133420
133428

**Mission of the Federal Bureau of Prisons**

It is the mission of the Federal Bureau of Prisons to protect society by confining offenders in the controlled
environments of prison and community-based facilities that are safe, humane, and appropriately secure, and that
provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens.

# Contents

VOL. 2, NO. 3 ■ SUMMER 1991

# Toward Better Use of Information

## Correctional managers and researchers working together

*Harriet M. Lebowitz*

Toss research reports into the "circular file?" Yes, that's what happens to some of them. Public decisionmakers often make less than full use of available research. What might a manager do when a researcher reports that the inmate population is expected to increase by 10 percent during the next 6 months, or that participation in education programs is not associated with lower recidivism rates, or that staff at institutions perceive high levels of danger during certain shifts? All of these findings have possible implications for action.

The same information could be treated differently in different situations. In one situation, the manager disregards the information because it is not relevant or because the topic is not high priority. In a second situation, the manager rejects the information because it conflicts with his or her beliefs or because the report does not effectively communicate the information. In a third situation, the manager decides that further study is warranted, and appoints a work group to resolve various issues; action is taken once the issues are resolved. Although there are many other possible variations in a manager's reaction to a research product, this third situation is one desirable response: the manager uses the information in making decisions.

Research findings often do not directly influence correctional policy. Research may be used to clarify logic, arrive at a better understanding of different policy options, make predictions, identify trends, substantiate a previously held position, cast doubt on proposed policies or programs, marshal support for a particular policy or program, confirm that all is well, or shed light on a situation. For example, recently in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, research findings on shock incarceration (placing young offenders, with no known history of violence, in "boot camps") and on privatization (involvement of private enterprise in prisons) have been used to better define agency positions on these programs. Also, monitoring of HIV infection among Federal prisoners has helped evaluate current policy on HIV testing. Research on social climate within institutions, regional offices, and the

headquarters office has assisted managers in pinpointing areas where change may be needed.

Although research information is being used, there is room for improvement. Seven factors have been identified as increasing the opportunity for research to be used within the agency.[1] Taken together, these factors can help improve the working relationship between managers and researchers and integrate research with administrative decisionmaking. They are:

■ An *agency structure* that formally links evaluative and administrative decisionmaking components.

■ *Openness* on the part of administrators and evaluators to give and receive information.

■ *Capacity* of administrators and evaluators to perform their roles effectively.

■ A *reward system* within the agency to give positive reinforcement to administrators for including legitimate evaluative findings in their decisionmaking, and to evaluators for conducting good evaluations or providing useful information.

■ Physical *proximity* of evaluators and managers as well as proximity of research information to the decisionmaking process.

■ *Persistence in communication* between managers and evaluators to promote understanding and acceptance of information.

■ *Linkage* between research and administration through an "administrator-evaluator" or an "evaluator-administrator."

A discussion of each factor follows.

> **Research may be used to clarify logic, arrive at a better understanding of different policy options, make predictions, identify trends, substantiate a previously held position, cast doubt on proposed policies or programs, marshal support for a particular policy or program, confirm that all is well, or shed light on a situation.**

## Agency structure

One important characteristic of an agency that promotes greater use of information is that there exists a formal link between the research and administrative decisionmaking components. For example, the research component should report directly to an office that provides policy direction for the entire agency.

Ideally, the formal link between research and administration should be at a high organizational level, not buried within some small or specialized component. If, for example, evaluators work for the medical services division, it is likely that they will primarily serve medical staff; if evaluators are located in the correctional services division, it is likely that they will investigate security concerns, and so on. However, if the research component

reports to the administrative level that provides policy direction for the entire agency, then the research staff has the link it needs to serve the whole agency.

Another reason for having the evaluation staff report to the top organizational executive or to a division whose primary function is policy review is to help maintain the independence of the evaluation staff from the programs they are evaluating. An evaluator of a correctional program, for example, can be more objective if he or she is not working for the director of that program.

Another important point relating to organizational structure is that evaluation activities should be organized into a functional system to help ensure expert handling of each phase of the evaluation. For example, when the researcher is formulating a project, he or she must systematically seek input on the history of the topic, the current situation, plans for the future, and so on. The evaluator should also specify how the research information will be disseminated to managers and decisionmakers: the use of the data should be a planned and structured activity, not an afterthought.

In the Bureau of Prisons, there have recently been two major changes in the organizational structure that could promote greater use of research information. The first change has been the creation of the Program Review Division. One of its major goals is to help managers integrate information from various sources and use that information in setting goals, evaluating progress, and planning for the future. Thus, Program Review helps managers to function as evaluators of information. Specifically, the branches within Program Review

help managers use various sources of information (the Key Indicators information system, the institution Social Climate Surveys, the Institution Character Profiles, and program reviews) to evaluate their programs.

The second organizational change that promotes use of information was the transfer of the Office of Research and Evaluation first to the Bureau Director's office, and then to a new Information, Policy, and Public Affairs Division. Under the Director's supervision, the Office of Research made an increasing effort to work with managers. In addition, managers from all divisions within the BOP have made increasing numbers of requests for technical assistance and information. A good example of research and management joining forces was in the development of the Key Indicators information system on microcomputers (see article on page 48); research staff have developed an information system that includes data elements rated by top managers as being of critical importance. Another example—the drug treatment program evaluation—was designed with input from the Bureau's "drug czar" in Psychology Services and others (see article on page 32). Here again, research and management worked together; when a manager has a say in the evaluation project, he or she is more likely to use the information.

With the creation of the new division, the function of providing information is raised to the Division level, which should allow the research office to continue to serve the entire agency.

## Openness refers to a readiness to give and receive information, based on the premise that change is desirable and possible; it requires the users of information, to be ready and willing to request assistance.

## Openness

Openness refers to a readiness to give and receive information, based on the premise that change is desirable and possible; it requires administrators, the users of information, to be ready and willing to request assistance. And it requires evaluators to be ready and willing to listen to their needs and to provide assistance by collecting information that will be of use.

One way the Bureau sets the tone for openness is by encouraging a strategic planning process that involves staff at all levels and prompts them to ask questions and debate among themselves.[2] Top management encourages staff retreats so that issues can be discussed in an informal setting. Openness is also encouraged during routine institution visits by administrators who interview staff and inmates, observe operations, and review records. Institution managers informally discuss program achievements and problem areas with the visiting administrators.

## Capacity

For research and evaluation to produce effective results, both administrators and evaluators must have the capacity to do their jobs. Capacity entails having the resources and competence to perform in a satisfactory manner.

*Administrators.* The correctional agency administrator is a key figure in the research and evaluation process. Whether research will have an impact upon agency management may depend more on the attitudes and perspectives of the administrator than on those of the researchers. This conclusion has been validated in studies of the role of the administrator in relation to computerized information systems, operations research divisions, and planning-programming-budgeting activities. However, the task of the administrator with regard to research and evaluation can be difficult.

Part of an administrator's concern about evaluative research comes from the dilemma that research creates—casting the administrator in contradictory roles. On one hand, the success of agency programs (including research) depends on the knowledge and involvement of the top administrator. On the other hand, evaluation carries the potential of discrediting a program sponsored by the administrator or of undermining a position the administrator has previously taken. Therefore, how far can the administrator go in supporting evaluation if it might question his or her programs, decisions, or beliefs?

The degree of support the top administrator gives to research will depend on that individual's style. The "trapped" administrator[3] believes in his or her programs;

if an evaluation indicates that the program lacks effectiveness, this administrator may be inclined to question the validity of the evaluation, or may set the research aside without comment. The "trapped" administrator, therefore, is unlikely to give much support to research. This can be a problem for research staff who may have invested considerable resources in the evaluation. Ignoring legitimate research findings may interfere with needed improvements in agency programs.

On the other hand, the "experimental" administrator is committed, not to a particular program, but to the concept of program and agency improvement. This administrator may be disappointed by findings that question program effectiveness, but will not ignore such findings; they will be considered seriously along with other indicators of program performance. "The experimental administrator is pragmatic, forward-looking, and more interested in finding solutions to problems than in justifying a particular choice of a solution," according to Stewart Adams.[4]

The "experimental" administrator will not disagree with a strong role for research and evaluation. Such an administrator will provide adequate fiscal and organizational support for the evaluative activity, and will provide a climate in which able persons with appropriate training can pursue career opportunities in correctional research.

The Bureau's research office operates within the "experimental" tone set by the Director of the Bureau of Prisons, who encourages research and evaluation. To quote the Director in a recent *Federal Prisons Journal* article (see V1, N1, Summer 1989), "Managers who are used

> ## "Evaluation must become a part of every Bureau activity, not just because it improves our efficiency, but because it ensures a wiser use of public resources."
>
> **J. Michael Quinlan**
> **Director, Bureau of Prisons**

to making decisions 'by feel' will find that they must make use of research findings and powerful information-gathering systems in their daily work. Evaluation must become a part of every Bureau activity, not just because it improves our efficiency, but because it ensures a wiser use of public resources." As mentioned, the Program Review Division has been established to assist Bureau managers in making evaluation a Bureau-wide reality, and the new Information, Policy and Public Affairs Division places special emphasis on increased use of information resources.

*Evaluators.* In our formula, a competent research staff with appropriate education and experience and with sufficient resources to perform its function is a key ingredient in promoting effective use of research. If the administrator provides appropriate resources, climate, opportunities, and access to the decisionmaking process, competent researchers must be fully responsive—pursuing the background of the program or issue to be studied, asking relevant questions of

management to educate themselves, and understanding management concerns before they begin to design a study. Researchers should also be candid about the limitations of their studies and the value of the results to the agency to help decisionmakers arrive at responsible choices. This will lead to better outcomes in the long run.

Although the role of the evaluator in the Bureau is still evolving, research and program review staffs are working, more than ever before, with program staff. For example, the Office of Research and Evaluation's ongoing drug treatment, discipline hearing officer, electronic monitoring, and inmate classification evaluations as well as the population projection project are very much a joint management/research effort.

## Reward system

To increase the influence of research and evaluation, the system must reward evaluators for high-quality evaluation efforts and administrators for incorporating legitimate findings into the decisionmaking process.

It is difficult, however, for managers and researchers to give each other positive reinforcement in cases where there is a major problem with the program or with the research. When administrators and evaluators try to accomplish too much (i.e., they have unrealistic goals or expectations), evaluations do not work out well. Both administrators and evaluators need to take a more modest approach to their jobs by viewing new programs as experiments to be assessed and fine-tuned.

Program managers should specify realistic objectives: similarly, evaluators should measure how well the program meets those realistic objectives and not measure success in grandiose terms. Most evaluations should be designed to measure improvement over current practice rather than having absolute success as the expected outcome. With adjustments in administrative expectations and parallel modifications in evaluation strategy, meaningful assessments of programs can be designed.

Realistic expectations are likely to promote satisfaction rather than disappointment by both managers and evaluators at the completion of a project. Such a climate benefits the agency and sets the tone for future cooperative efforts.

## Proximity

Evaluators must not be in an "ivory tower" within the agency. They should be located close to managers and see them frequently. The evaluator should be able to speak the jargon of the agency and be seen as an insider performing a different function than program staff. Just as the personnel or budget office provides services to the agency, so does the research office.

Besides physical proximity to managers, research information must be available when needed to aid decisionmaking. Evaluative data that are communicated long before or long after a decision will have limited usefulness. Sometimes researchers must modify evaluation designs (perhaps shortening the study period) so that information is available when the decision is to be made. Administrators must also be willing to delay some decisions and to wait for evaluative

---

**In the Bureau, the Key Indicators/ Strategic Support System, the information system on microcomputers, allows managers to retrieve information themselves, when they need it, in their own offices.**

---

results that may be critical to the final decision. This give and take is productive and should result in better decisionmaking.

In the Bureau, the Key Indicators/ Strategic Support System, the information system on microcomputers mentioned earlier, was designed to place information in extremely close proximity to managers—by allowing them to retrieve information themselves, when they need it, in their own offices.

Bureau task forces, wardens advisory groups, and the Executive Staff gather and use information, usually studying particular topics and recommending courses of action. These groups help ensure that necessary information is produced to coincide with decisionmaking by managers.

Sometimes final research results are not available when needed, due to study requirements (perhaps a 2-year followup is involved). In that case, research staff should negotiate short-term objectives

---

that can serve both management and research needs. For example, the research staff could produce interim reports on program aspects of special interest to managers.

Interim reports may also be valuable when researchers are conducting basic research; that is, research that addresses relevant topics but is unlikely to have an applied use in the short term. "Crowding" research would be an example. Deciding how much bedspace to add in what locations would have direct applicability (applied research), but basic research on crowding might look into inmate perceptions of crowding or the relationship of crowding to inmate behavior. Since the "payoff" of basic research is not immediate, interim reports help ensure that managers will receive information when they need it.

## Persistence in communication

Successful use of research requires persistence in communication[5] of relevant research findings. Such information must be repeated until it is understood and absorbed by decisionmakers. Results from various studies on the same subject matter should be organized in a coherent fashion and presented to managers in a variety of formats. These formats should be geared to different audiences, including other researchers, managers in different areas within the agency, and, in some cases, people outside the agency, such as legislators, academicians, and the public.

Evaluators and researchers typically view the end of the evaluation as a final written report. However, if the evaluator wants to be more certain that the findings

will have an impact on the agency, he or she needs to use the link with the administration to communicate the information. It can be presented in formal and informal meetings, through summaries as well as complete written reports, or through talks and slide presentations. Once an administrator sees the researcher as a repository of useful information, the administrator will actually request the needed information as well as offer his or her perspective. Communication then becomes a two-way, active process.

## Linkage

Positive links between research and administration promote the effective use of research. Linkage can be measured by the number, variety, and mutuality of contacts and the degree to which the two systems collaborate. The more links there are, the stronger the connection, and the greater the overall impact each system will have on the other.

There are two potentially effective staff positions within an agency to promote successful formal links. One position is the "administrator-evaluator." This manager may lack formal research training but has a working knowledge of evaluation through experience. He or she typically also manages other functions within the agency, has an understanding of the agency's ongoing information needs, and participates in decisionmaking within the agency. The administrator-evaluator views research as a management tool; his/her role is to translate information needs to an evaluative technician (research analyst), monitor the production of information, and integrate the results into the decisionmaking process.

> **Once an administrator sees the researcher as a repository of useful information, the administrator will actually request the needed information and offer perspective. Communication becomes a two-way process.**

The other position is the "evaluator-administrator," a formally trained researcher who directs the agency's evaluation activities and regularly participates in high-level decisionmaking. This person knows the agency's information needs and can effectively plan for the evaluation support staff to meet those needs.

In the Bureau of Prisons, both types of positions currently exist. The Assistant Director, Program Review Division, is an administrator-evaluator who participates in high-level administrative decisionmaking. She is in a position to understand management and research concerns. The new Assistant Director for Information, Policy, and Public Affairs, the Deputy Assistant Director for the Human Resource Management Division, and the Assistant Commissioner of UNICOR (Federal Prison Industries, Inc.), among others, are all evaluator-administrators and formally trained researchers who can comprehend management and research problems. They are in excellent positions to

promote linkage between research and administration.

I expect the number of Bureau management positions held by persons with research experience to increase each year as "researchers" branch out into administrative positions. This trend will also promote use of research information within the Bureau.

## Focus on relevant topics

Another element which, according to the literature, is very important to increasing the utilization of research information is the focus on relevant topics of high priority to management. If communication between evaluators and administrators is good due to the agency's structure, openness, reward system, and other factors, then evaluators will understand the topics most relevant within the organization. In the Bureau, relevant topics for research should also be apparent as a result of the strategic planning process and program reviews, in which key issues are identified.

The relevance of research to managers' interests needs to be obvious in reports of findings. Some researchers who have an academic orientation place a high value on the autonomy of the research process and stop short of drawing conclusions or recommending action when they report results. However, in reality, the implications of the data are rarely obvious. The program manager, in the absence of written conclusions, may not see the relevance of the findings for his or her program. Therefore, researchers who feel uncomfortable discussing the implications of the data need either to collaborate directly with program personnel to report those implications or to work with planning and development staff on the same task.

## Conclusion

Corrections needs to make greater use of research information to promote better management. With managers and evaluators working together, we can increase the level of information use. Specifically, I have reviewed seven factors that can play a part in increasing the usage of correctional information by integrating evaluation and administration. These factors relate to agency structure, openness, capacity of administrators and evaluators to perform, a reward system, proximity of evaluators and managers, persistence in communication, and linkage between research and administration.

These factors are not discrete; there is much overlap. They complement each other and can help create the climate for the effective use of evaluative, statistical, and other research information. Focus on topics that are relevant and of high priority to management is also critical to increasing research usage.

One word of caution: even when all these factors seem to be working within a correctional agency, information utilization is not guaranteed. Various political, bureaucratic, cultural, and technical considerations affect research use. It seems unlikely that we have the capacity at present to understand and successfully implement strategies to deal with all these factors. However, the more that managers and researchers work together to integrate their functions, the better the outcome should be. ■

---

*Harriet Miller Lebowitz is a Senior Research Analyst in the Office of Research and Evaluation, Federal Bureau of Prisons.*

---

**Corrections needs to make greater use of research information to promote better management. The more that managers and researchers work together to integrate their functions, the better the outcome should be.**

---

## Notes

1. The seven factors were identified by Havelock (1976) and discussed by Attkisson, Hargreaves, and Horowitz (1978), as well as others.

2. See the quote from Tom Peters, management expert, in *Bureau of Prisons goals for 1990 ... and beyond*, p. 2.

3. Stuart Adams describes the "trapped" and "experimental" administrators in *Evaluative research in corrections: a practical guide*, p. 20 .

4. Adams, S., (1975, March), *Evaluative research in corrections: a practical guide*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

5. Havelock uses the term "synergy" rather than "persistence in communications." He defines synergy as the number, variety, frequency, and persistence of forces that can be mobilized to produce a knowledge utilization effect. His discussion of synergy centers on redundancy in messages to the user aimed toward adoption of an
•  innovation.

## References

Adams, S. (1975, March), *Evaluative research in corrections: a practical guide*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Attkisson, C.C., W.A. Hargreaves, M.J. Horowitz, and J.E. Sorensen, eds. (1978), *Evaluation of human service programs*, New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Federal Bureau of Prisons (1989), *Bureau of Prisons goals for 1990 ... and beyond*, Petersburg, VA: UNICOR.

Glaser, E.M., Abelson, H.H., and Garrison, K.N. (1983), *Putting knowledge to use: facilitating the diffusion of knowledge and implementation of planned change*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Havelock, R.G. (1976), *Planning for innovation through dissemination and utilization of knowledge*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Research on Utilization of Scientific Knowledge, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan .

Lovell, R. (1988, June), "Research utilization in complex organizations: a case study in corrections," *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 257-280.

Quinlan, J.M. (1989, Summer), "The future of Federal corrections," *Federal Prisons Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 11-14.

Rausch, S.P. (1989), "Using research to manage more effectively, efficiently, and responsively in the Federal Prison System," paper presented at the 1989 meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Reno, Nevada, Washington, D.C.: Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Rich, R.F. (1981), *Social science information and public policy making*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Roberg, R.R., and Webb, V.J. (1981) *Critical issues in corrections: problems, trends. and prospects*, St. Paul: West Publishing.

Smith, R.L. (1981, February), "Welcome aboard the tiger—strategies for change and/or survival," in *Correctional Management*, American Correctional Association Monographs Series 1, Number 2, College Park, Maryland: American Correctional Association, pp. 5-14.

Tichy, N.M. (1983), *Managing strategic change: technical, political, and cultural dynamics*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Weiss, C., and Bucuvalas, M.J. (1980), *Social science research and decision-making*, New York: Columbia University Press.