

Efficient, Effective and Evidence-Based:

Unit Management
with Corrections Corporation of America



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I. Introduction

At Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), correctional centers function much like secure, self-contained cities.

A CCA correctional campus may feature a classroom, worship hall, gymnasium, recreation yards, laundry mat, dining hall, kitchen, vocational shop, housing units, a medical and dental clinic, and administrative offices. Well-trained professionals serve in security, education, program services, maintenance, health care, management and administration, and assume an instrumental and collaborative role in day-to-day operations, as they meet the needs of the inmate population while ensuring the safety and security of offenders, colleagues and the greater community.

This comprehensive approach informs inmate management with CCA. Through a method known as unit management, offenders live among and participate in activities with inmates housed within the same unit. Together, they function in a micro-community, where they are provided with a range of services and programs, perform assigned jobs and develop a rapport with a dedicated unit team, who help ensure proper and responsive offender care.

Through unit management, offenders are housed in small units and managed by a familiar core team, with whom they communicate and interact with everyday. This is a departure from being placed in large cell blocks, where offenders are overseen by a decentralized body of frontline security staff, whose assigned posts may change on any given day.

Unit-managed offenders are jointly engaged in educational, vocational, life skills, addictions treatment and other programs with other inmates from their unit. They are routinely monitored by and develop a rapport with staff who know their names, their personalities and their concerns. These professionals walk among and talk with offenders on each shift, as they maintain security and deliver services to meet their varied needs.

This is a snapshot of unit management in action with CCA.

II. What Is Unit Management?

A General History

Unit management has been applied in correctional settings for more than 40 years. Established in 1966 by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) at the National Training School for Boys in Washington, D.C., this approach has been implemented at every federal prison and many state and county correctional facilities since that time.¹ When Warden Roy Gerard developed unit management at the National Training School for Boys, he sought to clearly re-establish the proper order, after sensing that offenders were

¹ Robert Levison and Roy Gerard, "Functional Units: A Different Correctional Approach," *Federal Probation* 37, no. 4 (1973): 8-16.

exercising some level of control over the staff, which led to incidents and a tense facility climate.

Gerard observed that some staff spent much of their time responding to and de-escalating incidents. In response, Gerard developed core staff teams and assigned them to smaller units in the facility, in proximity to offenders. These teams familiarized themselves with the offenders by communicating directly with them, which enabled them to address and resolve concerns at a manageable level, and reduce the likelihood of incidents or disputes.

Achieving more orderly operations with fewer incidents, Gerard's experiment became a widely supported standard defined by the BOP as managing "a small, self-contained, inmate living and staff office area that operates semi-autonomously within the larger institution."² Unit management was credited with improving the quality of professional life for staff and inmates. Before retirement, Gerard directed several federal facilities, where he implemented unit management at each site. When he retired as the Assistant Director of the BOP 1981, he advised all BOP facilities to implement unit management.

Gerard later served as the primary consultant for the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), where he helped implement unit management for state systems throughout the nation. Under Gerard's counsel, the NIC endorsed unit management as a correctional best practice. After Gerard's departure, established corrections professional Gary Mohr, who now serves as CCA's Managing Director, Organizational Development and Staffing, began assisting the NIC with the continued implementation of unit management across the country.

A History of Unit Management at CCA

Guided by industry best practices and high standards, CCA decided to begin standardizing unit management system-wide in 2005. To help ensure consistency and uniformity, Gary Mohr has overseen a phased, gradual transition as CCA facilities have implemented unit management, which has been defined as a ***"companywide approach to inmate and institutional administration designed to improve security, control and relationships by dividing a large institution into smaller, more manageable groups in order to improve the delivery of correctional services."***

As implementation steering team, comprised of CCA executive management and managing directors, has developed a unit management manual, which outlines core competencies, principles, best practices and more.

Four CCA sites were identified to pilot unit management – Davis Correctional Facility in Holdenville, Okla., Cibola County Correctional Center in Milan, N.M., Hardeman County Correctional Facility in Whiteville, Tenn. and Marion County Jail in Indianapolis,

² Federal Bureau of Prisons, *Unit Management Manual* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons, 1977), p. 6.

Ind. Today, all CCA facilities, except those under contract with the Texas Department of Corrections, have adopted unit management.

III. Principles of Unit Management

Core values

Communication. Responsiveness. Teamwork. Supervision. Access.

These qualities are key to sound unit management, an effective and beneficial approach for both correctional staff and the offenders in their care. Through unit management, CCA professionals adhere to and help establish system-wide best practices that enhance operational quality companywide, consistent with the vision “to be the best full-service adult corrections company in the United States.”

Additionally, unit management at CCA:

- Responds to the concerns of staff and the needs of inmates.
- Places competent, trained staff in proximity to inmates, reinforcing direct supervision.
- Involves the unit team in making decisions or recommendations in a variety of inmate matters.
- Streamlines the delivery of services and programs to inmates assigned to the unit.
- Operates in accordance with a unit plan that outlines expectations and supports success.
- Enables facilities to modify program delivery to address the needs and interests of inmates, which enhances operations on a facility and companywide level.

Unit management staff members serve important and dual roles in security and programs. They “walk and talk” to inmates and familiarize themselves with personalities and identify concerns. They provide heightened surveillance, proactively intervening to help prevent incidents. Thus, unit management provides “each [unit] with a sense of group identity and increases the frequency of employee-staff contacts [with inmates] so that small problems can be addressed before they become large problems.”³

Benefits for Staff and Inmates

³ Robert Freeman, “Management and Administrative Issues” in *Prisons: Today and Tomorrow*, edited by Jocelyn M. Pollack (Gaithersburg, Md.: Aspen, 1997), p. 300.

Unit management also provides benefits to staff and offenders, including:

For Staff

- Helps develop sound correctional skills that foster professional advancement and enhance work life.
- Improves management of and service delivery to inmates through joint recommendations and decisions guided by multi-disciplinary teams.
- Builds staff camaraderie through consistent team communication and daily collaboration to fulfill a shared mission.

For Inmates

- Achieves consistency in care through professionals familiar with their personality, concerns and needs.
- Benefits from responsive, approachable unit management team that resolves routine and other concerns.
- Sets clear expectations for conduct, guided by treatment plans developed and monitored consistently by case managers and correctional counselors.

Inmate Assessment

The **inmate assessment** process helps ensure that unit management fulfills its objective to responsively and appropriately address the needs of inmates. Before being assigned to a unit, inmates are assessed by a multi-disciplinary team who evaluate their medical, mental health, educational and vocational status. This team then develops individual program plans for each inmate that outline programmatic and behavioral expectations designed to facilitate recovery and rehabilitation.

Features of inmate assessments and program opportunities include:

- Unit Admission
- Unit Orientation
- Classification/Re-Classification
- Group and Individual Counseling
- Education and Library Services
- Addictions Treatment
- Town Hall Unit Meetings
- Recreation

IV. The Unit Management Team

The unit management team is responsible for carrying out the **unit plan**, a warden-approved guide developed by the unit team that details unit services, schedules, operations, programs and expectations. The unit team works jointly enact the plan, while being operationally and administratively supported by senior facility leadership.

The size and classification of the inmate population, the number of housing units and unique contractual requirements influence each facility's typical staffing pattern. However, unit teams in all CCA facilities are instilled with a keen sense of duty, pride and ownership in their dynamic and vital roles. Several key roles comprise the unit management team; they are responsible for a range of duties, including but not limited to the following:

Chief of Unit Management

- Oversees the operation of unit management in compliance with the unit plan and unit management manual
- Supervises unit managers
- Makes rounds through all units to assess the quality of unit management and direct supervision
- Meets with department heads to ensure facility support of unit management

Unit Manager

- As the unit's "mini-warden," supervises unit staff and oversees unit program
- Provides direct supervision for all staff assigned to the unit
- Develops the unit plan and mission, objectives, schedules and programs
- Chairs reclassification and other unit team meetings
- Makes daily unit rounds

Case Manager

- May be referred to as counselor or social worker in some facilities
- Recommends changes in inmate classification and program assignment
- Communicates with external agencies regarding inmates
- Develops, supports and promotes inmates' compliance with their individual program plan
- Supports positive family contact and interaction
- Delivers programming and develops positive, meaningful inmate activities
- Makes regular rounds in the unit

Correctional Counselor

- May be referred to as a sergeant or senior in some facilities
- Addresses daily living issues of inmates
- Ensures programs are delivered as designed and planned

- Makes regular rounds in the unit
- Provides input regarding inmate reclassification and unit activities

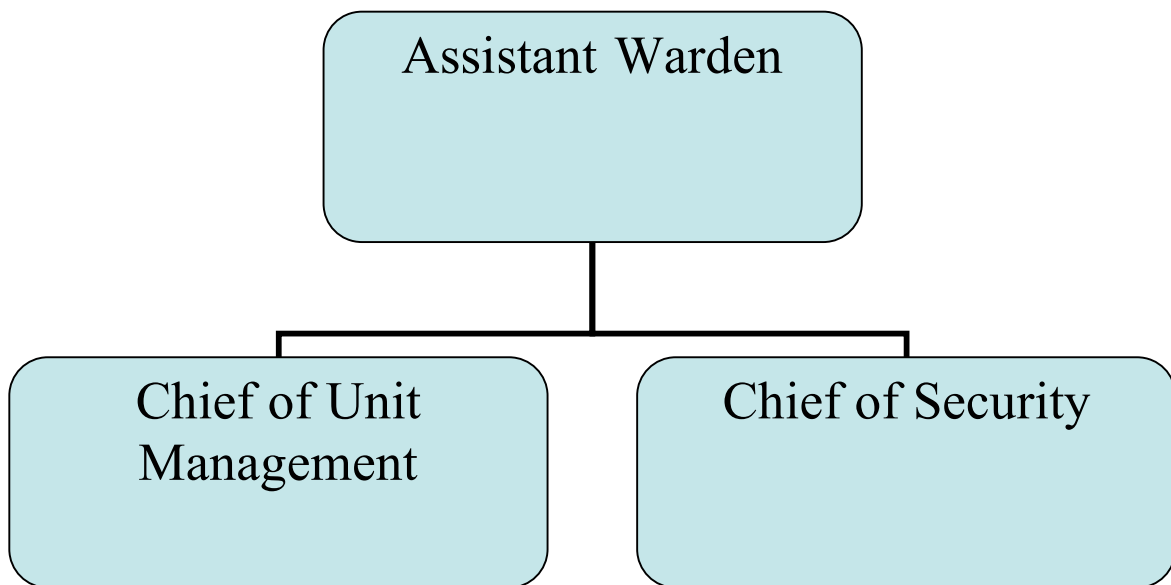
Unit Correctional Officers

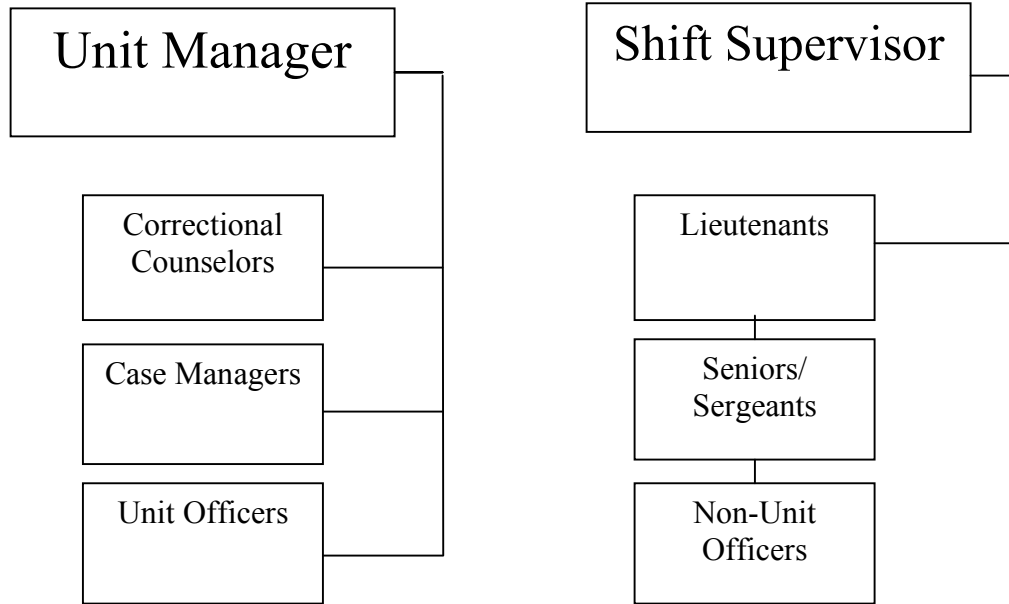
- Executes duties as outlined in the unit plan and post orders
- Completes all assigned security checks and maintains an effective level of communication with inmates
- Supervises inmate works and maintains necessary inventory of supplies
- Addresses daily living issues of inmates
- Makes regular rounds in the unit

The unit team is also supported by colleagues in inmate programs, health services, management and administration, as they collectively work to maintain safety and security and promote rehabilitation and recovery facility-wide.

The Unit Management Team Configuration

The following schematic shows the configuration of the unit management team. The important role that related professionals (chief of security, shift supervisor, etc.) assume in the overall organizational structure provides support integral to the unit's optimal daily functions. Descriptions of these key staff roles are outlined below.





Chief of Security – Administratively directs all security personnel and operations in each facility, including supervision of shift supervisors.

Shift Supervisor – Supervises administrative and operational security activities and effectively manages staff during assigned shift to maintain adequate security coverage.

Lieutenant – Assists shift supervisors by overseeing security, administrative, and operational activities of the facility, including maintenance of shift log and related administrative records and reports.

Seniors/Sergeants – Supervisory security staff who provide first-level oversight of non-unit correctional officers and who may be assigned to special security posts or operations.

Non-Unit Officers – Perform routine duties in accordance with established policies, regulations and procedures to maintain order and provide for the security, care and direct supervision of inmates/residents in housing units, at meals, during recreation, on work assignments and during all other phases of activity in a correctional facility.

V. Unit Management in Action

The same principles that define The CCA Way guide unit management with CCA. Working collaboratively toward a shared goal, the unit management team – with the integrated frontline, managerial and administrative support of the greater facility – upholds integrity, respect, trust, loyalty, safety and security, quality, accountability, service drive, cost effectiveness, teamwork, communication and innovation.

Unit management with CCA also features:

- Adequate resources, with appropriate staffing and materials
- Competent, well-trained and empowered staff
- Quality performance that meets the needs of staff and inmates
- Interdepartmental cooperation
- Consistent monitoring and evaluation of goals, achievements and incidents
- Ongoing analysis and refinement to improve unit management and identify best practices

The Unit Plan

Under unit management, each unit is guided by a customized plan developed by the unit management team and approved by the warden that clearly outlines duties, staffing and more, such as:

- Unit mission
- Profile of inmate population
- Policies and procedures
- Unit rules
- Staff and unit schedules
- Staff roles

Unit plans may vary according to the facility, inmate population, program focus and security level, the quality and detail of unit plans are a shared, constant feature companywide.

Unit Objectives

Unit objectives are the measurable outcomes that are expected to be achieved in the operation of the unit. The unit team collaborates to develop these objectives based on facility issues and the unique goals of the team. These objectives can help increase staff camaraderie and heighten morale, as the team works toward and supports each other to achieve a specific, public goal. Examples of unit objectives include:

- *Eighty percent of the unit population will complete a unit program during the next 12 months.*
- *The average reading level of inmates in the unit will increase by two grade levels over the next 12 months.*
- *The unit will reduce violent incidents by 10 percent over the next 12 months.*

Direct Supervision

Direct supervision and unit management are inextricably connected. Effective unit management cannot function without direct supervision, which maximizes staff-inmate

contact and helps achieve accessibility, communication, inmate intelligence and surveillance, and staff responsiveness.

Through direct supervision correctional officers are posted within the housing unit rather than in a remote location. As such, they seamlessly negotiate unit operations while managing inmates, setting and reinforcing rules and addressing challenges immediately.

Direct supervision has been compared to good parenting. In this analogy, successful parents are those who engage their children actively. Communication with their children is an exchange of expectations, rather than commands or orders issued without context or meaning.

Used together, unit management and direct supervision enhance operations, create a safer, more secure environment and provide opportunities for leadership development. Direct supervision is a team-guided approach to facility management, through which unit managers, case managers, correctional counselors and correctional officers handle day-to-day issues, inmate case plans, programming and security, which provides streamlined operational uniformity.

VI. Unit Management Successes at CCA Facilities: Case Studies

Huerfano County Correctional Center – Recruiting to Fit the Unit Management Team, Not Just the Job Description

Since 2006, the Human Resources staff at Huerfano County Correctional Center has conducted weekly career fairs in nearby Pueblo, Colo. and the surrounding community to recruit for a variety of facility positions. In 2008, with the support of Assistant Warden Arlene Hickson, the facility's unit management team began leading weekly career fairs in the community to help interview, identify, recruit and hire correctional professionals who not only meet the requirements of the position, but also complement the composition of the existing unit management team.

“The team goes to different locations in the community, like local hotels. They set up a room with displays and brochures, and conduct a presentation, showing videos about careers in corrections with CCA,” Hickson says. “Our unit managers and their teams give personal testimonials about what they do, how they do it and why they are with the company. Now they have a more personal stake in hiring the people who are working for – and with – them. Our unit managers are really invested in finding the right people, mentoring them and helping them achieve professional satisfaction.”

Saguaro Correctional Center – Unit Management with a Personalized Touch

Customizing unit management tools to reflect the interests of inmates has been beneficial for staff and offenders at Saguaro Correctional Center. LeeAnn Archuleta, now Chief of Unit Management at La Palma Correctional Center, helped support Saguaro's unit

management team, as they discovered which topics were important to offenders and then developed and delivered modified exercises and assignments.

“Unit management chiefs and managers can inspire correctional counselors to take ownership of the role in counseling offenders. Our team put their own spin on certain programmatic concepts,” Archuleta says. “They felt invested to give back to the inmates and in return they saw the rewards. This was a great opportunity for correctional counselors, come from a security background, to broaden their personal and professional horizons.”

South Central Correctional Center – Recognition for a Job Well Done

In April 2008, the unit management team at South Central Correctional Center received unexpected recognition for a job well done, when an inmate’s relative wrote a letter thanking the team for providing protection and quality programming. The letter reads, in part, “The actions of these individuals provided a very human face to a system that has a reputation of being insensitive and intolerant.” For the staff at the facility, such an experience is just one of many they hope to foster every day, as they build a productive rapport with the inmates in their care.

“For us, it was just business as usual,” says Debra Casteel, chief of unit management. “Communication is the key, plus job knowledge and the dedication to help inmates. We try to give the best service, while providing inmates and staff a secure working environment.”

Whiteville Correctional Facility – What a Difference a Year Makes

Unit management went into effect at Whiteville Correctional Facility in 2007. Since its implementation, the unit team has experienced qualitative and quantitative improvements, including a reduction in incidents, improved communication and a surge in professional pride.

“Our unit management teams really learn about their inmates and grow in their understanding of them everyday. We spend at least 50 percent of our time with the inmates. We’re essentially living in the unit with them,” says Trinity Minter, chief of unit management. “Our incidents and grievances have declined. We address issues before they escalate. We all share information and work together as one. We have seen a major difference in staff morale and inmate morale. Our team members are excited to come to work.”

VI. Looking Ahead

Since its development more than 40 years ago, unit management has become a proven approach for effective and engaged inmate management. Through its organization, which emphasizes team cohesion, and its philosophy, which promotes access and familiarity, unit management offers many operational benefits that help heighten safety and security

within the unit, the facility and companywide. Additionally, unit management mutually benefits staff and inmates. By improving communication, enhancing surveillance, fostering awareness and streamlining the delivery of services and programs, employees and offenders are provided with clear expectations that reduce barriers to understanding, participation and appropriate behavior.

CCA leadership, facility managers and frontline staff continually evaluate unit management, noting and commending successes and assessing opportunities for the improvement and refinement of practices, training and unit programming. With unit management, unit leadership – chiefs of unit management and unit managers – provide guidance and serve as examples of The CCA Way in strategic action, as they cross-train and prepare the next generation of unit leaders – unit officers, correctional counselors and others – in a company culture committed to operational excellence.