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The Failure of Correctional Management—Reviewed: Present and Future Dimensions

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AS EARLY as 1924, a probation executive wrote:

. . . without a consistent, orderly and practical plan of organization, and without adequate, competent and sensible methods of supervising the staff, a probation department cannot function properly. (Volz, 1924, p. 103)

Fourteen years later, Sanford Bates wrote:

The striking advance in the means and methods of public communication has (forced upon corrections) . . . the interpretation of its aims and purposes to an audience constantly widening in numbers and interest (so much so) . . . that it is becoming difficult to approach a consideration (of corrections) . . . with a truly open mind. (Bates, 1938, pp. 1-2)

The above statements are of interest today not simply as a result of their insights into correctional issues, but as a consequence of their early concerns for correctional management. Criminologists and correctional leaders generally were not concerned about administration; instead they continued to be concerned primarily with understanding delinquent and criminal causal behavior, processes for changing lawbreaker behavior, and treatment stratagems.

Sanfilippo (n.d., p. 5), writing for the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training in the 1970's, summarizes this concern as follows:

. . . correctional administrators . . . tend to face inward toward their organizations, responding to the norms and loyalties which they impose as a system . . . (and) are little in touch with the . . . outside world . . . (and) seem, too, to be isolated from organized efforts to advance and refine general understanding of administration, especially public administration.

Deviance and treatment remain topics of concern, especially among criminological and correctional writers. In fact, a review of several recent journals suggests that administration and management of correctional agencies are issues hardly examined—if studied at all. The focus generally remains on the lawbreaker, types of crimes and criminals, and processes for inducing change.

While these are critical issues and provide the substance or *content* of the correctional enterprise, the failure to study correctional agencies, organizational behavior, structural arrangements, and decision-making strategies, among others,

reveals a serious inattention to the *process* of corrections.

This failure to address processes of service delivery, in many respects, has led to what some have called the failure of corrections. It is a failure which can be attributed to an inability to correct or change the lawbreaker into law-abiding citizenship and/or to reduce recidivism. It is a failure based on a continuing commitment to the "rehabilitative ideal," which, policy-wise, has been laid to rest as a result of (1) research on treatment, (2) changes in public sentiments, and (3) reversals in public policy. (See, e.g., Bailey, 1966; Robison, 1969; Kassebaum et al., 1971; Lipton et al., 1975; Galvin, 1984; and Petersilia et al., 1985.)

The above is not to suggest that rehabilitative efforts should be discontinued or ignored as a valuable tool in providing services to clients and communities. Our positivistic approach to the control of crime and delinquency probably demands that attention be paid to the lawbreaker as an individual, a person who engages in deviant acts as a consequence of personal needs, problems, and concerns. Thus, the content of correctional services should remain important. However, exclusive concern for content at the expense of process can only lead to continuing failure—a failure recognized as well as lamented by clients, communities, legislators, and many correctional leaders.

As a consequence of the above, it may be helpful to delineate some classical concepts of organization, leadership, and management in order to understand better the state of the art in corrections. In fact, an historical review of selected but pertinent issues by some of the earlier writers in organizational behavior and corrections may prove illuminating, especially since the issues are as viable today as when first introduced.

For example, Selznick (1957, pp. 62-64) describes four major tasks with which a manager of a formal organization is expected to be concerned. These include (1) the definition of institutional mission and role, (2) the institutional embodiment of purpose, (3) the defense of institu-

tional integrity, and (4) the ordering of internal conflict.

From another perspective, Gross (1968, p. 38) summarizes the major premises of organizational administration to be (1) govern the organization and guide the personnel, (2) develop goals and be prepared to change them in response to new situations, (3) develop viable relationships between the organization and its environment, (4) develop, maintain, and utilize power and authority responsibly, and (5) to accomplish all of the foregoing, utilize various techniques, such as decision-making, communications, planning, evaluating, and supervising personnel.

While Gross appears to be concerned with the total organization, including its relationships with external groups, such as principal stakeholders, Selznick tends to concentrate more on the nature of leadership as an essential attribute of a manager within an organization. Further, for both authors, leadership will be found primarily, if not exclusively, at the top of the organization's hierarchy. This suggests, then, that all managers are leaders of a sort.

In corrections, however, we are confronted with an organizational contradiction: Even the lowest status members of the hierarchy, such as probation, parole, and correctional officers, are also responsible for *managing* people as well as for the development of goals, albeit for clients.

What is missing in these authors' concerns about organizations, moreover, is that of *accountability*, which is a critical matter for all organizations, whether in the private or public sectors (Vocino & Rabin, 1981, p. 10). In contemporary corrections, this issue is receiving more and more attention by the public (i.e., legislators) as well as by superordinates (i.e., government and court executives).

Walton (1959, pp. 41-44) asserts that while the sphere of administrative activity has been extended by definition by many authors over time to include a multitude of functions, it remains possible to accept a consensus that whatever else administration or management may be, it is at least the activity that concerns itself with efficiency, effectiveness, survival, and maintenance of the organization. Also, it is concerned with the direction of people-based activities toward the achievement of declared goals.

In spite of the above, the literature is not always clear in making a distinction between what a manager is responsible for accomplishing and the manner by which this is to occur. The point is that regardless of work setting or beneficiary of

the service (or product), administration is directly responsible *not for performing* the routine work of the organization, but *for attending to its performance.*

Moreover, since the administration of any organization is charged with the responsibility for attaining organizational objectives, it follows that it is also responsible for their definition, promulgation, and for holding all staff accountable for their achievement. Such assumptions are implicit in the lexical definition of administration and may be instrumental in making the definition more precise.

It follows then that any activity which is performed to maintain an organization or to direct the activities of people working within the organization toward the accomplishment of organizational objectives may be classified as administrative—or organizationally conservatizing—in nature. Planning, preparing budgets, implementing and evaluating personnel and programs, and leadership, therefore, may logically be classified as administrative when, and only when, they occur under the above conditions.

If, for example, a correctional official engages in lobbying for funds to support a specific program that has been legislated or mandated, he or she is performing an administrative act. But, if he or she attempts to persuade a legislative body to enact laws that would change the accepted purposes of the agency, he or she is not engaging in administration. Instead, what we have here is an act of leadership rather than administration, regardless of the merits of the proposal.

There is, however, at least one gray area of concern that prompts the following question—a question that deserves attention in corrections during times of severe restrictions in resources and/or profound changes in public sentiments about services and programs: When the purposes of an organization need to be changed in order for the organization to survive and administrators take the lead in formally changing objectives, can this activity be described as administrative?

In business and industry, where technological advances sometimes dictate complete restructuring of organizational purposes, this situation is not altogether uncommon. In social service organizations, such as corrections, where there may be changing philosophies about the nature of people and concepts of social control, such wholesale changes in organizational goals are probably more uncommon.

Nonetheless, if we say that administration is the activity that serves to sustain an organization

and to direct its internal energies and resources in such a way that the purposes—old or new—of the organization are expected to be attained, then we are forced to conclude that changing any aspect of the purpose of the organization, for whatever reason is *not* an administrative function.

Yet, there is a subtle issue that forces us to change our conclusion. This occurs when an organization's purpose is to modify or change others' objectives, as is found in corrections and education. Then it is indeed an administrative function to provide the mechanisms whereby such changes can be effectuated. (Clark, 1956, pp. 327-336)

When an administrator engages in pursuits other than administrative in nature (as previously defined), he or she becomes known as an entrepreneur, politician, or demagogue, depending on personal interests and goals, skills, and/or relationships within and without the organization. Interestingly, when such extra-administrative activities are successful, we view this person as a charismatic leader.

An examination of correctional leadership and management confronts us with a number of dilemmas, not the least of which include (1) the diversity of programs and services, (2) the lack of consensual goals and objectives, and (3) the unavailability of a discrete body of knowledge guiding practice.

Nelson (1966, p. 222), for example, characterizes corrections as being:

> . . . Many things to many people. To some it is an area of professional practice; to others it is an academic discipline. To still others it is neither of these but merely an intersection of occupations which differ greatly in philosophy and technique.

Other writers, including Ohlin et al. (1956, pp. 211-225) and Hall et al., also have deplored the inability of corrections to define for itself its guiding principles. The latter (1966, pp. 493-494) state:

> . . . the field of corrections is characterized by a 'practice without theory' approach to its task . . . (it has not defined the) task-relevant skills (needed to make the field) . . . professionally unique. . . . (This) will not be forthcoming until the objectives of correctional agencies have been clarified to the point of allowing some measure of success or failure in the attainment of objectives.

These sentiments have been echoed to one degree or another by Adams (1975), the National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1976), Reynolds (1977), Rand Corporation (1985), and Riveland (1989).

Although the work of the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training was completed in the early 1970's, several of its con-

clusions remain relevant today. As Frank (1970, p. 4) points out, one assumption that has continued to flourish in the field is that correctional ineffectiveness can be attributed to ". . . a quantitative lack of manpower rather than to any qualitative deficiency in theory or contemporary practice."

He further suggests (1970, p. 4) that correctional practice would be better served if it defined for itself its own uniqueness and expertise. Unfortunately, Frank made an assumption that correctional executives inherently have been competent managers, which is a position with which Nelson and Lovell (1969) and Cohn (1973, 1979, 1981, and 1987), among others, have taken issue.

Notwithstanding the above, if we assume that correctional managers have the *potential* for competency, then the prospect for improved correctional practices and service delivery systems increases significantly. In fact, as Sanfilippo (n.d., pp. 1-2) indicates, as he discusses the work of the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training:

> The increasing technology and expanding knowledge base from which corrections may draw its program ideas require a climate in which free thinking and willingness to take risks prevail. . . . The challenges to corrections today are many. . . . (and) Only through *creative leadership* can the field handle efficiently its current workload and plan effectively for its future. . . . many correctional administrators today find themselves ill-equipped to cope with the complex problems of modern management. (Emphasis added)

If correctional administrators have the potential for being real stewards of their charters, it is important to identify the demands of the future with which they should be concerned and over which they should exercise control. If they are to be progressive for themselves and their organizations, if they are to manifest a sense of vision, and if they hope to guide their organizational destinies, what should be their concerns?

Warren Bennis, an authority on organizational behavior, contends that adaptive organizational mechanisms designed to meet the demands of the future will be characterized by the following (as quoted by Sanfilippo, pp. 6-7):

> 1. *The Environment*: Interdependence rather than competition. Turbulence rather than steadiness. Large-scale rather than small-scale enterprise.
>
> 2. *Population Characteristics*: Increased level of education and employee mobility.
>
> 3. *Work Values*: More intellectual commitment to jobs and greater involvement, participation, and autonomy in work.
>
> 4. *Tasks*: More technical, complicated, and unprogrammed, calling for the collaboration of specialists in a team form of organization.
>
> 5. *Goals*: More complicated, requiring more adaptive or innovative-creative capacity by business and government.
>
> 6. *Structure*: Adaptive, problem-solving. Temporary systems

of diverse specialists, linked together by coordinating and task-evaluating specialists in an organic flux.

7. *Motivation*: Enhanced satisfactions intrinsic to the task, but reduced commitment to transient and changing work groups.

While Bennis undoubtedly can be labeled as an extraordinary visionary, his predictions for future organizational structures and worker activities may have appropriateness for business and industry, but fail to take into consideration the rigidity of correctional agencies; that is, continuing commitment to dogma and tradition, as well as executive trepidation over any attempt to change one's organization, which is perceived as a high-risk activity.

Thus, coping with rapid change, which may be a hallmark of contemporary corrections, engaging in temporary work systems and breaking off meaningful work relationships, may reflect a style of organizational life substantially different from that with which correctional personnel are accustomed. There are not many executives in any kind of work setting who want to live with ambiguity, who are attentive to adaptive processes, look for contingencies, and are self-directed enough to be comfortable with dramatic change.

Further, it must always be understood that the power and authority of all correctional executives are *derivative* from superordinates of even higher rank, who also can be counted on to resist dramatic or rapid change. Unfortunately, many correctional managers have learned from bitter experience that among those to whom they report, some really have as a motto, "Let sleeping dogs lie!" More unfortunately, they have learned that "barking" or "attacking" dogs generally will not survive.

This is not to suggest that there cannot be change. As a matter of fact, we know that change is inevitable. The question is whether an executive chooses to be reactive or proactive; whether he or she will simply ride the currents of change and hope for the best, or whether he or she will deliberately attempt to harness and control change. The former is a crisis or dilemma manager; the latter is the kind of manager we should be training to assume mantles of leadership; the kind of manager who has a sense of mission as well as vision; the manager who will ensure that the correctional organization thrives rather than merely survives.

Regardless of what the state-of-the-art may be in corrections today, if there is need—and surely there is—to improve and to enhance correctional organizations and service delivery systems tomorrow, then only accountable managers can perform this task. But, they cannot possibly engage in such a task unilaterally. Superordinates, staffs, and communities must also be involved; that is, there must be a team effort.

But, such an organizational thrust also has to be directed toward the fulfillment of defined goals and objectives that are reasonable, appropriate, responsive to community values, and achievable with what probably will be continuing limited resources. Therefore, it is not just sound management which is required—strong leadership is needed as well. Otherwise, we will continue to experience a failure in correctional management, a failure that is likely to become more and more irreversible.

Both the content and process of corrections is changing in this implosive age of technology, communications, and information. The correctional manager must be committed not only to redirecting and evaluating routine services and programs, he or she must be concerned as well about such issues as automation, staff development, accreditation, standards, records management, liability, workloads, diminished resources, victim concerns, and more critical relations with other elements within and outside of the network of criminal justice administration.

Thus, if the contemporary correctional manager desires success, then he or she will have to fulfill Emerson's dictum that man is great "not in his goals, but in his 'transitions.'" These transitions from the corrections of today to the corrections of tomorrow are no doubt possible, albeit with some qualifications.

It is a cliche to offer "cautious optimism," but it appears that is the appropriate sense of where we are and where we can and ought to be in the immediate and long-terms futures. But, to ensure that success occurs, we must look to the "competence process," as Jay Hall (1980, p. 46) suggests, a process . . . "which may be set in motion to harness the abundance of talent and energy available in our organizations . . . (because) people are capable of doing what needs to be done . . ."

Hall adds (p. 47) that only the manager is in a position to guide the organization, and when managers discourage competence and create:

. . . impersonal organizations which are insensitive to the human need for efficacy and worth, managers have afforded contexts which frustrate the expression of competence. And they have replaced an attitude of hope among workers with one of despair. Productivity is but a mirror of the attitudes and aspirations management has encouraged among those who do the organization's work.

In *Requisite Organization*, author Elliott Jaques (1989, p. 130) essentially takes the same position, namely that success can be achieved provided

managers recognize that the single most impor-
tant resource available is that of a satisfied and
involved staff. Further, it is an organization that
is committed to a:

> . . . human systems philosophy—a philosophy that is con-
> cerned with the work and social interaction of human
> beings in social systems.

Jaques adds (p. 129) that the core of the phil-
osophy is the building of "requisite social sys-
tems" in two interconnected senses:

> First, providing for effective human working interaction and
> development in a setting of mutual trust and shared values
> and commitment. Second, holding people *accountable* for
> such interaction in relation to the effective achievement of
> the objectives of the institution.

Garrett Heyns, who was the executive director
of the Joint Commission on Correctional Man-
power and Training, probably summarizes our
current problems and issues associated with the
future success or failure of correctional manage-
ment. He said (as quoted by Sanfilippo (n.d., p.
10):

> I have told you about what's wrong (in corrections) and
> how to right these wrongs. Now I'm going to tell you *who*
> must lead the change. The line workers can't do it. The
> specialists often don't have the time or the clout. It's the
> *managers* who must take the reins. And I don't just hold
> the reins and let the horse stand idle. I mean you must get
> on the horse and get it moving. (Emphasis added)

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