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Goal Facilitation as a Probation Administration Strategy

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THROUGHOUT recent years, much has been written on the desirability, if not necessity, for modern correctional organizations to establish goals, and back up those goals with effective actions whereby they can be achieved. In 1975, Robert M. Latta and Jack Cocks presented an effective challenge to the Federal Probation Service, pointing out quite clearly that the time is upon the profession to move ahead with the setting and accomplishing of goals and objectives.¹

At the same time, Probation and Parole organizations have been under continuous and careful scrutiny by outside agencies that have demanded a more readily defined product in return for the correctional tax dollar, as well as some definite measures of success. Needless to say, most often, the correctional agencies under such scrutiny have fallen far short of the expectations expressed by those reviewing investigative organizations. At the caseload level, review today still reveals that although more and more often case goal setting is becoming an accepted practice, few cases show evidence of appropriate action having been taken toward the accomplishment of those goals. The blame for this continuing deficiency only lightly rests on the shoulders of the professional probation and parole officer, but is more a result of fragmented administration direction found in many correctional organizations. Although the need for goal setting and achievement continues until the statement becomes almost trite, few organizations have actually demonstrated a true desire to establish their administrative activities toward the ends of facilitating the accomplishment of operational goals.

After Goals, Then What?

Today, most probation and parole administrators have established goals for their organizations. Likewise, more and more individual caseload carrying officers have identifiable goals contained in case files indicating certain objectives seen by

that officer as necessary for proper case adjustment. Yet, the establishment of goals is often as far as a probation office will go in its efforts to carry out its correctional effort. From here, the actions become disjointed. What is quite often lacking in both administrative and caseload objectives is a strategy of action to effect goal achievement and a direct relationship between the caseload goals and those of the organization. Through a strategy statement containing observable actions, the activities of both administration and line officer can be compared in an effort to evaluate whether or not those acts will, in fact, lead to the achievement of stated goals and objectives.

It is the actions taken by an organization as a whole that will define its effectiveness more than its goals. Congruency of goals is not a difficult task, nor the most critical. It is ensuring that all levels of an organizational structure are moving in a unified direction with their actions to maximize the end of achieving its stated goals. What is commonly found to be dysfunctional is the fact that often the steps taken to effect administrative goal achievement actually impair the achievement of objectives set by the line officer.

An example might prove helpful in illustrating this point. It is safe to assume that most probation and parole organizations have, as one of the stated objectives, the effective delivery of available community services to the client. Instead of analyzing each community and its services and the individual officer's ability to secure those available resources, most often cases are assigned on a purely geographical basis that may cut across service areas and exclude certain needs from being met. Just as often, cases and caseload areas are assigned to officers on a seniority basis with little thought given to the needs of the client. Frequently, caseloads with a high concentration of non-English speaking clients end up assigned to officers unable to determine client service requirements because of a language barrier. It is this kind of incongruity between stated objectives

¹ Robert M. Latta and Jack Cocks, "Management Strategies for Federal Probation Offices in Metropolitan Areas," FEDERAL PROBATION, September 1975.

and subsequent actions at administrative levels that regularly proves to lessen an operation's effectiveness.

Overall, it is this conflict of actions that can have a serious detrimental effect on a probation and parole structure. In fact, a correctional organization's growth potential is, to a large extent, limited by the degree to which the actions of administration and line officers conflict in their efforts to achieve the same overall goals.

The Impulse To Manage

Although the overall growth effect produced by outside scrutiny of correctional programs has been productive, there has been a definite increase in the defensiveness of the overall correctional atmosphere. J.R. Gibb in his discussion of group climate, speaks of both supportive and defensive climates.² Briefly, a defensive administrative climate is produced and characterized by an emphasis on management by controls and censuring. On the other hand, a supportive climate is achieved by an administrative attitude of willingness to share in goal achievement and enter into a cooperative effort.

The increase in the defensive climate of many probation and parole administrations is not terribly surprising. Left alone, correctional organizations may indeed have developed into supportive and facilitative structures, even if not economical. Somewhat regular and embarrassing outside evaluations of effectiveness have, however, had some dysfunctional results in that there has been a continuous movement away from the role of administration being one of goal facilitation.

For example, if an investigative agency such as the General Accounting Office audits a Probation and Parole Organization and has as one of its results that probationers are not being seen as often as they should, many organizations have, as their immediate response, the establishment of new case classification and accountability systems, the initiation of punishment systems to deal with officers not making contacts, and possibly a public policy statement to reflect a decision to make more contacts. This is, to a large degree, a defensive response that will have the effect of creating a defensive atmosphere that can eventually characterize the entire organization. A more appropriate response might be to determine *why* cases have

not been seen, and seek to provide a facilitative network of administrative actions to increase the probability that those contacts will be made. The development of new tracking systems, or other management tools, is likely to either have little effect, or possibly even impede and restrict line officer's efforts to make more contacts unless the means of increasing the contacts to be tracked are first introduced.

As seen so frequently, the first impulse of many correctional administrators is to manage. This comes so easily when compared to the real challenge of achieving lofty goals of rehabilitation or the protection of society that basically rely on faith in the correctional process and have few, if any, tangible products. Management may indeed be a most urgent need in production rather than process oriented organizations. It is still difficult to envision, however, a production company initiating management tools that might have the net effect of reducing production level. This happens repeatedly in the field of probation and parole.

What it comes down to is that management is only as useful as its ability to facilitate and increase the probability that the goals of the organization as a whole can be achieved.

This somewhat less than flattering evaluation of impulsive management in no way allows for the dismissal of professional accountability in the field of probation and parole. Accountability and statistical integrity of probation organizations is something that should be a cornerstone of any well-conceived operation. However, the notion of an over-zealous management effort leaves the logic of accountability behind in its efforts to continue to dwell on the simplistic, traditionally measurable activities of correctional organizations. It is a fixation of the byproducts of the correctional process without any analysis as to how those byproducts lend to, or impede, a total organizational effort in goal achievement.

If anything, present ideas of organizational accountability do not go nearly far enough in expressing the worth of either the individual line officer or the entire operation. Today, nearly every probation and parole agency has the statistical capability to count such things as number of cases, numbers of ~~see~~ contacts, cases with or without employment, and so on. This is not true accountability since few correctional organizations have as their main objective the maintenance of certain numbers of offenders, or certain numbers of actions by their professional staff. The true objec-

² J.R. Gibb, "Factors Producing Defensive Behavior Within Groups," IV, Annual Technical Report, Office of Naval Research, November 15, 1957.

tives are those anticipated and achieved results arising from the interaction between offender and the corrections professional. It is here that action facilitation becomes the most complete form of accountability system, not only for the individual officer, but also in analyzing the efforts of the larger parent organization.

To effect this higher level of accountability, it is apparent that line officers must be held accountable for their observable efforts to facilitate the total resocialization of the offender. However, this is not where agency accountability should end even though it quite often does. As will be pointed out continuously in this article, it is the levels above the line officer, the administrative levels, that frequently lose sight of their roles as facilitators of subordinate actions that are, in turn, to lead to goal achievement. Line officer professional accountability should be a given fact in modern correctional organizations and is swiftly reaching that level. However, the administrative accountability for actions taken to achieve goals is still relatively new and virgin territory for even the most sophisticated urban probation offices.

The Evaluation of Organizational/ Operational Change

Service delivery in process organizations such as probation and parole are constantly changing, both organizationally and procedurally. Many such changes are imposed from outside the organization, but just as many have their point of initiation from within. In many correctional organizations, these changes are so rapid that if an employee was to have a 2-year break in service with such an organization, they might find, upon return, that there has been sufficient alteration of procedural activities as to render the job unrecognizable. What happens all too often is that many changes within an organization are conceived and initiated with little thought given to the effect that those changes will have on facilitating the achievement of the organization's goals and objectives.

All changes have some degree of facilitative effect on goal achievement and must be evaluated on that basis before being initiated. Since probation and parole organizations have as their main function the dispensing of probation and parole services through the efforts of line probation and parole officers, changes that may prove to be useful in their management qualities, and therefore positive, may, in fact, impede a probation officer's

efforts to deliver the services required by the organization. The ideal change is one that facilitates the completion of activities performed by those charged with providing probation services. Although this ideal is seldom achieved, quite often resulting in some trade-off, the frightening thing is that many administrative changes are made without being subjected to this type of analysis and are entered into on the basis of immediacy and expediency. That is to say, that often administrative decisions and changes are discussed only as to how they might expedite an administration's efforts to observe, organize, and provide sanctions with regard to subordinates, with little thought given to how they affect the performance of the line officer's job. This leads to a condition whereby management proceeds and exists in order to provide management as an end in itself rather than as a facilitative body directed toward goal achievement and allowing an atmosphere where probation services could most easily be rendered.

Another often occurring phenomenon is the attempt by naive administrators to overlook the dysfunctional aspects of a change or decision on the pretense that "in the long-run" such a decision will facilitate the line officer's efforts to carry out the organizational goals. In practice, however, a stumbling block now only tends to become a barrier, or something to be avoided the longer it exists. It may even become accepted, but will most likely never change from a stumbling block to a facilitative agent.

One of the most often observed examples of this type of problem centers around the distribution of workload in a probation organization. Unless new tasks are analyzed on the degree to which these tasks interact with present workload, often what is developed is a condition whereby a newly introduced task will impede the completion of other duties and thereby reduce the effectiveness of an officer's overall performance. We often find ourselves in the position of being the waiter who is asked to take an order from a nearby table that is not his station. Although to do so would certainly expedite the achievement of the goal to serve the customers with food, there are restrictions based on reasons aside from goal achievement that actually slow down the process. Goal facilitation as a measure for policy and procedural change as well as an evaluation point for present policy is ultimately how we, as a system can increase our output of service delivery.

Goal facilitation and sound organizational man-

agement are not all mutually exclusive, but are only incompatible when management techniques are not evaluated on the basis of their facilitative worth. Through effective action facilitation, a probation and parole administration can more easily reach the step of monitoring, controlling, and managing the correctional process by reducing barriers to goal achievement that are often the product of an overly zealous management effort.

A Revised Look at the Role of the First Line Supervisor in Probation

Recent articles dealing with the field of probation administration still emphasize the dichotomy between the field officer and administration as if there is an inevitable clash or divergence of goals. Although this may sadly be the case in most probation and parole organizations, it is far from inevitable and certainly provides for dysfunction in a goal-directed organization.

Along with this traditional view, the first line probation supervisor is still seen as "somewhere in the middle," mediating, analyzing, clarifying, and transmitting communications between the field and administration. Supervisors are still being warned of the dangers of over-identification with either line staff or higher administration.

Instead, it is suggested that probation staff supervisors should be viewed as facilitators. This view transcends the conventional definition placing him or her as either a representative of administration or line staff. Nor is the supervisor seen any longer as "in-between." As a facilitative agent, the role of staff supervisor becomes an integral part of the continuum of direction from chief executive to line officer.

Examples abound of how the facilitative role of the first line supervisor continues to be neglected. In an April 1976 Supervisory Development Program undertaken by the United States Probation Office in the Central District of California where prospective supervisors had the task of formulating a position description for a supervising U.S. probation officer, the results were as follows:

Basic Function—serves as the supervisor of a unit of Probation Officers in the District Probation Office, assisting in the management, direction, coordination and control of the unit and officer activities to achieve maxi-

mum service effectiveness consistent with the balanced best interest of the Court, the U.S. Parole Commission, clients, employees, and the general public; shares in the development of a responsibility for the basic objectives, policies, plans, programs, and financial requirements of the office; appraises the performance of the services of officers and the operations in the light of approved objectives, plans, policies, and budgets; takes or recommends actions to ensure improvement.³

Without using a great deal of imagination, nowhere in this basic function description does it speak to the supervisor's role as a facilitator of subordinate actions directed toward goal achievement. Earlier attempts at the same task by other similar groups of prospective supervisors proved equally ineffectual, speaking in their position descriptions of "supervising, organizing and evaluating" with little thought given to facilitating what they were eventually to supervise, organize and evaluate.

Viewing the first line probation supervisor as a goal facilitator also transcends the earlier view of the supervisor as a "helper" to line staff as envisioned by Edward W. Garrett in 1963.⁴ Here again, Garrett makes little reference to what is seen as the ideal of a facilitative philosophy underlying all levels of a probation organization's administrative structure. This is more than merely helping an officer in the performance of his or her duties. This means establishing organizational goals and the related actions necessary to achieve those goals by making sure those actions do not frustrate efforts at any other level to achieve the overall objectives. The supervisor should exist to maximize the probability of a successful correctional process.

The previously noted impulse to manage has also well been documented when analyzing the existing role of the first line supervisor in probation. Joan Carrera, in her article on a probation supervisor's job, probably best touches on the tendency of many probation administrators to see management as their major responsibility. She states that a supervisor

should not be so preoccupied with minute details and the meeting of deadlines that he overlooks the objectives of the agency. His intent should be to help his workers improve their functioning so that as they become more competent, the goals of the agency can be better fulfilled.⁵

Yona Cohen, in a much later article, points out the realization that staff supervisors can obstruct the Probation Officer's growth and usefulness if there is over-emphasis on the supervisory role employed by the supervisor.⁶ Both writers, how-

³ This exercise was part of a 6-month training program to recruit and develop supervisors from existing line staff. The author was one of the participants.

⁴ Edward W. Garrett, "Improvement of Officer Performance Through Supervision," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, September 1963.

⁵ Joan Carrera, "Some Thoughts on the Probation Supervisor's Job," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, September 1968.

⁶ Yona Cohen, "Staff Supervision in Probation," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, September 1976.

ever, do little to offer a means of rethinking probation staff supervision to avoid many of these common barriers. What is being suggested here is that the first line probation supervisor no longer be taught to view the position as "in the middle" of two forces. Rather, the position should be seen as an integral part of an overall effort within which the supervisor can be dedicated to achieving the goals of the entire organization through the facilitation of subordinate actions. Once this is accomplished, the rather mechanical aspects of management become easier, and certainly more relevant to the organization as a whole.

This rethinking of the probation supervisor's role is also an aid in the evaluation of a supervisor's overall performance on the job. Supervisors can best be evaluated on the basis of observed action steps taken to facilitate the goal facilitating actions of the officers supervised.

By way of illustration, supervisors should be engaged in such activities as public relations, community resource development, the reduction of redundant and unnecessary steps in investigation and case supervision, the improvement of physical conditions for officers, regular and frequent supportive individual case evaluation and so on. It is these types of actions taken by supervisors that lend themselves to evaluation of his or her real worth to an organization. In spite of this, many organizations still feel that the measure of a supervisor is how he or she limits, controls, observes, and acts as a voice for administration rather than how that supervisor takes appropriate actions such as those described above that enhance, expand, and facilitate the efforts of the line officer charged with the duty of day-to-day dispensing of the correctional process.

Action Facilitation and the Team Concept

Probably one of the most popular, and possibly accurate views of the role of probation officer is that the officer is ideally an agent of change. In other words, the officer should be a catalyst or facilitator for appropriate actions on the part of the probationer that would have the recognized

effect of social reintegration of the offender. Many old and new approaches to community supervision of offenders such as Community Resources Management Teams, continue to stress the facilitative, active role of the probation officer over the more passive position of observation, surveillance, and reporting.^{7,8} However, to really be seen as an effective role for the probation officer to assume, this role identification must permeate the entire probation organization from chief executive to the most subordinate. As pointed out above, if a first line supervisor is to hold a line probation officer accountable for taking necessary steps to facilitate a probationer reaching a certain goal, then the supervisor should be equally held accountable for the facilitative worth of his or her actions providing support for the officers to complete those steps. This accountability should continue up the administrative ladder.

An earlier view of the team concept in probation by Patrick J. Murphy in 1975, marks several good efforts by some probation organizations to look at their structure for possible realignment to maximize goal achievement.⁹ Little emphasis, however, is given by Murphy to the role of administration in the team concept of service delivery. It is assumed that, to be effective, these models must also include every level of management as team members dedicated to facilitating the achievement of realistic agency goals. Too often, probation organizations view action facilitation as a good thing for supervision officers to do, yet administratively, make little effort toward these same ends.

Conclusion

In total agreement with Latta and Cocks¹⁰ that probation is at a point in its development where it can truly begin to achieve many of the goals and aspirations stated for so long, what is being suggested is a revised attitudinal orientation for probation administrators. Many organizations have reached the point in their development where there is an ideological congruency existing at all levels within their hierarchy of organizational structure. Now what is needed is a strategy to achieve those goals through compatible and functional actions by all members of the correctional agency.

The next step following goal identification should not be the establishment of systems to measure whether or not the goals and objectives have been achieved. It should instead be the

⁷ Program—Community Resources Management Team, Training Activity—Corrections Program, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, National Institute of Corrections, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice, September 20, to October 1, 1976.

⁸ Frank Dell'Apra, W. Tom Adams, James D. Jorgensen, Herbert R. Segurdson, "Advocacy, Brokerage, Community: The ABC's of Probation & Parole," FEDERAL PROBATION, December 1976.

⁹ Patrick J. Murphy, "The Team Concept," FEDERAL PROBATION, December 1975.

¹⁰ Latta and Cocks, *op. cit.*

analysis of organizational actions and practices to determine whether they facilitate, or in fact impede, the process of goal achievement. It is from this analysis that sound management tools and devices will flow, not the reverse. It is time that the idea of professional accountability move beyond merely the counting of actions taken by a certain officer or even a certain organization. The state of the art now permits an analysis of those actions on the worth of this facilitative nature in achieving the overall goals of our business. We can no longer answer charges of ineffectiveness with a mere tally of numbers, but must genuinely make an effort to demonstrate how those numbers relate to an agency's efforts to achieve its goals. Through creative administration, both management tasks and facilitative tasks can be blended, if only administrators can begin to view their

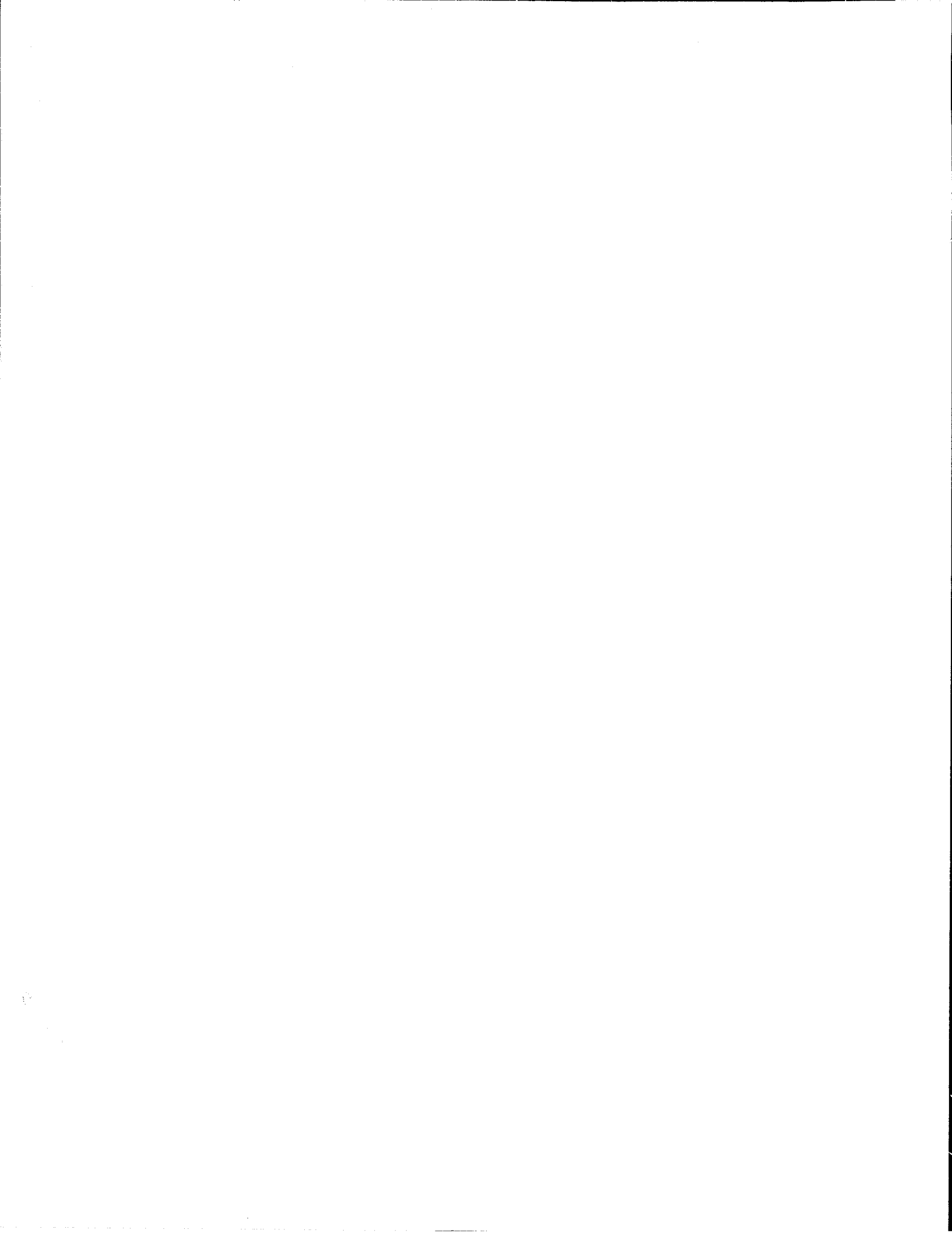
actions critically with respect to their facilitative value.

When seen from this orientation, the evaluation of probation officers and probation offices becomes simplified and relevant.

A line officer is only as good as his or her actions to facilitate change with clients under supervision. A first line supervisor is only as good as his or her actions to facilitate the officer's ability to effect those changes, and so on up the table of organization. Ultimately, the worth of a probation operation as a service can only, and should, be evaluated on its readily observable efforts at facilitating the accomplishment of its stated goals. Those that make a concerted effort to reduce administrative barriers in the path of this direction are, at least, increasing the probability that they will succeed.

IDEOLOGICALLY, Federal Probation is at a point in time and in development where the assumption of leadership in solving problems of organization and structure would go a long way in bringing about the kinds of change—meeting of goals—that society has mandated correctional administrators to achieve. The degree to which success is accomplished, through empirical and experimental models, may be a real contribution to criminal justice administrative theory. Above all, however, is the recognition that the emerging role of the professional, be he subordinate, supervisor, or executive, must be as an individual whose personal goals and behavior are congruent and appropriate to the goals of the organization.

—ROBERT M. LATTA AND JACK COCKS



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