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## BRIEFER CONTRIBUTIONS

### EVALUATING THE RESULTS OF PROBATION

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My own interest in this problem dates from the time a good many years ago, when I served for several months as a volunteer probation officer. Even that brief first-hand experience left with me a deep impression of the heavy responsibility which rests on the probation officer, the difficulties and perplexities attending his work, and the wonderful opportunities for human service which probation work affords.

The Director of the U. S. Bureau of Prisons, the Honorable Sanford Bates, when he organized our Statistical Division, felt that one of its principal functions should be to test scientifically the results of all our operations. So far as probation is concerned, the need for evaluation is becoming steadily more acute, along with the expansion of the Federal Probation System. Since July 1, 1930, the number of full-time salaried probation officers has increased from 8 to 63, while the number of probationers under their supervision has grown from 4,281 on July 1, 1930 to 20,200 on April 1, 1932—an increase of 372 per cent in less than two years.

In this paper, I shall approach the problem of evaluation by answering these three questions:

- (1) *Why* evaluate probation?
- (2) *How* evaluate probation?
- (3) *Who* should evaluate probation?

*First, why should probation work be evaluated?* Certainly, evaluation is not necessary as a basis for deciding whether probation should be continued as a method of treating delinquency. For the usefulness of probation has long ago been fully demonstrated. At the same time, the scientific evaluation of the results of probation should furnish additional evidence of its value and thus promote its further extension.

There is, however, another and a more important reason for undertaking the task of evaluation, and that is, to test working efficiency, as a basis for improvement in methods. I believe it is fair to say that the probation movement as a whole has completed its first phase of development, which might be called the propaganda or educational period. During this period, most probation departments have largely depended upon rule-of-thumb, hit-or-miss methods of judging the results of their work.

This does not necessarily mean that probation officers and administrators have failed to realize the need for more scientific evaluation. It has no doubt been chiefly due to limited resources, and the resulting necessity of emphasizing that which seemed the more urgent task, of doing the best possible job of probation supervision. A still more

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important reason has been the lack of any adequate technique of evaluation.

During recent decades, it has come to be recognized in the field of business that bookkeeping and cost accounting are a vital necessity. Likewise, important industrial concerns are increasingly adopting the methods of industrial management or efficiency engineering, which has applied scientific principles to the problem of evaluating working efficiency in the shop, factory, or other industrial unit. And now that probation is approaching, if it has not attained, its maturity of development, there is a growing recognition of a need for testing the actual working efficiency of various probation methods.

There is no question that probation departments, as well as correctional institutions and other social agencies dealing with crime and delinquency, have lagged far behind business and industry in the use of scientific techniques. During the coming years we may expect to see increasingly strenuous efforts on the part of all these agencies to modernize their activities. One highly important phase of this process of modernization is the development of more scientific means of evaluation. For evaluation is essential, not only to test the present effectiveness of probation work, but as a basis for the progressive improvement of probation techniques, and for the securing of information as to types of personnel needed, and the sort of training which is required to fit them for their profession.

Still a further reason for evaluation is the fact that it will help toward the better public understanding of community conditions which hinder success and promote failure in the effort to rehabilitate of-

enders. Probation, like other social work, often seems to the thoughtful worker to be a never-ending and hopeless struggle to salvage the human wreckage left in the wake of destructive social processes. All probation workers know that widespread economic insecurity, unemployment, inadequate incomes, bad housing, overcrowding, degrading family and neighborhood life, and demoralizing amusements, create culture-beds of crime. The elimination of such conditions will call for social planning and for the preventive work of the social engineer. There is real hope that the thorough-going and scientific evaluation of probation work may develop more conclusive evidence of the social and economic conditions which foster crime and delinquency. Thus evaluation may help to build up public support for a frontal attack on these evils, and may point the way toward the progressive reduction of delinquency.

To summarize, we have found that the evaluation of probation is needed: (1) To speed the growth of the movement by providing further evidence of the value of probation; (2) To furnish probation departments with scientific tests of their actual efficiency, and thus show the way toward improvement of probation methods; and (3) To bring about a better public understanding of the preventable causes of crime and delinquency, with the hope of eliminating such causes.

Let us next consider our second main question, which is, "*How shall we evaluate probation?*" In dealing with this question, I shall consider, as the first important method of evaluation, the observation of procedure. This method has often been used in studies made under the auspices of the National Probation

Association and in surveys conducted by local groups. In such observational studies, probation departments are analyzed with respect to such matters as: (1) Qualifications of personnel; (2) Field investigation methods; (3) Case supervision methods; (4) Clearing of case information with other agencies, especially the police, social service exchanges, and criminal justice commissions; (5) Character of office facilities and working conditions; (6) Degree and kind of cooperation with other agencies; and (7) Procedure in handling probation violators.

Studies of this type are extremely useful for revealing obvious weaknesses of organization and procedure, and providing information as to prevailing standards of work. Moreover, procedural evaluation will always be needed to provide a proper basis for the more intensive methods of evaluation. Incidentally, where a procedural study shows that a probation department has such serious defects of personnel, organization, or working methods that practically no useful results can be expected from the work of the department, it would obviously be a waste of time to attempt a more intensive evaluation by other methods.

The second principal method of evaluation is through mass statistics of probation work. Such statistics should be compiled by every probation department at least annually. Examples of types of information which should thus be compiled are as follows:

- (1) Case load statistics for the department as a whole, and for individual officers.
- (2) Numbers of cases placed on probation during year or other period, with:

- (a) Proportion receiving preliminary field investigation.
  - (b) Action of court in relation to recommendations of probation department.
  - (c) Proportion receiving physical and mental examination.
- (3) Numbers of probation violators compared with total cases whose probation is terminated during a given period, as to:
    - (a) Ratio of violators to total terminations.
    - (b) Length of time on probation.
    - (c) Type and number of contacts made while on probation.
    - (d) Proportion receiving preliminary field investigation.
    - (e) Action of court in relation to recommendations of probation department.

It may here be noted that the best available index of the frequency of probation violation is secured by this suggested comparison of the number of probation violators with the total number of persons whose probation is terminated during the same year or other period.

Aside from their use in the regular reports of probation departments, such mass statistics often play an important part in special surveys of probation departments which are basically sound in their organization and procedure, even though they may have certain defects, and for which it is therefore worth while to analyze their activities in some detail, with a view to recommending improvements in organization or methods. Furthermore, mass statis-

tics as well as procedural information are needed as a background for more intensive evaluation.

However, in spite of the genuine usefulness of the two methods of evaluation which have thus far been discussed, we must recognize that they have serious limitations. These methods may tell us how large a volume of work a probation department is doing, and whether its general methods of procedure comply with the standards established by experience. But in the last analysis, what we must know, in order to reach a correct judgment as to the efficiency of a probation department's work, is whether the character of the individual probationer is better or worse at the end of his probation, *how* must better or worse he is, and how much credit probation supervision can justly claim for any improvement which may have occurred. Neither the procedural method nor the mass statistical method of evaluation can throw much light on these all-important questions. It is therefore evident that we must look further for a more adequate method of evaluation.

This brings us to the consideration of still a third approach to the problem of evaluation, through the case study method. Here, the individual is intensively studied, and becomes the unit of evaluation. Since the individual is the unit of case work, it follows that the real efficiency of the probation department or officer should be judged from the degree of success attained in the social rehabilitation of the individual offender. Furthermore, as already noted, no plan for evaluation is complete or adequate unless it reveals what type of probation cases display improvement in conduct, and thus reach a more satisfactory social adjustment. The actual con-

tribution made by probation toward rehabilitation must also be determined with critical accuracy. Thus it becomes clearly apparent, that the individual offender is the best unit of evaluation. Hence the case study method is the most effective, and should be used wherever feasible.

At the same time, it must also be recognized that the case study method cannot be successfully used, and should not be attempted, unless certain essential conditions prevail:

(1) In the first place, the facts must be assembled for considerable numbers of cases, before reliable conclusions can be drawn from such facts. These facts must be available in case records which are detailed, accurate and accessible. Preferably, the records should be standardized so far as feasible in size and arrangements of items.

(2) A second essential is that the case study results must be analyzed by appropriate statistical methods.

(3) In the third place, both the process of assembling the case data, and the statistical analysis of the data, will be full of technical difficulties, which will require for their solution the best services of experts trained in social research, statistics and other special fields.

From the bare statement of these conditions, it is evident that the case study method can be used to advantage only in departments which are equipped by organization, personnel and procedure to do at least a limited amount of intensive case supervision. At the same time, it is by no means essential that all cases on probation be included in the case study. Any department which is soundly organized, and provided with competent personnel, may apply the case study method of evaluation, even though its staff is inadequate

in numbers and burdened with excessive case loads. A department thus handicapped would merely need to select a fraction of its cases, small enough in numbers to be supervised on an intensive basis. This same limited group of cases should then form the basis for the case study evaluation.

Where this selective or sampling plan is followed, it is important that a method of selection be used, which will make the selected group accurately representative of the entire body of probation cases. It would, for example, be a serious mistake to select only a group of cases thought to be especially good subjects of probation treatment, or on the other hand to select a group of the more difficult cases. All of the different varieties of cases should be represented in the same proportions which they form in the entire group.

Generally a representative sample can best be secured, by deciding, first of all, what proportion of cases it will be possible to include, and then making a selection on a chronological basis. For example, if 10 per cent of all the cases placed on probation are to be selected, every tenth case in serial order could be taken.

For purposes of preliminary experimentation, it is feasible to utilize a very small number of cases. But no attempt should be made to draw any conclusions as to the relative efficiency of various methods of supervision, until at least 100 cases have been studied. A much larger number would be essential for a really complete evaluation.

In using the case study method, we are confronted by the difficult problem of summarizing the detailed case information in such a way as to give a clear picture of the case.

To meet this need of presentation, we are designing a special form of case summary called a PROGRESS RECORD. This Progress Record would bring together in compact form the facts needed to show the status of the probationer at various times. So far as possible, the facts should be expressed in the form of scores, ratings, or indexes, similar in principle to the well-known Intelligence Coefficient, used by psychologists. The purpose of these rating scales or indexes, would be to measure degrees of improvement or deterioration in the probationer, just as a thermometer measures changes in temperature.

This Progress Record should cover chiefly the following classes of information:

- (1) An exact description of the offender's status at the time he is placed on probation, with respect to his conduct record, physical condition, mental condition, education, occupational qualifications and experience, family status and history, social group affiliations, and recreational habits;

- (2) Similar analyses of his status at intervals during the time he is on probation, at the time of discharge from supervision, and preferably a year or more after discharge;

- (3) Specific facts concerning the treatment applied, including the names of officers and other persons handling the case, social adjustments made or attempted, and changes in the probationer's behavior.

Our plans for this Progress Record are still in the planning or experimental stage, and much work remains to be done before the device will be in shape for actual use. However, as an illustration of the way in which the Progress Record

would be applied, I shall select a single section of the record and describe in some detail the way in which this section would be developed. Since the conduct record of the probationer is perhaps of chief importance for purposes of evaluation, I shall use it as an example. In the first place, the behavior of the probationer up to the time he is placed on probation would be summarized in numerical terms. For this purpose, it will be necessary to assign scales of arbitrary weights or values, for various types of action or behavior. Negative values would be assigned to each specific type of delinquency, crime, or other anti-social conduct. Likewise, the socially useful actions or accomplishments of the probationer would be assigned positive values, which would be large or small, depending on their estimated degree of usefulness. The probationer's total behavior score would be calculated by adding together all of the assigned values of his useful actions, and making deductions for his anti-social actions. It is apparent that such a rating scale can be used, only where detailed information is available concerning the probationer's conduct. Furthermore, in designing the conduct scale, it will be preferable to secure a consensus of opinion of many experts, rather than accept the judgment of a few.

Similar ratings of conduct should be made at the termination of probation, and at intervals of perhaps a year during probation, if the probation period has extended over several years. Likewise, where it is feasible to follow up the ex-probationers, ratings of conduct should be made a year or more after their discharge from probation.

In using the proposed conduct rating-scale, great care should be

taken to assign exactly the same weights for the same kinds of actions of a given probationer. For unless this is done, the measurement of progress will not be accurate.

It should be emphasized that the chief objective in using the Progress Record will not be to compare various individuals with each other, but to compare each individual's status at various times. This consideration greatly simplifies the problem of designing the Progress Record, since it will be a far more difficult task to develop rating methods which will enable us to make accurate comparisons between individuals. Eventually, however, it should be possible to improve the methods of scoring or rating to a point where fairly accurate comparisons between individuals will be possible.

One further point in reference to the Progress Record. At the start it will be necessary to treat separately each phase of the offender's personality. It will probably not be feasible to combine the ratings for various items, such as behavior, physical condition, and mental condition into a single index number. Later, however, it may be found feasible to summarize the various ratings on the separate phases of personality into a single index number. Through such a composite rating, we may eventually be able to compare the probationer's total personality at various times, and even to compare different individuals as regards their social usefulness.

Even after the Progress Record has been brought into practical use, we cannot expect it to work automatically. It will require, for a considerable time, the continued application of technical skill of a high order. Such expenditures of skill and effort will, however, be amply

repaid, if the Progress Record should provide an effective yardstick for scientifically measuring the results of probation work. Ultimately, it may thus perform the same functions for probation, which cost accounting and efficiency engineering have done for business and industry.

Let us now consider the third chief question, "*Who should evaluate probation work?*" This question can best be answered by analyzing the nature of the task. We have already seen that evaluation by the case study method, especially through the Progress Record, is by no means a routine clerical task. It requires much technical skill, if the rating of the probationer's status is to be done accurately and consistently. Likewise, after Progress Records have been made for the group of cases which are to be evaluated, the correct analysis and interpretation of these records will be a task requiring much statistical training and experience. Those who are directly responsible for this task must therefore be skilled in the scientific study of social situations and conditions through statistical and other methods. At the same time, the expert in social research can hardly solve this problem by himself. He needs the collaboration of probation administrators and of specialists in vocational educational and guidance, psychology, medicine and psychiatry. Thus the task of evaluation will require effective teamwork between a number of professional groups, and cannot be successfully carried out by any single group alone.

There is a further important condition, which is negative in character. This is, that no probation officer should be expected or permitted to evaluate his own work. There are two outstanding reasons why

evaluation should either be a distinct function in the probation organization, or should be directed by an outside agency. In the first place, very few persons who possess the qualities necessary to make them good probation officers, have also the training in social research which would qualify them as evaluators. Still more important is the psychological fact that no one, however able he may be, or however well qualified in social research, can evaluate his own work correctly. Inevitably, his point of view is colored or warped, so that he cannot keep the detached and judicial attitude which is absolutely necessary for the evaluator. Hence we must conclude that although the original recording of case data must necessarily be performed by the officer in charge of each case, the Progress Record which has been suggested as a tool for evaluation, should not only be made by a social research worker, but by one having no responsibility for supervision of the cases studied.

Where shall probation departments look for social research experts to carry on evaluation? And how shall the evaluation work be organized? Some of the chief possibilities are as follows:

(1) In the first place, a few large probation departments may be able to set up their own research divisions. This is probably the best plan where the volume of work is large enough to justify it, and where financial support can be secured. In many departments, however, this plan may not be feasible, because the necessary financial support is lacking. Hence it is important to consider other available sources of personnel and plans of organization.

(2) Another possible source of personnel consists of the research