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# A TECHNIQUE FOR DEVELOPING CRITERIA OF PAROLABILITY

FERRIS F. LAUNE<sup>1</sup>

About a year and a half ago, the State of Illinois employed sociologists to apply the Burgess prediction method to all male prisoners of the Illinois State Penitentiary who were appearing before the Parole Board, and to engage in further research to improve the basis for prediction. Soon after application of the method started, it seemed desirable to develop factors supplementary to those used in the Burgess scale.

Reform is largely a matter of attitudes and depends in part upon factors of personality of the individual, while the Burgess factors are external and many of them determined through records or case histories of the *past* of the individual. Also with the exception of a few connected with the man's prison record, the Burgess factors are static and if entirely credited, a logical inference would be that no change in conduct can be expected as a result of incarceration.

In seeking for some method for predicting probability of success on parole which would include an estimate of a prisoner's personality and attitudes, the question of the "hunches" of other inmates was considered. In a prison it is quite generally believed that an inmate can size up his fellow inmate and estimate with some degree of accuracy his future conduct. If this is true, the official who could, through some means, analyze an inmate on the same basis as is used by his fellow inmates, would be enabled to make a more accurate prediction.

The problem resolved itself then into these three: First: How reliable are "hunches"? Second: What are the objective factors on which hunches are based? Third: How may an independent investigation determine the presence or absence of these factors?

## 1. *How Reliable Are "Hunches"?*

In order to determine if there is any reliability to the subjective judgments of inmates as to the probable success on parole of their fellow inmates, the co-operation of certain inmates was secured. Two

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inmates first prepared a list of 150 inmates known by them sufficiently well for them to score them on their probable future conduct. No one except the graders themselves knows what inmates were chosen as subjects. This scoring was done very painstakingly, and absolutely independently of one another. After this independent scoring was completed, the two sets of scores were compared statistically. The correlation was found to be  $+.62$ . Other inmates were then asked to score the same list and again high correlation resulted.

The "hunch" scores were then compared with the scores obtained through the Burgess system. Here again a correlation existed, the coefficient being  $+.58$ . Consequently it seemed that there really is a concept "parolability" just as there is a concept "intelligence" and that this may be subjected to measurement and expressed quantitatively.

### 2. *What Are the Objective Factors on Which "Hunches" as to Parolability Are Based?*

After scoring the 150 men independently as to their parolability, two of the investigators next attempted to determine just what objective factors went into the making of these scores. In this, the discussion method was used. The investigators brought their lists and scores together, and debated about each case where there was any difference of opinion. For example, investigator A would say, "You gave Joe Zilch only 65 and I gave him 85. Don't you think his loyalty to his mother and her loyalty to him is going to go a long way in keeping him straight?"

"Yes," B would answer, "But don't you know that his love for flashy clothes and his contempt for anyone who wears less than a ten dollar hat will make it impossible for him to live on any honest wages he might be able to earn?"

Right there two factors emerged, and were duly recorded: *Family ties* and *Love of clothes*. By means of this sort of discussion about the whole list of 150 men, 42 so-called primary factors were developed. It is interesting to note that most of these 42 factors emerged in the discussion of the first thirty men and all had appeared by the time fifty men had been discussed. This gives us reason to believe that the list of 42 primary factors is fairly exhaustive.

### 3. *How May the Presence or Absence of These Factors Be Determined?*

When it had been determined that inmates' hunches have some reliability in estimating parolability and that these hunches are based

upon the presence or absence in each individual case of certain objective factors, the problem became the practical one of finding some method by which the "outsider" could analyze a man according to these factors and make a prediction as to his parolability that would be as valid as that of fellow inmates. Naturally the outsider could not get his information in the same way that the inmate does, that is, through close association and perhaps personal friendship extending over many months of confinement together. Nor could he expect the exchange of confidences which is often the basis of one inmate's estimate of another. It seemed, if this study was to have any practical application whatever, it would be necessary to devise some technique whereby contact could be made with the men in groups and the necessary information be secured through some mass method.

A questionnaire, based upon these factors, seemed to be the most practicable tool for this purpose. Obviously we could not expect to get lengthy answers to general questions; so the plan of a Yes and No questionnaire was adopted. This type also lends itself more readily to statistical treatment. Many questions capable of being answered by "Yes" and "No" were formulated about each factor. To avoid deception in the answers, questions of obvious significance had to be avoided. This necessitated a multiplicity of questions of lesser significance, yet of such character that the answers, *en masse*, would throw light on the factor being analyzed. In all 1700 such questions were formulated and scattered through a four section questionnaire in such a manner that the questions on any single factor would not be concentrated. In formulating the questionnaire, certain "index" questions were included to enable us to determine the general veracity of the responses.

The next step was to test this questionnaire. Sixty inmates, well enough known to the inmates who were conducting the experiment to have confidence in the promise that their identity would not be disclosed to any outsider in connection with their answers, co-operated by answering this questionnaire, pledging truthfulness. This group, which dwindled to 57 before the experiment was completed, was called the Truth Group and their answers were used in subsequent analysis as control on the "run-of-the-mill" subjects who later answered the questionnaire with no pledge of truthfulness. In all over 100,000 responses were obtained and were tabulated. The methods of tabulation, and some of the ingenious devices developed to aid in this work make a story in themselves. However, tetrachoric correlation coefficients were computed to measure the relationship between many

of the responses and to assist in weighing their value. In all, 5000 "r's" were calculated.

Using the results from this Truth Group, then, as a control, the questionnaire was administered (in sections) to "run-of-the-mill" inmates, that is to those who had no particular knowledge of the research project nor of the personnel conducting it. From this source an equivalent number of responses was secured, tabulated and compared with those of the Truth Group.

It was recognized from the first that a man could not be expected to spend the larger part of his minimum sentence in filling out questionnaires. It was necessary, therefore, to cut down the forty page questionnaire of 1700 questions to one of a size adapted to group administration. Several methods were experimented with to do this. First among these methods was the Thurstone Factor Analysis. Applied to the 23 questions constituting our first factor we were left with five with high significance. But in a study of this result certain objections became apparent which caused us to try a "common sense" approach.

Those questions which seemed most likely to yield valuable information about each factor were selected and arranged in batteries containing from two to six questions each. Then these various combinations were tested by comparing the scores obtained from their answers with the hunch scores of the same individuals. It was necessary to experiment also with the method of scoring. For the purpose of scoring, each answer was considered either favorable or unfavorable on a common sense basis. In the case of some factors a score of two favorable answers out of four questions would be the minimum score which would result in a mark of *plus* on the factors; in other cases two out of three or four out of five was found to be the best-fitting minimum score. By choosing those batteries which were most closely connected with the hunch scores, it was possible to make up a questionnaire containing only 164 questions. Scores obtained on this questionnaire correlate .70 with hunch scores.

We intend to check this result by administering this short questionnaire to another group, each of whose members will previously have been scored by the hunch method. In the event that this correlation, too, is high, the questionnaire will be administered to men leaving the institution on parole. In this way an experience table can be built up, which will measure the efficiency of this means of predicting success on parole.

Work is also going on with the purpose of simplifying the scor-

ing of the questionnaire. The answers to the questions, in themselves, would be of little value in prediction without a simple means of expressing the results in terms of numbers.

At the same time that the questionnaire is being tested, we shall attempt to apply a second method. This will consist of a "directed interview," which will aim to obtain information on the factors discovered. This will be particularly useful in those cases where men, because of language difficulties or illiteracy, are unable to answer the questionnaire.

The material gathered from prison inmates in this study may prove valuable also in throwing light on the actual attitudes which prevail in a restricted society of this kind. A section of our questionnaire has been administered to a group of university students, and a careful comparison of the answers with those obtained from convicts may reveal significant differences in certain attitudes. From such information it may be possible to build up a more comprehensive program of institutional treatment and post-parole supervision, which will place special emphasis on those points where convict attitude differs most widely from the attitude of society at large.