buy-in.

A more robust test of the effects of manager buy-in was to assess how staff perceptions predicted their acquisition of FMI-related skills during and following training. Our blocked regression analyses indicated that both perceptions of manager buy-in at the time of FMI training, as well as changing perceptions of buy-in over time, were not significantly predictive of the magnitude of change in SJT scores after training,

however. This pattern of results reinforces other indications that how staff perceived buy-in and support from management had a weak or null relationship with the extent to which they developed and maintained FMI-related skills after training.

One possible explanation of the results is that manager buy-in has an influence on staff engagement with FMI; however, this is more closely reflected in how they apply skills in practice rather than their acquisition of or knowledge for those skills. Consistent with this, qualitative feedback has indicated that officers may be more likely to use FMI when they believe such practices are guided or supported by other staff, including managers (Barkworth et al., 2023). A related finding of the current study was that staff perceptions of manager buy-in did not change significantly before and after FMI training, suggesting that implementation of FMI at a given correctional centre may not have been associated with progressive (perceived or actual) increases in adoption of related language and practices among management at that centre. It is possible that the influence of manager buy-in on FMI-related skills acquisition, as well as use of those skills in practice, may be enhanced in the event that introduction of training was accompanied by a concerted and sustained increase in the promotion and modelling of FMI by senior staff at that centre.

A similar interpretation is that perceived manager buy-in may promote more favourable attitudes towards FMI, although such attitudes may not necessarily be correlated with performance in exercising FMI-related skills. A recent study found that a number of correctional staff who appeared to endorse FMI described applications that had less-than-optimal fidelity to the intended skills and practices (Barkworth et al., 2023). This emphasises the potential value of ongoing initiatives to support maintenance of FMI-related skills, such as refresher training, as well as those that support staff uptake and motivation. However, we also acknowledge that interpretation of relationships between perceived manager buy-in and outcomes of FMI training may be limited by methodological factors, including the correlational design of analyses and small samples available at post-training assessment.

Lastly, and while secondary to the aims of this study, our results showed that staff performance on the SJT measures significantly improved on average after FMI training. Other research has also found that FMI has a causal effect on short-term increases in staff members' perceived ability to help inmates rehabilitate (Barkworth et al., 2021). The findings from the current study give preliminary indications that these perceptions are accompanied by objective markers of skills acquisition, and show promise for the viability of our SJT measures and methods themselves. The longer-term agenda of research using SJTs will provide additional insights about how FMI training helps to build skills among correctional staff, as well as factors associated with the development and maintenance of skills, to support the rehabilitation of people in prison.

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