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PENNSYLVANIA ADULT CORRECTIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTES (P.A.C.T.)

Developed by the
Center for Law Enforcement and Corrections
College of Human Development
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

**A Training Module for Trainers of Personnel
in the Administration of Criminal Justice**

**Designed as Part of the Statewide Training Program for
Executive and Managerial Correctional Personnel**

PENNSYLVANIA PROBATION/PAROLE RESEARCH ON BASIC EVALUATION

Training Module 6911

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Training Module 6911

PENNSYLVANIA PROBATION/PAROLE RESEARCH ON BASIC EVALUATION

THE P.R.O.B.E. GAME

Introduction

Foremost among the goals of the administration of justice system is the rehabilitation of offenders, the purpose of which is to provide improved protection for the community and the reclamation of human resources for the benefit of society.

Rehabilitation of an individual must obviously be based upon full knowledge of the offender as a unique individual. Particularized information about his strengths, liabilities, background, reasons underlying his involvement in delinquency and the potential for his rehabilitation through the application of specific correctional services must be developed and made available to the court.

It is well known that the individual's behavior is heavily influenced by his group associations. Indeed, most delinquent activity is recognized to be a group phenomenon rather than an isolated individual act. If the purpose of the pre-sentence investigation is to determine why the individual has come to behave in the ways that have brought him to the attention of the court and to develop information from which to predict how he will respond to various forms of correctional alternatives, then it is important to have some information about his group behavior.

The P.R.O.B.E. game is intended to identify a method by which the pre-sentence investigation can be enriched via the development of

such information describing the individual and his behavior in group settings; information that is commonly lacking in pre-sentence reports. The procedure is designed, insofar as possible, to recreate the natural setting in which groups of individuals interact with one another. Systematic observation of this interaction produces valuable information concerning relative susceptibility of individuals to group influence.

The group observation schedule introduced at the Pennsylvania Adult Correctional Training Workshops for probation and parole personnel was developed by Dr. Leonard Hassol, community psychologist with the division of Community Development, College of Human Development, The Pennsylvania State University. The development of the schedule and the reliability tests were conducted in the juvenile courts of Massachusetts from 1961 to 1964. Items were selected for the workshops from the original longer version.

The value of the group observation schedule is suggested by the following facts: 1) diagnostic reports based on the use of the schedule are as good or better than the reports resulting from private session psychiatric interviews for predicting both recidivism and performance on probation; 2) group sessions are more economical than individual interviews since a maximum of twelve persons at a time can be evaluated; 3) group data is gathered in a situation more closely resembling real-life resulting in potentially high predictive power for post-release behavior.

It should be noted, that although the group observation data has been proven reliable, it is not intended as a total replacement of other data on the individual in arriving at a diagnostic statement. Further,

it should only be used by persons who have had appropriate training both in conducting the group session and in using the schedule for incorporation into the diagnostic report.

Implementation of the P.R.O.B.E. Game

The purpose in conducting the P.R.O.B.E. exercise at the P.A.C.T. Workshops is to sensitize probation and parole workers to an additional method of obtaining data for inclusion in the pre-sentence investigation report. It is not the design of the workshop to produce skilled group leaders or evaluators prepared to go into the field and implement the group data schedule. It is, instead, an orientation exercise and as such, the workshop participants fill the roles of both participants and evaluators.

All participants in the exercise are given the succinct orientation which appears in Appendix A. The participants acting as clients are told to behave extemporaneously as the character's brief personality sketch suggests to them and as their experience in working with similar behavioral types might indicate. For a period of twenty minutes or so the group session, led by the 'probation officer', proceeds. The discussion revolves around what has happened to them, how they feel about their arrest, themselves, the officer, etc. A general effort is made by the 'officer' to move the group toward interaction with each other. During the session the remaining participants, playing the roles of evaluators, check off appropriate responses for the 'clients' on the group data sheets. See Appendix B.

While the ratings of the evaluators are being tallied, the workshop leader talks with the group about what they have observed and emphasizes those specific responses of the 'clients' which

seem most telling to the experienced evaluator. At this time he notes that the systematic observation guide is designed to prevent observational bias from having an undue influence on the evaluator's judgment. This is accomplished by having a broad range of variables before the observer. He also should point out that many items on the schedule are dichotomized on a continuum. That is, a whole range of variable attributes from negative to positive are covered on one given dimension e.g., on one item alternatives to be checked range from 'highly constructive' to 'highly destructive.' The participants are also told to take cognizance of the fact that systematic data of this nature should suggest to the parole or probation officer alternative correctional and treatment approaches. For example, a seemingly passive person in individual interview is shown, in the group session, to be a strong provocateur. This would suggest to the officer jobs which such a person should be steered away from and conversely jobs he might hold successfully.

The results of the ratings are then reported back to the group. It was found, in our experience, that there was a high correlation in the ratings on the types of behavioral traits manifested by the 'clients.' This was the case even though the evaluators had had no prior group evaluation training or experience with this group data schedule.

Reactions Of Workshop Participants

The reactions of the parole and probation officers was one of considerable enthusiasm. They were impressed by the fact that the schedule gave good evidence of such variables as social adjustment, impulsivity, and acceptance-rejection. The concept of group

evaluation was new to most of the group, however, they expressed a great desire to return to the field and try it out. Some of the problems in terms of clearing the new procedure with their superiors were discussed.

Again, it should be stressed to the group that one exposure to the technique is not sufficient training. They are told that it is especially important that the evaluating officers know what kinds of behavior to look at when making the ratings and, then, that the ratings be carefully interpreted in the diagnostic report. A final qualification is noted. The judges, who make use of the diagnostic reports, must have some orientation in the use of the group evaluation technique so that the terminology and rationale for the diagnostic statements will be meaningful to them.

Reaction of Workshop Staff

The staff of the Center for Law Enforcement and Corrections was impressed with the ease with which the participants accepted the notion of group evaluation and the facility they exhibited in their initial handling of assignments. Although innovation generally encounters skepticism and, at best, hesitancy or reluctance, the group exhibited high receptivity. The positive reception of the P.R.O.B.E. game should be followed up with a series of in-depth training sessions so that field implementation can be realized and feedback received. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the exercise for the staff was the awareness that field personnel had been both exposed to and keenly

interested in a new and supplementary technique of investigation. The direct applicability of group observation to the work of parole and probation personnel in conducting meaningful pre-sentence investigations is indicative of its strong potential.

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APPENDIX A

PROBATION AND PAROLE WORKSHOPS

P.A.C.T.

Pennsylvania Adult Correctional Training
Institutes

The Pennsylvania State University
College of Human Development
Division of Community Development
Center for Law Enforcement and Corrections

P.R.O.B.E. Game

In this exercise, you will have a chance to observe the interaction of individuals playing the role of offenders in a peer group setting. Each of you are asked to make ratings on the attached form concerning the behavior of one individual who, for purposes of this exercise, will be viewed as your client. (The name of your "client" is entered on the attached form.) These ratings will then be used to demonstrate how the pre-sentence investigation report may be substantially enriched with observations of client behavior in peer group settings and the new dimensions of information they generate.

The Situation: Six persons who have been convicted of felonies and are awaiting completion of the pre-sentence investigation and court disposition, are lodged in the county jail.

Probation officers conducting pre-sentence investigations on the six offenders have brought them together for the purpose of observing their interactions so as to gain information which will be useful in making meaningful recommendations to the court regarding appropriate disposition and treatment.

PROBATION AND PAROLE WORKSHOPS

P.A.C.T.

Pennsylvania Adult Correctional Training
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The Participants: Roles played by seven members of your group in the "P.R.O.B.E." exercise.

Officer Smith: Probation Officer Smith is conducting the group meeting of six offenders. The other officers are observing the meeting through a one-way mirror and cannot be seen by the participants.

Sam "Slick" Silver: "Slick", as he prefers to be called, is a real "con artist". He has just been convicted of fraud and has a background of confidence games and shady business operations. He is quick-witted, alert, and always calculating situations to his own advantage.

Herman Honeywell: Herman is a rather inadequate, wishy-washy guy, who can be easily swayed by persons around him. Much of what he does (including his crime of burglary) is determined by those with whom he associates. He agrees to everything the probation officer says and often in the next breath supports the opposite behavior in others. His motive is to get in the good graces of his peers.

Henry Hank: Henry is an accidental offender convicted of negligent manslaughter. He is conscientious, hard working, and will probably never get into trouble again.

Herman Freyd: Herman has trouble with drinking. Many of the underlying causes of his drinking can be associated with a very temperamental and authoritarian wife. Herman also has other troubles as you are aware.

William Ruff: William is assertive in any situation, loud, and wants his ideas to predominate. He will challenge any leadership, even that of the probation officer.

Charles Doe: Charles is a person who has been in trouble for many years. He drinks a lot and is apparently inadequate.

APPENDIX B

PROBATION AND PAROLE WORKSHOPS

P.A.C.T.

Pennsylvania Adult Correctional Training
Institutes

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Center for Law Enforcement and Corrections

Group Data Schedule*

Case Name _____ Rater _____

I. BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS IN GROUP.

To what extent does the offender show each of the following behaviors in the group?

1. Attempts to change the structure of the meeting as defined by the leader.

Very much						Moderately			Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			

2. Responds to specific question re non-personal matters.

Very freely						Moderately			Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			

3. Responds to specific question re feelings and personal material.

Very freely						Moderately			Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			

4. Rejects leader's control and authority.

Very much						Moderately			Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			

5. Discusses non-personal matters spontaneously.

Very much	Moderately					Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Discusses personal material spontaneously.

Very much	Moderately					Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. Shows suspicion concerning the leader's statements in non-court related matters.

Very much	Moderately					Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Expresses or shows interest in group members verbally or through gestures.

Very much	Moderately					Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. Emphasizes differences between self and others.

Very much	Moderately					Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. Expresses admiration or friendliness (including friendly hostility) toward others.

Very much	Moderately					Not at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. Contributes constructively to issues raised by others vs. blocks or belittles them.

Highly constructive	Clearly more constr. than destr.	Somewhat more constr. than destr.	Somewhat more destr. than constr.	Clearly more destr. than constr.	Highly destructive
1	2	3	4	5	6

12. Tries to support or maintain vs. disrupt the group.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Highly disruptive	Clearly more disruptive than supportive	Somewhat more disruptive than supportive	Somewhat more supportive than disruptive	Clearly more supportive than disruptive	Highly supportive

II. INTERACTION PATTERNS

A. Relations With Leader.

13. To what extent does the offender reach out for vs. avoid interaction?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Reaches out very much	Clearly reaches out more than avoids	Reaches out somewhat more than avoids	Avoids more than reaches out	Clearly avoids more than reaches out	Avoids very much

14. To what extent does he (she) relate in a dominating or or controlling vs. submissive manner?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Very dominating	Clearly more dominating than submissive	Somewhat more dominating than submissive	Somewhat more submissive than dominating	Clearly more submissive than dominating	Very submissive

15. To what extent does he exhibit a basic trust vs. mistrust?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Highly trusting	Clearly more trusting than mistrustful	Somewhat more trusting than mistrustful	Somewhat more mistrustful than trusting	Clearly more mistrustful than trusting	Highly mistrustful

B. Relations With Peers

16. To what extent does offender reach out for vs. avoid interaction?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Reaches out very much	Clearly reaches out more than avoids	Reaches out somewhat more than avoids	Avoids somewhat more than reaches out	Clearly avoids more than reaches out	Avoids very much

17. To what extent does he (she) relate in a dominating or controlling vs. submissive manner?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Very dominating	Clearly more dominating than submissive	Somewhat more dominating than submissive	Somewhat more submissive than dominating	Clearly more submissive than dominating	Very submissive

18. What is the predominant group reactions(i.e. of most members) to the offender?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Highly accepting	Clearly more accepting than rejecting	Somewhat more accepting than rejecting	Somewhat more rejecting than accepting	Clearly more rejecting than accepting	Highly rejecting