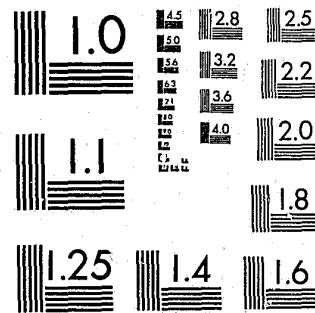


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The Need for Interagency Cooperation in Corrections: Problems and Prospects

BY RONALD I. WEINER, D.S.W.*

School of Justice, The American University, Washington, D.C.

AS THE RATE of crime and recidivism in America continues to rise, growing sentiment among citizens and policymakers favors abandoning rehabilitation and returning to punishment as the principal method of handling criminals. Why this has occurred is not exactly clear although it is necessary to assert here that the corrections profession has long known its limited capability to rehabilitate offenders. Explanations for poor results frequently invoke the convenient scapegoat of limited budget: If funds for manpower and programs were in more abundant supply, the argument goes, correctional agencies would significantly improve their ability to ac-

complish the elusive task of rehabilitation. In a sense, correctional leaders ensured their own failure by assuming responsibility for much more than they could reasonably accomplish. Instead of admitting limited competence to deliver services to offenders and then designing new service delivery models, they meekly abdicated their responsibility to try to rehabilitate offenders and have permitted propunishment forces to propel them toward accepting again the philosophy of retribution.¹

As long as corrections could operate as a closed system it was somewhat successful at hiding its failures from the general public and from

*The author is indebted to Professor Robert Johnson for his comments on this article.

¹Alan M. Dershowitz, "Criminal Sentencing in the United States: Historic and Conceptual Overview," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 423 (January 1976), p. 132.

policymakers. Now, these failures are becoming apparent. And, oddly enough, the crowning blow to rehabilitative theory did not come from public criticism. It was, according to Plattner, the work done by sociologist Robert Martinson in his massive survey of rehabilitative programs:

The coup de grace to the rehabilitative theory was administered by the social scientists themselves. As the number and kinds of treatment programs proliferated, and as more controlled and rigorous studies were made of their results, the findings revealed that they were not succeeding in reducing recidivism. . . . Martinson. . . concluded that there was "no clear pattern to indicate the efficacy of any particular method of treatment."²

If we are witnessing the demand to abandon rehabilitation and to resurrect the old penology, then perhaps correctional administrators and policymakers need other information and research to help them find alternatives to the palliative strategy of imprisonment. There is virtually no empirical evidence available to explain why rehabilitation became a closed system enterprise in the first place; that is, why correctional facilities imported programs and established specialties within their boundaries, rather than relying upon the expertise of the existing network of public and private community agencies to provide a full range of restorative services to offenders. Proimprisonment sentiment undoubtedly had something to do with this. When the trend toward community-based rehabilitation programs (most notably probation and parole and, more recently during the decade of the sixties, halfway houses and work release programs) began, correctional professionals were on the right track. However, they often lacked the tools and technology needed to work successfully with community agencies. Their failures, which were largely caused by this limited interagency cooperation, have been, instead, ascribed to the very concept of rehabilitation itself, thus fueling the arguments of the proimprisonment forces once again.

Corrections is a principal component of the criminal justice system, but it is also an important part of the social service system. More is known about the formal relationships among the police, the judiciary, and corrections than about how correctional organizations fit within a community's social service system. Interagency relationships and, particularly, the problems encountered in achieving interagency cooperation have been of both theoretical and practical interest to the social

²Marc F. Plattner, "The Rehabilitation of Punishment," *The Public Interest*, Number 44 (Summer 1976), p. 109.

³Harvey Treger, "The Reluctance of the Social Agency To Work With the Offender," *Federal Probation*, Vol. 29 (March 1965), pp. 23-27.

⁴Wallace Mandel, "Making Corrections a Community Agency," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 17, 3 (July 1971), p. 282.

welfare profession for some time. In spite of this stated interest, the community social welfare network has not been willing to open its resources to correctional agencies or their clientele. Bad prior experience in working with offenders or with the correctional agencies themselves may account for the limited exchange between these service systems. This resistance is widespread among a variety of social, health, and welfare agencies in both the public and private sectors, not to mention business, industry, and the Federal Government.³

Limited access to social services is a strong barrier to the rehabilitation of offenders, but little is known about the manner in which correctional organizations cope (or fail to cope) with this problem. What is less clear still is whether this problem is mutual, that is, whether correctional organizations, frustrated by barriers to interagency cooperation or perceiving no need for such cooperation, also resist and avoid working with community service organizations. Mandel (1971) has pointed to the need for cooperative relationships between correctional organizations and other community agencies, suggesting that corrections has had "few working relations" with other agencies and has not been accepted in the "family of community agencies." His comments on this problem are important:

The resources—such as health, education, and welfare—necessary to enhance correctional programs exist in every community but are under the control of independent social agencies. Although these agencies are generally committed, at a policy level, to helping with correctional problems, they do not do so.⁴

Role Confusion

Much of the confusion surrounding the place and function of the correctional agency arises from unclear definition of the roles of workers and of their perceptions of the correctional task. While service and help have always been included in definitions of their correctional task, correction personnel generally have been unable to reconcile their need to control and supervise offenders with their espoused desire to provide service to them. More often than not, control efforts have dominated the institutional as well as the community sector of corrections, forcing service-giving to take a secondary position in the hierarchy of correctional objectives. Correctional programs genuinely designed to establish linkages for the offender with his community are the exception rather than the rule. This suggests that there are strong organizational pressures encouraging correctional workers to maintain a high regard for

their control tasks and a low regard for their service tasks. They have become bureaucratic monitoring agents, in large measure because the standards for obtaining services for offenders are somewhat vague and poorly defined. Restraint and reform of offenders rather than reintegration—which places a high regard on both the offender and the community—have become the institutionalized objectives of the correctional system.⁵

So long as the restraint model dominates correctional practice it is very unlikely that the field of corrections will develop the knowledge and skills required for effectively interacting with the "family of community agencies" to which they aspire to belong. As a consequence, the failure to establish cooperative interorganizational relationships will mean a failure to use these community resources, which in turn will mean inability to provide services to offenders and, ultimately, failure to protect the community.⁶

Organizational Links

If community corrections is to remain alive as a viable programmatic concept in the face of strong forces pushing corrections to retrench into the institution, it must shift its managerial perspective. The profession will need to examine its own role carefully, and perhaps separate its control task from the task of linking offenders to needed services if it is to develop the organizational links essential to function as a community agency. Martinson, in fact, recommends such an approach:

. . . There is no reason that state and local government employment agencies, mental health services, and educational institutions among others cannot be required to provide services to offenders as well as nonoffenders. At most, a unit of the criminal justice system could be established which would provide the offender with knowledge of how to get the kind of help he thinks he needs. This unit would serve as a broker and an advocate for the offender with the function of assuring that he obtains desired services from existing agencies. It would not provide diagnostic services. It would not provide direct services.⁷

If Martinson is correct, then correctional decisionmakers will need to know more about their communities, about available community services,

and about strategies for achieving community support and responsibility in combating recidivist crime. This has been stated authoritatively by the Task Force on Corrections:

. . . The failure of prisons to rehabilitate was blamed unfairly on correctional personnel; responsibility for community programs is shared widely. Corrections must be increasingly conceived as part of the larger social system. Problem and person, crime and criminal, are imbedded in community life and must be dealt with there—This is the thrust of corrections for the future.⁸

Knowledge Deficiency

The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, in its 1973 report, recommended that corrections actively assume a change agent role to mobilize community resources and to educate the community about the need to correct service gaps or deficiencies. Standard 7.2 of their report states:

. . . Correctional organization. . . should take appropriate action immediately to establish effective working relationship with the major social institutions, organizations, and agencies of the community. . . at the management level. . . seek to involve representatives of these community resources in policy development and interagency procedures for consultation, coordinated planning, joint action, and shared programs and facilities.⁹

To adopt a perspective which links the offender to his community challenges the practices of many correctional organizations. It will require that correctional administrators shift their management attention to the community as the appropriate locus of intervention. Brown and Schuman (1974) have argued that correctional decisionmakers have found themselves with neither the time nor the manpower necessary to educate the community and the service delivery system about the resources needed for offenders.¹⁰ While manpower and time shortages undoubtedly represent critical problems confronting some correctional managers, their more pressing problem is their lack of managerial knowledge and skill in learning to relate effectively to other organizations in their task-environment. In the absence of more effective ways of negotiating cooperative working relationships with community agencies, correctional organizations will most likely become irrelevant to the needs of society.¹¹

Organizational research and theory in corrections, for the most part, has concentrated on internal processes and structures such as organizational climate or employee motivation and morale.¹² Knowledge of correctional goals, policies, and managerial practices is insufficient for understanding the complex range of problems that hinder organizational interdependence and,

⁵Vincent O'Leary and David Duffee, "Correctional Policy: A Classification of Goals Designed for Change," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 17, 4 (October 1971), pp. 382-383.

⁶Treger, op. cit., p. 25.

⁷Robert M. Martinson and Judith Wilks, "Is the Treatment of Criminal Offenders Really Necessary?," *Federal Probation*, Vol. 40, 1 (March 1976), p. 5.

⁸National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Report on Corrections* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 227.

⁹National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Report on Corrections*, op. cit., p. 240.

¹⁰Barry S. Brown and Alan M. Schuman, "A Correctional Program for the Not Too Distant Future," *Community Mental Health Journal*, Vol. 10 (1), 1974, p. 39.

¹¹Treger, op. cit.

¹²David Duffee, *Correctional Management—Change and Control in Correctional Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979).

thereby, the provision of rehabilitative services to offenders. Research is needed that focuses on organizations and their environments, particularly the manner in which organizations relate to one another under different environmental conditions.¹³ Until recently, hardly any work has been devoted to building theoretical knowledge useful to understanding the complex problems associated with interorganizational relations. In the field of corrections, there is limited theoretical or empirical data available to explain how or why organizations interact or fail to interact with one another in providing services to offenders. Information is also needed about the patterns of organizational behavior occurring among correctional agencies themselves, since they are often competing for the same scarce resources within the community.¹⁴

Exchange Focus

As a means of overcoming the natural gate-keeping tendencies on the part of community resource providers, correctional organizations will need to become more adept at establishing exchange relationships.¹⁵ This will require them to become proficient as boundary spanning organizations, competent in relating to their external task-environment.¹⁶ One way this can be accomplished is to adopt as their primary task a people-processing orientation.¹⁷ By redefining their role in the exchange process as referral experts and organizational links, they shift the dominant responsibility for the provision of services for offenders to the community of social, health, and welfare agencies in both the public and private sector. This is not to suggest, however, that correctional agencies no longer assume a major responsibility for service delivery to the offenders under

their control. On the contrary, it suggests that they assume a different kind of responsibility—as service negotiators or brokers with organizations in what Warren refers to as the “interorganizational field.”¹⁸ This enlarged role will require greater proficiency on the part of correctional agencies to screen out offenders seriously interested in securing help from community resources from those offenders who do not. For those offenders who may need services but lack the motivation and desire to accept them, the correctional organization would do well to identify this group and not bother to waste the time or energy of the community’s resource providers.¹⁹ Instead, this group of offenders could be under more closely controlled and monitored correctional supervision.

This type of interorganizational managerial information will be useful to correctional decision-makers in considering changes in their patterns of interaction with their colleagues in other correctional organizations as well as with community service organizations in their environment. If they can use the limited resources of the community wisely, they may encourage community agencies to accept more offenders for service and to collaborate in planning new services, such as assisting offenders in gaining employment and promoting other aspects of positive social functioning. Correctional institutions would no longer have to require the offender to change in the absence of resources to assist him.

The skills and knowledge base required of our current correctional workers must shift significantly from primarily control or treatment. Instead, they must develop competence in assessing community resource networks, in establishing and nurturing cooperative interorganizational exchange relationships with community resource providers, and in informing the public and policymakers of resource deficiencies or gaps that need to be ameliorated as a means of controlling crime more effectively. This enlarged correctional task places joint responsibility for working with offenders squarely on the shoulders of both correctional organizations and their local community. Genuine services provided to motivated offenders are likely to promote the reintegration of offenders. (Indeed, genuine services may motivate otherwise unresponsive offenders to grapple with the challenge of change.) While unfamiliar to many correctional and community service personnel, this community-centered role “offers the only reasonable prospect for dealing more successfully with the serious problem of the recidivist offender.”²⁰

END

¹³Ronald I. Weiner and Robert Johnson, “Organization and Environment: The Case of Correctional Training Programs,” *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Forthcoming, 1981.

¹⁴Ronald I. Weiner, “Managing the Interorganizational Field in Corrections,” *Federal Probation*, Vol. 44, 4 (December 1980), pp. 16-19.

¹⁵For an excellent discussion of the “gate-keeping” concept, see the work of James R. Greenley and Stuart A. Kirk, “Organizational Characteristics of Agencies and the Distribution of Services to Applicants,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 14 (March 1973); pp. 70-78; and Saad Z. Nagi, “Gate Keeping Decisions in Service Organizations: When Validity Fails,” *Human Organization*, Vol. 33 (1974), pp. 47-58.

¹⁶William B. Brown, “Systems, Boundaries, and Information Flow,” *Academy of Management Journal* (1966), pp. 318-327; and Howard Aldrich and Diane Herker, “Boundary Spanning Roles and Organization Structure,” *Academy of Management Review*, (April 1977), pp. 217-230.

¹⁷Yeheskel Hasenfeld, “People Processing Organizations: An Exchange Approach,” *American Sociological Review*, (1972), 256-263. Hasenfeld categorizes human service organizations as either people-processing or people-changing types. The former are defined as attempted to achieve changes in their clients not by altering basic personal attributes, but conferring upon their public status, and disposing of them by referral to other agencies. This classification and disposition function represents the extent to which service is provided. People-changing organizations, on the other hand, are directly involved in efforts to change personal attributes of their clients.

¹⁸Roland Warren, “The Interorganizational Field as a Focus of Investigation,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (December 1967), pp. 396-419.

¹⁹R. Weiner, op. cit.

²⁰National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Report on Corrections*, op. cit., p. 227.