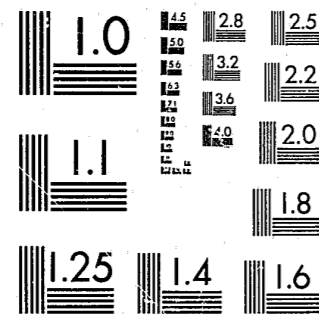


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A Periodic Review of Criminal Justice Evaluation

NCJRS

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73689

X
AN EVALUATION WITH PRIDE

From the vantage point of evaluator for Project New Pride, I have learned about juvenile delinquency. Project New Pride of Denver, Colorado is a community based program accepting the juvenile probationer with a record of several offenses and social adjustment problems for a year of intensive, individualized treatment.

I learned about exemplary projects since the National Institute has designated Project New Pride as an Exemplary Project. New Pride was also selected as "Agency of the Year" by the Colorado Juvenile Council and has been visited by legislators, state planners, and members of the judiciary from 22 states.

Mostly, I learned about evaluation. From its inception, Project New Pride has been developing an evaluation capacity. The adaptations of the evaluation process for Project New Pride have proved highly instructional in the quest for useful evaluations.

What's It All About

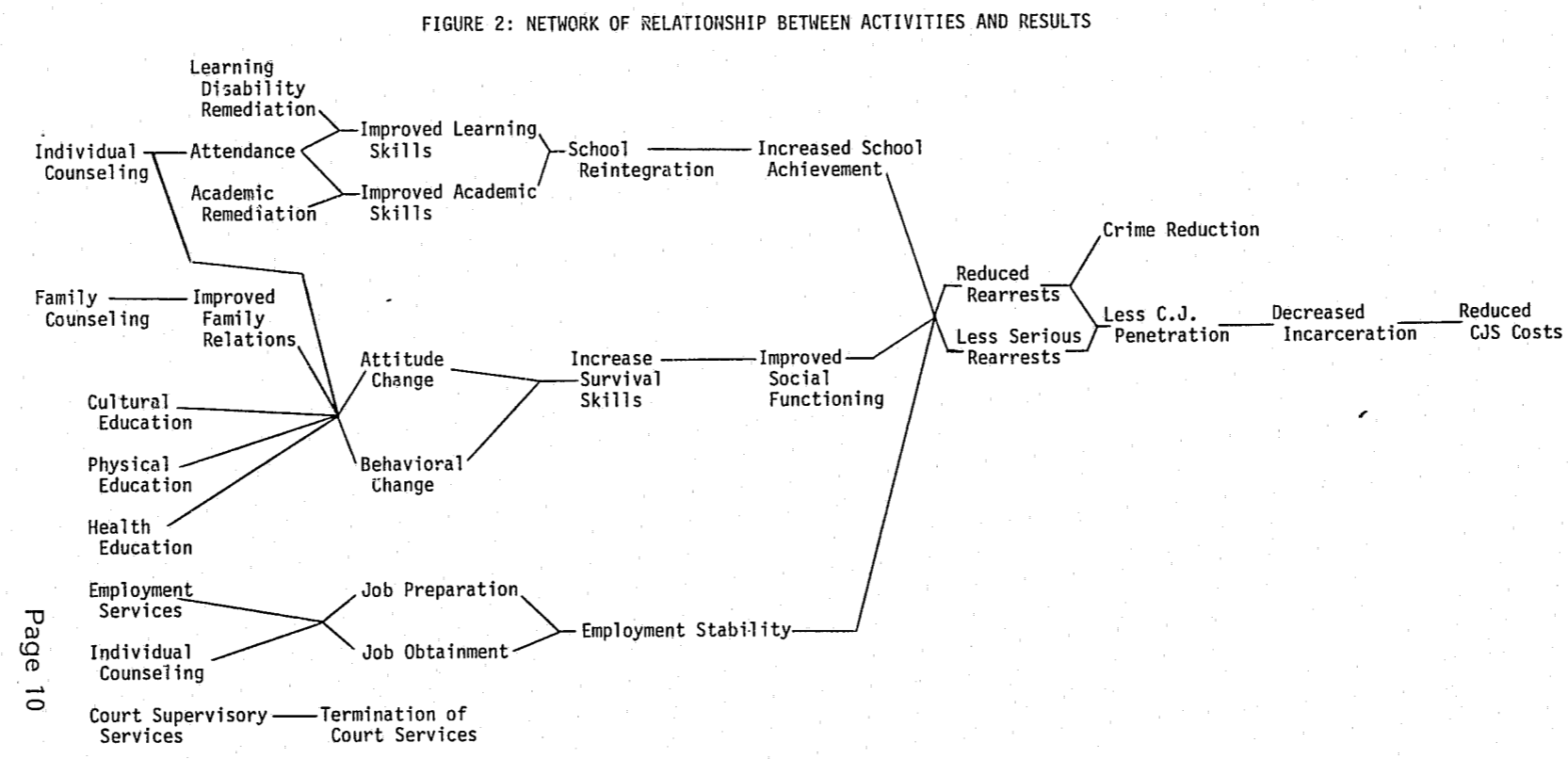
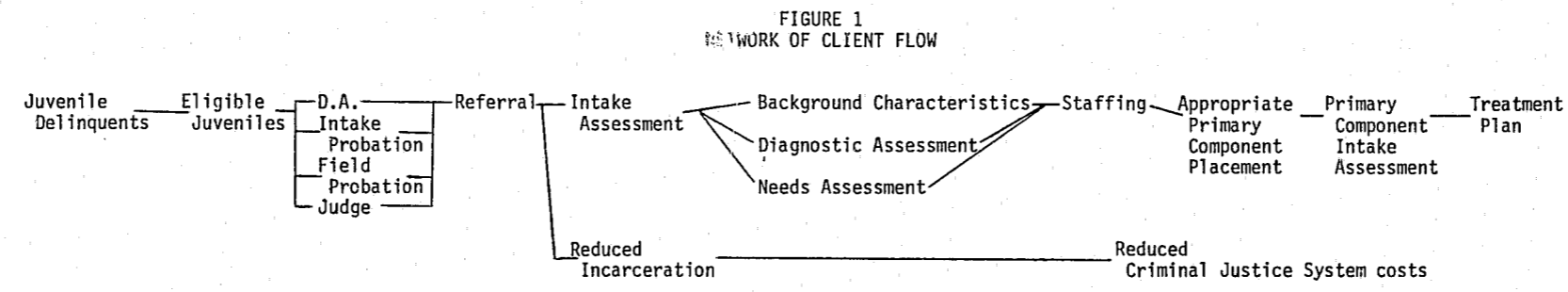
New Pride operates on the premise that an individual must confront his problems in his own environment, i.e. within the community. To do this the offender must be guided in adopting and maintaining conventional life styles as an alternative to delinquent life styles. Within this capacity, New Pride provides an array of services including alternative schooling, correction of learning disabilities, vocational training, job placement, counseling, recreation and cultural activities.

In order to establish the composite of service options best serving the needs of the individual client, an intake assessment is completed. The result of the diagnostic tests and needs assessment is a treatment plan with client objectives and a service delivery plan to meet those objectives. The flow of clients through the intake process is diagrammed in Figure 1.

Treatment plans are formulated and a client is placed into a primary component where responsibility for the administration of the treatment plan resides. Figure 2 represents the basic theoretical framework underlying the New Pride model. The project activities are expected to produce increased school achievement, improve social functioning, and employment stability. These immediate results are predicted to favorably influence the criminal behavior of clients, and thereby, reduce recidivism.

Looking for Godot

The original evaluation plans for Project New Pride called for an experimental design where a random sample of juveniles were selected from the eligible pool of juveniles for treatment within the project. The control group was to receive the traditional court services. However, plans had to be altered when it became obvious that the eligible pool was not large enough to divide into an experimental and control group. The size of the eligible pool of juveniles was directly influenced by the willingness of the referral sources to refer a juvenile to New Pride.



After some soul-searching discussions it became clear that the referral sources were not interested in the answers to questions which were being posed through the use of an experimental design. They were not committed to knowing what would happen to a client if it were not for New Pride. Rather, they remain interested in making the most appropriate referral for any given client. The Denver juvenile district attorney, probation officers, and juvenile judges are committed to establishing the most appropriate penetration for each and every juvenile. It came as no surprise that they rejected a control group.

The next selection was a factorial design in order to study within project differences. A strong factorial design allows for random placement into different treatment conditions, thereby controlling for selection bias. For Project New Pride this would have required randomly placing juveniles into the three primary components of Intensive Counseling, Morgan Center for Learning Disabilities, and the New Pride Alternative School.

The problems were obvious. How could a learning disabled child be placed in Intensive Counseling while giving learning disability remediation to a child without learning deficiencies? The guiding philosophy of Project New Pride involves a wholistic treatment for project clients based on an individualized treatment plan. What next?

The evaluation of New Pride was in jeopardy of uselessness. The focus had been on the establishment of relative effectiveness. Was Project New Pride more effective than traditional court services? What component in the New Pride model was the most effective? Without the aid of experimental or factorial evaluation designs, such questions remain unanswered.

Does Anybody Really Care?

While the evaluator was mourning the lost, she noticed that project management and staff were unmoved. As it turned out, the questions being asked by the evaluation were rather uninteresting, if not distasteful, to project personnel. The issue at hand was the judgment of effectiveness.

How was effectiveness measured? Did the collected data represent all the positive gains achieved by the project? Would the errors in data collection, analysis and interpretation override accuracy? The questions were focused on the reliability and validity of outcome measurements.

Experimental and factorial designs are of little use without an adequate measure of outcomes. It is not necessary to lament the measurement problems inherent in criminal justice variables such as recidivism rates, public school attendance figures, survival skill improvement, etc. We are here to uncover the usefulness of an evaluation when it is not possible to make valid comparisons external or internal to the project and when the measurement of differential effectiveness is problematic.

The Ol' Black Box Just Ain't What It Used To Be

At New Pride, evaluation questions began to be framed in the context of project implementation. It continued to be important to know whether New Pride was effective, but to answer that question a descriptive rather than comparative, approach was taken.

Example evaluation questions:

- What information is used to determine treatment plans?
- To what extent are treatment plans implemented?
- What is the breadth and frequency of services rendered?
- What is the relationship between project services?
- What configuration of services produce positive and negative results?
- What are the differential effects of project activities across types of juvenile offenders?

Figure 3 provides an overview of the evaluation model for the study of the implementation of Project New Pride in terms of impact on clients.

Where Have All the Data Gone?

The wholistic philosophy of the New Pride model has resulted in a data intensive approach to answering the evaluation questions. Clients are involved in many varied activities with project staff. Services are provided by different staff members in isolation or simultaneously. Clients are transferred between components in order to carry out a treatment plan or to meet a newly discovered crisis. Treatment plans are revised to keep abreast of client needs and progress. Client progress is tracked for a twelve month period in school, work and the juvenile justice system. For all these reasons and more, there are currently over one-thousand data elements collected on each client. The data element dictionary has been changing and expanding for over three years. The complexity of the data collection system has been challenging.

Historically, evaluations have been plagued with problems in attempting to capture timely, uniform, and complete data sets. The evaluation at New Pride is no exception.

Prior to a computerized system, Project New Pride had to rely on a manual system of report generation. The manual system was slow but, more importantly, was unable to report on the interrelationships between data elements. It was impossible to interpret numbers of services rendered without knowing the client objectives. As the project developed, it was the linkages between treatment plans, service delivery and outcomes which were of particular interest.

From a manual system, New Pride converted to a "batch" processing orientation. The computer analysis and feed back stages of this system were typically several months subsequent to the origin of the data at the project site. A typical scenario involved submission of data collection forms, keypunching of data, creation of the data base, pre-processing of data (i.e. cleaning and editing data), feedback to projects of inaccurate and incomplete data, resubmission of data collection forms, and updating the data base. All these steps were preliminary to the actual computer analysis to generate management reports and conduct statistical analysis. Such an approach to data base development was a little utility for decision-making purposes.

FIGURE 3:
EVALUATION OF IMPACT ON CLIENTS

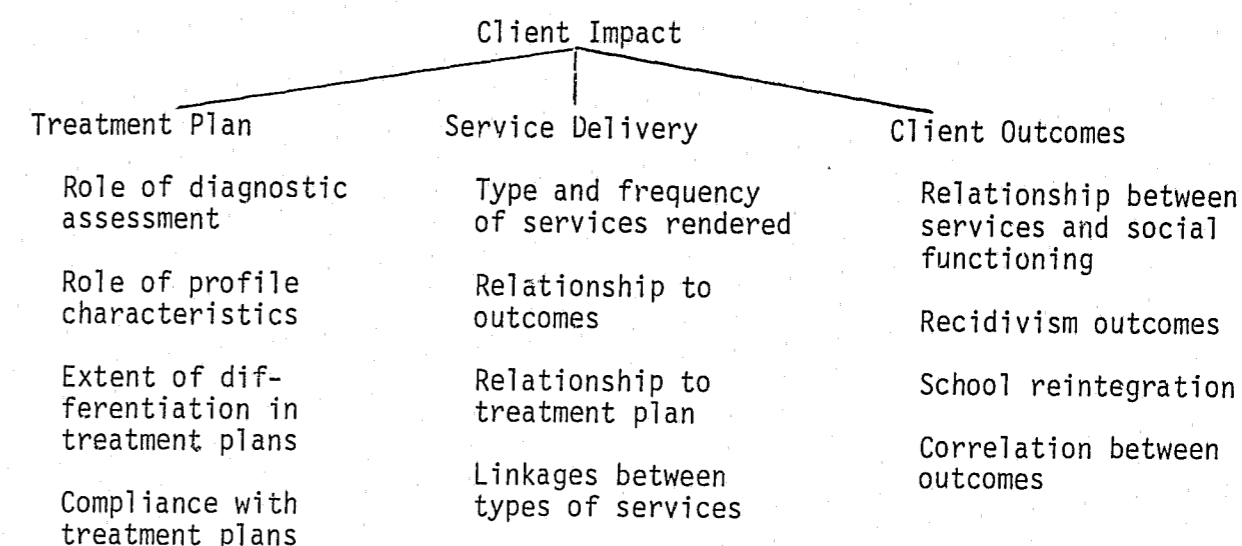
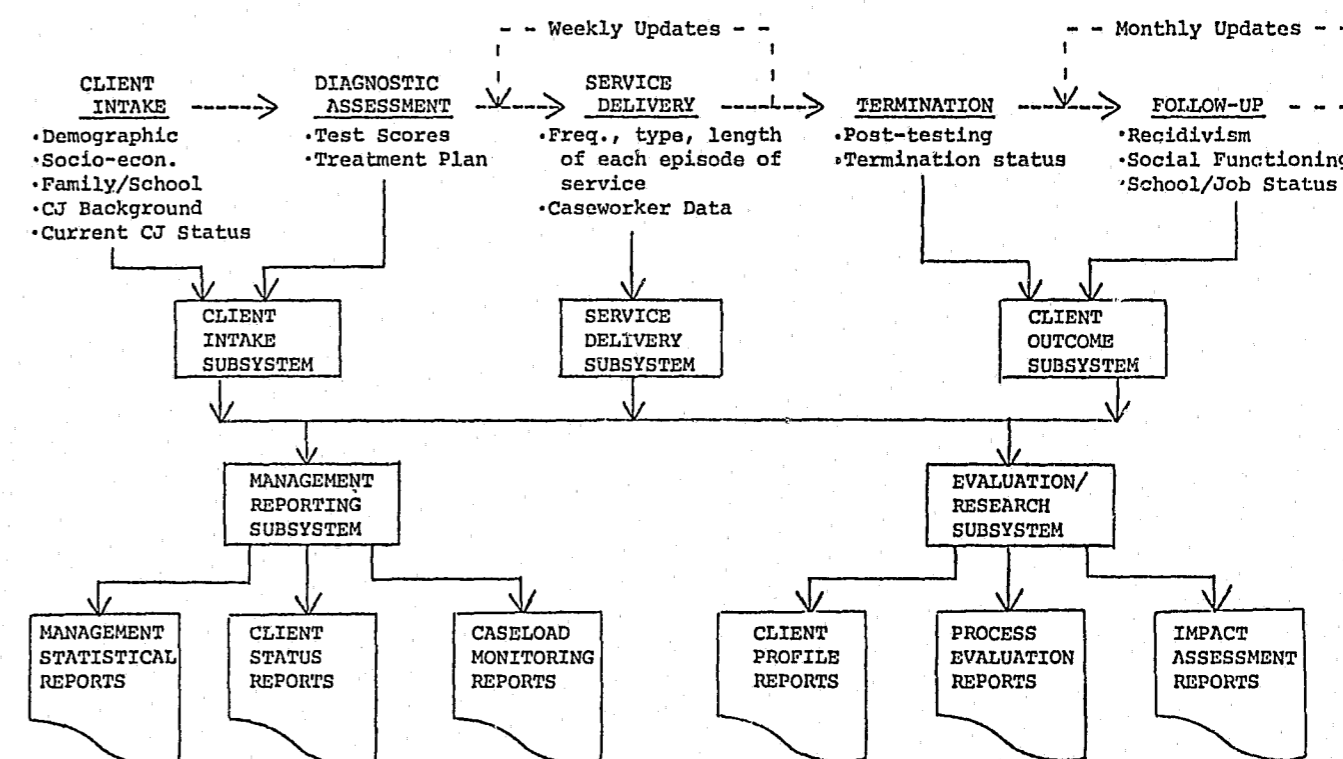


FIGURE 4:

CLIENT-BASED MIS



The extensive data needs for the evaluation of New Pride required an innovative approach to data collection. A Management Information System (MIS) was designed to perform the following functions:

Provide a system for monitoring service delivery activities on a client-specific basis throughout the treatment process.

Provide a system for tracking and analyzing client outcome data.

Provide a system for generating accurate and timely population accounting statistics for external reporting purposes to referring and funding agencies.

Provide a system to support internal project management needs.

The MIS was created to be a system for collection, storage and retrieval of the many data elements captured on a client-specific basis at several points in the client processing cycle. To accomplish this, data entry occurs at the project site by way of remote terminals. The remote data entry via teletype terminals provides project staff and the evaluator with an accurate, complete, and timely data base. In addition, the MIS facilitates management report generation due to the conversational mode of the system. And it is the most cost effective method of meeting the informational needs of New Pride.

The discussion, thus far, has centered upon the rationale, design considerations and system configuration for the client based on the MIS. It is now appropriate to outline the relationship between the evaluation questions, case processing information flows and data capture for the MIS. Figure 4 displays a system flowchart representation for the MIS. The figure illustrates the five key client processing points and examples of categories of data to be collected at each processing point. Each category of data represents a string of data elements. It should be clear that data originate at each sequential processing step for juveniles participating in the project. Two of the five steps shown, service delivery and follow-up, actually represent a series of data base updates since these steps consist of lengthy time spans whereas the other steps are short-duration activities.

The linkage between the MIS and the evaluation questions is quite obvious. The MIS provides for the collection of variables and statistical software that can be utilized to test each hypothesis that relates specifically to clients. The MIS addresses evaluation issues related to project structure, processes and outcomes.

The Quest

In the final analysis, any approach to evaluation must be judged by its usefulness. Comparative designs are useful in their ability to advance scientific knowledge concerning the relative effectiveness (assuming it is possible to measure effectiveness) of various treatment alternatives. Due to the nature and the environment of Project New Pride, it was impossible to establish distinct comparison groups. However, all was not lost. Project personnel and management felt that their chance to utilize evaluation results increased when the evaluation relied on a descriptive methodology with immediate feedback on project activities and results.

The Management Information System at Project New Pride has been designed to assist case managers in tracking the correspondence between the treatment plan, service record and client progress; to give competent supervisors one more tool in the monitoring of project staff caseloads; to have project managers view the system as a composite, as well as trace answers to relationships suggested by the reports. The MIS at Project New Pride will be operating on a complete data base by September 1980. It is too soon to rest final judgment on the utility of the MIS as a diagnostic tool for project development and change. However, initial indications are favorable.

Evaluations in criminal justice have been challenged to produce results which reduce the uncertainty surrounding decisions. The quest is for evaluators to adapt, react, and adapt to changing conditions so as to search and provide information which will have the greatest utilization. The longevity and commitment of Project New Pride and the National Institute to evaluation had provided this evaluator with an arena in which to dream the impossible dream.

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EVALUATION AXIOMS

If you have a favorite evaluation axiom (or rule, or cartoon), please send it to the editor. Thanks, I need some contributions.

"Booker's Law: An ounce of application is worth a ton of abstraction."

"Clarke's First Law: When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong."

"Clarke's Second Law: The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible."

"Levy's Ninth Law: Only God can make a random sample."

All these axioms are quoted from Arthur Bloch's MURPHY'S LAW (Price/Stern/Sloan Publishers, Inc. -- Los Angeles, California).

END