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Something Works in Community Supervision

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IN AN era of increasing accountability and diminishing resources, documentation of program effectiveness is critical. All too frequently, agencies implement new programs with minimal information regarding efficiency/effectiveness issues. As a result, the same programs are quickly dropped when miracles are not produced. This "trendy" approach to program development promotes the view that practitioners in the field really cannot show measurable results and really do not know much about what they are doing, perhaps because nothing really does work.

Is community supervision effective? Do parole and probation officers make a measurable difference in the lives of the people they supervise? What, if anything, works?

In recent years, a variety of studies have raised the effectiveness issue, frequently detracting from rather than enhancing the image of parole and probation (Martinson, 1974; Petersilia, 1985). Community supervision practitioners have faced a frustrating task of building support for parole and probation as effective criminal justice sanctions, given the void in documenting supervision effectiveness.

This article presents research findings which demonstrate that certain programs and methods of officer intervention can positively effect change which is measurable.

Background

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles is currently responsible for the supervision of 47,000 offenders released to the community from prison. The agency seeks to protect the community while assisting offenders' reintegration into the community; however, prison overcrowding and limited resources have complicated attaining either goal.

In response to limited resources and increased caseloads, the agency adopted a comprehensive community supervision management system previously promoted by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) as a "model" for probation and parole agencies. The NIC model was initially

developed in 1975 as the "Case Classification/Staff Deployment Project" within the Wisconsin Division of Corrections, Bureau of Community Corrections, with a grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). The result of the development effort was a comprehensive management system which NIC promoted as a largely transferable model for probation and parole.

The components of the system were fully implemented by the agency during 1983-85. It provides a standardized, integrated methodology for community supervision which enhances efficiency, accountability, and, as the research presented in this article suggests, supervision effectiveness.

As implemented, the system has five components:

- Case classification based on risk/need assessment;
- A standardized case management system, Client Management Classification (CMC), resulting in objective-based supervision planning;
- Workload-based budgeting and workload equalization;
- A management information system; and
- An accountability system designed to evaluate objective measures of program and staff performance.

Case classification provides a standardized method of prioritizing resources for administration, management, and line staff. This is accomplished by sorting those released to community supervision into supervision categories so that more time and attention is devoted to high-risk clients and somewhat less to medium-and low-risk clients. Validated, standardized risk evaluation scales are often combined with need identification scales. The scales are similar in concept to insurance actuarial tables in comparing individual offender profile information with aggregate outcome statistics. The scales do not predict individual behavior but do indicate probable outcome based on aggregate data. Most of the literature to date had focused on the advantages and shortcomings of these quantitative risk/need-driven classification systems (see Clear, 1985).

Case classification primarily addresses quantitative issues such as frequency of officer contact based on risk/need. Case classification does not, however, address the relative effectiveness of different methods of supervision. A companion case

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management system for probation and parole officers called Client Management Classification (CMC) was developed by Dr. Gary Arling and Ken Lerner (for a thorough discussion of CMC, see Lerner et al., 1986). The CMC system was developed specifically to provide corrections professionals with standardized and efficient methods for client management and supervision planning.

The CMC system is a classification process which uses a 45-minute semi-structured interview which is scored to assign clients to one of five supervision planning groups. The interview consists of items constructed empirically which deal with attitude (45 items), back-ground/offense history (11 items), interview behavior (8 items), and officer's impression of significant factors (7 items). A companion supervision planning guide describes detailed behavior characteristics of clients in each profile group and suggests methods of supervision for each group. The final step in the CMC process is the development of a time-framed, objective-based written supervision plan appropriate to the strategy group and individual profile.

Briefly, the CMC groups, characteristics, and supervision strategies include:

CMC Classification	Characteristics	Officer Supervision Strategy
Selective Intervention Situations (SI-S)	Generally law-abiding	Occasional intervention and support
Selective Intervention, Treatment (SI-T)	Unstable in one area (e.g., chemical abuse).	Treatment for chronic problem area
Casework/Control (CC)	Chronic instability in several areas of life.	Motivation and monitoring
Environmental Structure (ES)	Impaired intellectual ability and poor life skills	Structure the environment
Limit Setting	Criminally oriented	Limit setting/enforcer

The difference between risk/needs classification and case management classification is that the former generally addresses the "how much" issues, such as frequency of contact, and the latter addresses the "what and why issues." For example, two offenders may be classified as intensive, requiring frequent contacts; one is a career criminal, and one is a mentally retarded offender. Both will require a great deal of officer time and attention, but how that time will be spent will necessarily be different.

CMC in Texas

Officers completing training in the CMC system express the view that the system is a logical and rational approach to community supervision (if they only had enough time to complete the CMC process in addition to other duties). Cost benefit questions usually center on time versus effectiveness. Like most other agencies which adopted CMC, the Board of Pardons and Paroles' decision to implement was based more on the face validity of the system than the limited empirical evidence indicating the system's impact on case outcome.

The initial training for agency staff occurred during March 1984. Subsequent training sessions in two or more of the agency's eight regions were conducted monthly until June 1986, when all line officers and supervisors were trained. Staff selected to attend each regional CMC training session were chosen by the training coordinator randomly with officers and line supervisors in each class. After completing the training, all officers began to complete the CMC process on all new releasees from prison.

During March and April 1985, approximately 200 officers were trained and using CMC while another 200 officers had not received the training. Trained officers were similar in all respects (i.e., experience, demographics, etc.) to untrained officers. During March and April, roughly half of the offenders released from prison were assigned to CMC-trained officers and went through the process while half did not. A sample was drawn from all cases released from prison from March through April 1985. The sample consisted of 2,551 cases, with 46 percent of the sample classified by CMC and 54 percent non-CMC cases.

An agency time study completed in 1986 indicates the CMC process requires an additional 1½ hours per case in the first month of supervision versus a non-CMC case. The CMC interview accounts for roughly 1 hour; scoring accounts for 10 minutes; and writing the plan roughly 20 minutes. Internal audits of non-CMC cases during the same period documented generally cursory unstructured discussions with clients. Also, supervision plans in non-CMC cases were either not present or were limited to compliance with rules. Consequently, the introduction of the CMC process resulted in a standardized method of gathering information and a standardized method of case planning compared to the highly individualistic interview and case plans which were evident for non-CMC cases.

Research Findings

A preliminary examination of the relationship of CMC to outcome was completed after cases in the sample had 6 months of release experience. The cases were grouped as poor, fair, and good risks using the salient factor scale as a control. The salient factor scale which is also used by the U.S. Parole Commission has been repeatedly validated on the Texas parole population as a reliable predictor of parole outcome. A single outcome measure, pre-revocation warrants issued, was used instead of actual rate of return to prison because of the small number of cases actually returning during the short followup period. Pre-revocation warrants are issued for serious parole rule violations such as new law violations and serious technical violations.

CMC cases had significantly lower pre-revocation warrant rates for both poor and fair risk cases than did non-CMC cases in the same risk group (table 1). Approximately 15 percent of poor risk CMC cases were in the pre-revocation process after 6 months, versus 23 percent of poor risk non-CMC cases. Similarly, 11 percent of fair risk non-CMC cases were in pre-revocation versus 17 percent of fair risk non-CMC cases. Little difference was noted in the good risk cases, which has relatively low pre-revocation warrant rates regardless of the method of supervision. The same groups were re-examined after 1 year of release to test the validity of the data over a longer followup period. The rate of return to prison was used as a second outcome measure in addition to pre-revocation warrants.

TABLE 1. CMC AND RELEASE OUTCOME

<i>Percent Pre-Revocation: 6 Months</i>				
<u>Case Type</u>	<u>Poor Risk</u>	<u>Fair Risk</u>	<u>Good Risk</u>	<u>Total</u>
CMC	15% (36/235)*	11% (64/ 608)**	6% (19/333)	10% (119/1176)**
No CMC	23% (68/296)	17% (129/ 740)	7% (24/339)	16% (221/1375)
Total	20% (104/531)	14% (193/1348)	6% (38/672)	13% (335/2551)

<i>Percent Pre-Revocation: 1 Year</i>				
<u>Case Type</u>	<u>Poor Risk</u>	<u>Fair Risk</u>	<u>Good Risk</u>	<u>Total</u>
CMC	24% (58/235)*	17% (103/ 608)**	13% (42/333)	17% (203/1176)**
No CMC	32% (95/296)	26% (187/ 740)	13% (45/339)	25% (327/1375)
Total	28% (153/531)	22% (290/1348)	13% (87/672)	21% (530/2551)

<i>Percent Return to T.D.C.: 1 Year</i>				
<u>Case Type</u>	<u>Poor Risk</u>	<u>Fair Risk</u>	<u>Good Risk</u>	<u>Total</u>
CMC	17% (41/235)***	13% (80/ 608)	5% (15/333)	12% (316/1176)
No CMC	22% (65/296)	14% (103/ 740)	6% (21/339)	14% (189/1375)
Total	20% (106/531)	14% (183/1348)	5% (36/672)	13% (325/2551)

*Significant at .05 level

**Significant at .01 level

***Significant at .10 level

After 1 year, as table 1 shows, both poor and fair risk CMC cases had significantly lower pre-revocation warrant rates when compared to non-CMC cases in both groups. The pre-revocation warrant rate for poor risk CMC cases was 24 percent versus 32 percent for non-CMC poor risk cases while fair risk CMC cases had a pre-revocation warrant rate of

17 percent versus 26 percent for non-CMC fair risk cases.

When return to prison was used as the outcome measure, poor risk CMC cases were returned less frequently than non-CMC poor risk cases, 17 percent versus 22 percent (figure 1). Little difference was observed for either fair or good risk cases using this measure.

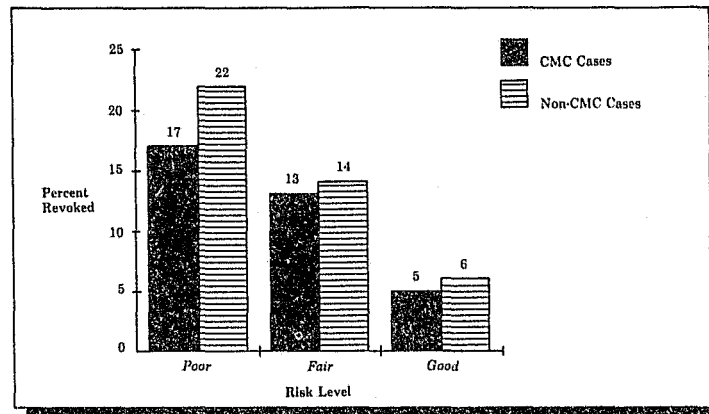


FIGURE 1. CMC CASES AND RELEASE OUTCOME:
PERCENT REVOKED 1 YEAR AFTER RELEASE

If CMC had a positive impact on the pre-revocation rate for fair risk cases, why was there little difference in the rate of return to prison? Table 2 sheds some light on the apparent discrepancy between the two outcome measures. The fair risk group with CMC had significantly fewer violations for failure to report, but new offense violations were

quite similar for CMC and non-CMC groups. Violations for failure to report are characteristic of absconders who (where no new offenses are involved) are usually not returned to prison. This would account for the difference in the pre-revocation rate versus the rate of return to prison for fair risk cases.

TABLE 2. CMC AND TYPE OF VIOLATION

<i>Poor Risk</i>				
<i>Type of Violation</i>				
<u>Case Type</u>	<u>No Violation</u>	<u>Reporting</u>	<u>New Offense</u>	<u>Other Violation</u>
CMC	70% (171/243)	6% (15/243)*	10% (23/243)*	14% (34/243)
No CMC	60% (175/294)	15% (43/294)	15% (45/294)	11% (31/294)
<i>Fair Risk</i>				
<i>Type of Violation</i>				
<u>Case Type</u>	<u>No Violation</u>	<u>Reporting</u>	<u>New Offense</u>	<u>Other Violation</u>
CMC	79% (480/609)	7% (45/609)**	6% (37/609)	8% (47/609)
No CMC	71% (516/732)	12% (89/732)	7% (54/732)	10% (73/732)
<i>Good Risk</i>				
<i>Type of Violation</i>				
<u>Case Type</u>	<u>No Violation</u>	<u>Reporting</u>	<u>New Offense</u>	<u>Other Violation</u>
CMC	85% (281/332)	6% (20/332)	3% (11/332)	6% (20/332)
No CMC	85% (288/340)	7% (25/340)	3% (11/340)	5% (16/340)

*Significant at .05 level

**Significant at .01 level

Based on data in this study, it appears that differential impacts are not apparent where expected violation rates (base expectancy rates) are less than 10 percent. For example, only 7 percent of fair risk cases committed new offenses, and no differences were observed between CMC and non-CMC cases. In contrast, failure to report for fair risk cases has a higher overall violation rate of 10 percent. For this measure, 7 percent of the CMC cases failed to report compared to 12 percent of the non-CMC cases in this group (to prison). Fair risk CMC cases had 5 percent fewer (7 percent versus 12 percent) violations for failure to report than non-CMC cases; however, no significant differences were found for new offenses in this group.

In summary, after 1 year, there was a significant difference where the potential for failure is greatest. In the poor risk CMC group, new offenses were 5 percent lower, and violations for failure to report were 9 percent lower. In the fair risk group, CMC cases had 5 percent fewer violations for failure to report.

Conclusion

CMC is an effective program which has a positive differential impact on case outcome for high risk offenders as measured by fewer pre-revocation warrants. CMC also appears to reduce the percentage returning to prison for parole violations. The impact on medium risk clients is related to technical violations such as failure to appear which occur at relatively high rates.

The research results document effectiveness at several levels. First is the effectiveness of the CMC program itself. CMC operationalizes differential case supervision. It is our perspective that it is the interdependence of the standardized interview and case planning process which is associated with the difference between the two groups. In the CMC group, changes in behavior were measured by a lower rate of return to prison and absconding. The results are particularly noteworthy considering positive outcomes did not depend on ideal conditions. Texas is a large geographically diverse state, and typical problems associated with implementing new programs such as CMC were experienced.

Second, the research documents that low risk cases will generally succeed with or without officer

intervention regardless of the method of supervision. This point is important from the public policy standpoint for community supervision agencies setting program priorities in the face of diminishing resources.

Finally, the information documents the effectiveness of line staff in changing human behavior. This is particularly significant when one considers the most dramatic differences occurred in the group posing the most risk; the same group which even line staff and the community frequently describe as "lost causes."

Several suggestions are offered as to why CMC works based on an examination of the 1 1/2 hour CMC process. First, CMC forces line staff to systematically gather information about the client's life, typically in much greater detail than has occurred on previous encounters with any part of the criminal justice system. Next, the information is processed systematically through the scoring procedures, and, finally, a goal-oriented, written plan of action for the officer as well as the client is developed.

Formally, the critical elements of the process appear to be systematic information gathering for the purpose of assessment and planning. Informally, the process defines a structure for the process of supervision. Clients who are used to being read rules and threatened observe officers asking questions about areas of their lives which had often gone unasked. Officers frequently recount stories of clients who state that no one has ever asked them about many of the areas covered in the CMC interview. Consequently, CMC serves to both professionalize and personalize the supervision process. The reduction in the number of violations for failure to report is a probable consequence of systematically requiring staff and clients to work in a problem-solving environment.

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