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Responsibility Charting in Corrections

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THE WHARTON SCHOOL of the University of Pennsylvania gives on an annual basis the Strategic Management in Corrections Program, sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections. Forty top correctional executives from across the country spend a week in Philadelphia working with innovative management and organizational concepts. This phase is followed by a Regional workshop, an individual site visit and a final residential session in Philadelphia. One of the goals of this program is to impart to participants and through them to their organizations specific tools or processes that are particularly well suited to corrections. For this goal to be achieved, participants must work through the difficult implementation dynamics—personal fear of trying something new, interpersonal pressures that reinforce one's traditional ways of managing, and customizing the tool to fit one's own style and organizational circumstances.

The following article is co-authored by a member of the program staff and a participant, with the joint objective of introducing Responsibility Charting—a powerful technique for negotiating the relationships of various organizational actors to specific decisions—and describing its application to the decentralization of field services in a large state correctional system.

The Elements of Responsibility Charting

Correctional managers must work within a rapidly changing and increasingly complex organizational setting that often results in unclear lines of responsibility. Many new ideas—such as regionalization, the unit plan, contract services, delivery of educational programs by the Department of Education, etc.—may flounder because of the ambiguity over who is involved in what decisions. The signs are reduced accountability, lack of initiative, feelings of being wrongly excluded from decisions, or unplanned duplication of effort—all resulting in ineffective implementation of the new idea and increased resistance to change.

These issues cannot be resolved simply by ruling in favor of one individual or another because both often have a legitimate interest in the program. For example, correctional educational programs must be responsive to educational and correctional concerns. Regional halfway houses may require central office expertise on funding requirements and regional knowledge concerning the community political situation.

We need ways of confronting and dealing with the ambiguity or conflict among roles in complex organizations. One powerful technique for negotiating role clarity is Responsibility Charting.[1] With Responsibility Charting one identifies decisions in which there are ambiguities, brings the differences out into the open, and resolves them through the participation of the people affected. This approach enables managers from the same or different organizational levels to participate in describing systematically the decisions that have to be made and then clarifying the role that each plays in relation to those decisions.

The three basic elements of Responsibility Charting are *decisions*, organizational units or actors; and a language to describe the degree of participation of a given actor in a given decision. The interrelationship of the three elements is illustrated on the chart on page 20.

As regards the third element, degree of participation, from the military organizational model we have inherited the basic staff (consultative) and line (responsible) distinction. We argue that as correctional organizations have become more complex, they require a richer range of relationships among actors and decisions. Each organization must develop terms that are widely and similarly understood within the agency. Some organizations have identified up to a dozen different degrees of participation. Four basic terms that can be used as a starting place to develop agency-specific terms are the following:

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[1] Responsibility Charting has a long history as a format, but has only been integrated into a process relatively recently. In 1954 Alfred Larke wrote "Linear Responsibility Chart—New Tool for Executive Control" in *Dun's Review and Modern Industry*. Robert D. Melcher in 1967 developed some of the process aspects in an article entitled "Roles and Relationships: Clarifying the Manager's Job," in *Personnel*, May-June, 1967. Galbraith (1973) briefly describes the process in *Designing Complex Organizations*, Addison-Wesley. Beckhard and Harris have a section on Responsibility Charting in *Organizational Transitions: Managing Complex Change*, Addison-Wesley, 1977.

ACTORS DECISIONS	Commissioner	Bureau Chief	Regional Director	Etc.
Hiring			↑	
Extended Furloughs	←		for each box a symbol to describe DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION	
Development of New Aftercare Programs				
Etc.				

R—Responsible—the person who takes the initiative in the particular area, develops the alternatives, analyzes the situation, perhaps makes an initial recommendation

A—Approve—a person who either signs off or vetoes a decision before it is effective, or chooses from alternatives developed by the R role

C—Consult—a person who is consulted *prior* to a decision being reached but with no veto power

I—Informed—a person who must be notified after a decision, but need not be consulted

Blanks indicate no relationship to the particular decision. It is useful to have a DK (Don't Know) category to differentiate ignorance from no relationship.

Responsibility Charting is most powerfully used as a process. The steps are as follows:

Step 1. Create the chart by identifying key decisions and the relevant participants.

Step 2. Develop a common language to describe degrees of participation.

Step 3. Individual balloting and tabulation of results.

Step 4. Feedback and discussion.

Step 5. Action steps and followup.

We now wish to describe the uses of Responsibility Charting to clarify roles after a decentralization of Field Services in a large state system.

Decentralization of Field Services: A Case Study

Background: On October 1, 1976, the Bureau of Field Services of the Michigan Department of Corrections was decentralized into three regions, one covering Wayne County (Detroit) and further divided functionally with separate chiefs for probation, parole, and community corrections. The other two regions encompass a large number of counties which are each further subdivided into four areas, supervised by an area manager covering all functions.

The delegation of authority for a variety of activities to the different levels in the new hierarchy was spelled out in the initial memorandum establishing the regions. Some central staff opposed the loss of their decisionmaking power and argued persuasively of dire consequences that divestment would cause. After the initial months of operation, problems surfaced that suggested some reconsideration. The Deputy Director, recently introduced to the technique at the initial phase of the Strategic Management program, perceived the potential power of Responsibility Charting to surface and work through some of the issues.

Creating the Chart: The Deputy Director for Field Services, two assistants and two regional people individually developed lists of the 30 decisions or major responsibilities that they most frequently confronted in their particular roles. There was considerable overlap and the group developed a common list of thirty-five decisions that they subdivided into three major areas:

Fiscal/Administrative: leases, contracting, equipment.

Personnel: hiring, overtime, disciplinary, assignments.

Case decisions: return of parole violators, furlough, plan adequacy, risk screening, imposition of sanctions.

Because the list was so long, the Deputy Director developed three separate charts and arranged to administer the exercise at three different times during a two-day management seminar. On the following chart (Exhibit 1) two decisions from each of the three areas are illustrated with the initial data and final consensus.

The decisions were expressed in such a way as to eliminate all action verbs or any other clues that would lead a person in one direction or another or suggest what the central office's view was.

Note that only major organization units were used with the understanding that the particular individual, for example in the Regional Administrator's office, might vary depending on the decision.

Developing a Common Language: Building on the Wharton definitions, the Deputy and his staff modified the terms slightly to bring it into conformity with common usage within the agency. At the seminar, the participants were introduced to the terms verbally and had a chance for questions as well as having written definitions on the instructions sheet.

Individual Balloting and Tabulation of Results: The respondents were three Regional Administrators, three Deputies, ten area managers, three business managers, and appropriate Central Office staff. Each participant read a description of the process and definitions of the codes before discussion. The discussion period was brief although the definitions were a little hard to handle the first time around. They balloted on case decisions first because this seemed much clearer as to who initiates the action, etc. Also this was the type of thing that had occurred for the most part in the field before regionalization, with the exception of the final return decision or imposition of a sanction which had been done by central office. Participants were instructed to ballot as to their perceptions of what was intended by the regionalization plan.

The spacing illustrated on page 23 (Exhibit 2) of the three sets of decisions allowed staff time to score the results prior to presentation to the group and commencement of negotiations. Total tabulations were entered in a transparency and displayed one line at a time using an overhead projector so that negotiations could concentrate on a single issue. The consensus was entered as it was achieved with a marking pen on the transparency.

Feedback and Discussion: The charts were then tabulated and posted on the transparencies and worked through one by one, with the consensus entered on the transparency as it was achieved. There was often little initial agreement even about the most common types of decisionmaking such as the return of a parole violator; however, this lack of agreement led to considerable dialogue as the group worked through the negotiation process.

An examination of the six decisions displayed on Exhibit 1 illustrates the issues that were surfaced. On decision No. 1, ten individuals wished to get BFS Central Office approval when the reorganization was intended to decentralize such decisions. As a result of the discussion, Central Office is not even informed thereby reducing their workload and allowing them to apply limited resources elsewhere. The discussion dramatically clarified the roles of Regional Administrator and Area Manager. As regards the Regional Administrator, the group was divided mainly between an A (9) and C (7) role. With the Area Manager, the split is between R (5) and C (10). The discussion resulted in clarifying the Area Manager's responsibility to initiate and staff, the making of leases subject to approval from the Regional Administrator. The reader is urged to closely read through other decisions to get the flavor of the issues Responsibility Charting surfaces.

It was an outstanding example of participative management, as each person felt fully involved in the final decision, understood the rationale for it and in no instance was it necessary for the Deputy Director's intervention as a referee to decide one way or the other. Consensus was arrived at during negotiations in all cases.

The next step in the procedure was to revise policy directives and procedures to accommodate this realignment of decisionmaking responsibility. Participants were uniformly enthusiastic about the process. The group will reconvene to review the experiences with the new pattern after several months of operation.
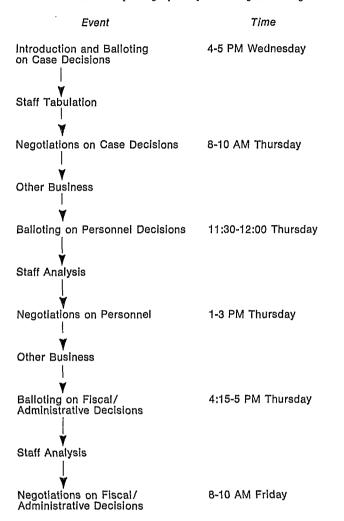
Guidelines for Using Responsibility Charting

Some further general comments on using Responsibility Charting may be helpful, particularly drawing out some of the issues that often arise during feedback and negotiation.

EXHIBIT 1:—*Responsibility Chart, original data and negotiated consensus.*

DECISIONS		Director	BFS Central Office	Region Administrator	Area Manager	SPA	Agent	External (i.e., C/S, DMB, etc.)
1. Leases	R A C I		0 10 0 1	3 9 7 1	5 0 10 0	4 0 3 3	3 0 1 1	0 3 0 7
Negotiated consensus				A	R	C		I
2. Parole Placement Plan Adequacy	R A C I		5 9 0 5	0 3 1 12	0 2 3 8	1 8 9 2	15 1 2 2	0 1 0 1
Negotiated consensus			I		I	A	R	A (Parole Board)
3. Telephone Installation	R A C I		0 3 0 7	0 16 2 1	2 2 13 0	12 1 4 3	6 0 0 1	0 0 0 5
Negotiated consensus				A	C	R		I
4. Appointment of staff	R A C I	1	2 2 1 6	2 10 1 4	9 6 0 5	4 1 8 7	9 0 1 8	1 0 0 0
Negotiated consensus					A	C	R	
5. Order Disciplinary Investigation	R A C I	0 0 0 1	2 5 0 7	4 11 2 2	4 2 13 3	8 1 5 3	2 0 2 3	0 0 0 2
Negotiated consensus			I	A	C	R		
6. Order Lost Time 8 hrs. or less	R A C I		0 5 1 8	5 14 0 1	4 4 10 2	8 3 1 5	2 0 0 3	1 0 0 6 Personnel
Negotiated consensus					A	R	I	I

EXHIBIT 2:—*Spacing of Responsibility Charting*

Event	Time
Introduction and Balloting on Case Decisions	4-5 PM Wednesday
↓	
Staff Tabulation	
↓	
Negotiations on Case Decisions	8-10 AM Thursday
↓	
Other Business	
↓	
Balloting on Personnel Decisions	11:30-12:00 Thursday
↓	
Staff Analysis	
↓	
Negotiations on Personnel	1-3 PM Thursday
↓	
Other Business	
↓	
Balloting on Fiscal/ Administrative Decisions	4:15-5 PM Thursday
↓	
Staff Analysis	
↓	
Negotiations on Fiscal/ Administrative Decisions	8-10 AM Friday

In creating the chart, the issues selected should be clearly stated and commonly understood. For example, if the general decision area is hiring, one must further specify the level of the position and for what unit. If the decision reads "hiring above grade 12 for positions within a region," the differences between a regional director and central office bureau chief can be meaningfully discussed. It often helps to go over each decision prior to balloting to test for confusion. The language for describing degrees of participation should also be commonly understood.

On the balloting, it is much more effective for individuals to work alone rather than work it through in group discussion, so that discrepancies do not get suppressed by peer pressures. A powerful variation is to fill out the charts both as the situation exists and as one believes it *should be.*

The most striking feature of the resulting data is usually the discrepancies that exist among indi-

viduals' views of who plays which roles. If individuals have a copy of their data in front of them during the discussion, they can compare how they see their own roles with the views of others on their role. Some of the discrepancies are noted in the following table. Possible places where these are at issue are referenced to the data in Exhibit 1 although it would depend on how the specific role occupant voted.

You see your role as	Others see it as	Consequence
A	R	You are waiting to make final sign-off type decisions and looking to others to develop the alternatives. They are looking to you for the major initiative. Possible lack of action in this area, with you blaming others for not delivering when they in turn are looking to you. (No. 2, BFS, Central Office)
R	A	You want the central role, developing the alternatives, others see you as a final signoff and perhaps give you too little information and involve you later than you want in the decision process. (No. 4, SPA)
C	I	You want a chance to make substantive input before the decision, others see you as only needing to be informed. (No. 4, SPA)
I	C	You want to know the decision and not be involved, others will be drawing on your time expecting input when you don't feel the need for involvement. Problems arise when others wait for your response, when you feel you are only being informed. (No. 4, SPA)

In working on discrepancies, when disagreements persist it is helpful to discuss specific examples either real or hypothetical to illuminate the issue.

After all the differing views have been aired, the group either reaches consensus or the top manager specifies how the various actors will relate to each decision.

Once there is agreement, or in reviewing one's individual ballot, one can examine the chart vertically (by columns) to examine the pattern of participation by each organizational unit or actor, and horizontally (by rows) to examine the pattern of participation by each decision. Some of these issues are illustrated on the following tables. To understand better these abstract points, we urge readers to examine exhibit 1, looking at the overall patterns either across roles or decisions, even though only six of the 35 decisions are reproduced.

Vertical Analysis by Decisionmaker

Finding	Possible Interpretation or Question
Lots of R's	Can or need the individual play the active initiating role for so many decisions?
No empty spaces	Does the person need to be involved in so many decisions or could management by exception principles be used, perhaps reducing C's to I's or leave it to the individual's discretion when something needs particular attention.
No R's or A's	If a line position, maybe a weak role that could either be enlarged or eliminated.
Overall pattern as against the personality type of the role account.	Does the pattern fit the personality and style of the role account—either too little involvement, too much, etc.

Horizontal Analysis by Decision

Finding	Possible Interpretation or Question
No R's	Job may not get done, everyone waiting to approve, be consulted, or informed, no one sees their role to take the initiative.
Multiple R's	Is it clear which R has the lead role to ensure action on the decision?
Lots of A's	Diminished accountability, with so many people signing off may be too easy to shift blame around.
Lots of C's	Do all these individuals really need to be consulted? Have the costs of consulting in terms of delay and communication time been weighed against the benefits of more input?
Lots of I's	Do all those individuals need to be routinely informed or could they be informed only in exceptional circumstances?

The final phase of Responsibility Charting is to take action based on the analysis. As with all group processes, it is desirable that the decision mechanisms for resolution be clearly specified in advance so that after analysis all know how the final decision on the allocation of responsibility will be reached. This decision can range from merely clarifying the relationships to significant reassignment of responsibility. The most important aspect of the action steps is that all the participants be clear about the rules of the game. It is far more important that people be clear than that they be satisfied. The outcome is like a contract among the parties to try to relate in the agreed on fashion for a specified time period.

The time period is important so that people feel the agreement will be tested under real conditions with a possibility for reconsidering the arrangement at a future meeting. It puts everyone in an experimental frame of reference and provides an explicit future occasion to review grievances. Participants should be encouraged to collect specific examples of problems, perhaps even to write them down. They should also be encouraged to hold each other to the agreements or minimally work through why they were not observed while the incident is fresh. For example, although pledged to *consult*, someone may only *inform*. Immediate processing of the reasons may lead to new understandings of circumstances in which the time costs of consultation are excessive.

Conclusion

In this concluding section, we wish to stress both Responsibility Charting's power and its usability by correctional managers. A Table of Organization cannot capture the richness of interactions that are necessary for an organization to perform effectively. On some decisions a superior may serve as a consultant to a subordinate, on others merely be informed. The chain of command relationship of a Table of Organization may state the overall authority relationship but not in a way that helpfully guides specific decisions. Job descriptions give one information about one's own role, but not the information on how it specifically relates to other roles that is critical for effective team performance. Responsibility Charting informs one of one's relationships to decisions within a clearly identified pattern of interdependence.

Balloting anonymously prevents dominance by superiors or peers, so that different perceptions are more likely to surface. Once identified, it is far easier to resolve differences and policy around hypothetical cases before people are in a win-lose conflict over a real situation. Furthermore, in resolving conflicts, Responsibility Charting allows tradeoffs among a richer set of alternatives—shifts can be within a decision in terms of the degree of participation (e.g., from I to C, etc.), or an individual can be given a larger role in one decision area as compensation for reduced influence in other areas.

It is particularly powerful in low communication, low face to face contact situations (e.g., central office-field office) because it generates a substantial amount of data on the perceptions of each of the other. This data, generated anonymously, often establishes points of overlap before group loyalty polarizes the issues. Furthermore, the issues get negotiated and resolved within an overall pattern, not on an *ad hoc* basis determined by

the temporal accidents of which issues emerge as crises first.

One of the most powerful consequences of Responsibility Charting is enhanced accountability. Bureaucracies are more responsive to errors of *commission*—mistakes, poor decisions—than they are to errors of *omission*—lack of initiative, failure to act in a timely manner. Responsibility Charting clarifies both aspects of accountability. Those with an A (approve) relationship to a decision are accountable for errors of commission. The R (responsible) role is accountable for errors of commission (when their recommendation is followed) and omission.

One of the most frustrating vicious cycles often uncovered by Responsibility Charting is when a superior perceives a subordinate as responsible for some area, and the subordinate sees him or herself in only a consulted role. As the superior negatively judges the performance of the subordinate with respect to that issue, the superior may begin to look to others for initiative in that area, which the subordinate now views as firm evidence that he or she did not have the R (responsible) role. Thus, a subordinate is held accountable when the mandate to play the initiating role was never clear in the first place. The result is mutual anger and reduced effectiveness. The explicit clarity at the conclusion of Responsibility Charting means that all are publicly aware of the standards against which their actual performance will be judged.

The above points speak to the power of Responsibilty Charting. However, there are many tools and processes from the organizational development field that are powerful, yet hard for managers to use in corrections. Processes, such as T-groups, that depend on openness and trust are difficult to use in corrections, where a measure of mistrust and guardedness exist simply by virtue of the nature of the task.[2] Processes or tools that engage deep interpersonal issues require a high level of special skills and awareness and often, in conflict situations, third party assistance. Other tools and team development processes are deeply embedded in a management ideology such as the Managerial Grid.

We argue that Responsibility Charting does not have these drawbacks. It is easily learned and requires no sophisticated skill to use. It does not demand openness and trust but only that individuals prefer clear negotiations over who has what relationship to which issues. It focuses on task interdependence rather than on interpersonal issues. It can be used within a wide range of managerial philosophies. Third party assistance, though sometimes helpful, is by no means required.

In conclusion, we argue that Responsibility Charting is both powerful and useful in the fast changing organizational situation of corrections. It is particularly powerful in establishing the ground rules at the beginning of new programs or organizational changes. It offers clarity without oversimplification such that the different units with relevant input to an issue can be involved without the diminished accountabilty that so frequently results from excessive interdependence and complexity.

[2] See Roger Harrison, "Role Negotiation" for an interesting discussion of the differences between "tough minded" and "tender-minded" approaches in Burke and Hornstein, *The Social Technology of Organization Development*: University Associates, 1972.

M oving further toward humanization is a reasonable, worthy, and "lofty" enough direction in which to move and is completely in keeping with the major significant changes that have already been made in corrections.
—GEORGE I. DIFFENBAUCHER

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