

1942

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Recommended Citation

David Dressler, Measuring Parole Officers' Work, 32 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 424 (1941-1942)

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MEASURING PAROLE OFFICERS' WORK

David Dressler¹

Private case work agencies have long adopted methods of evaluating the work of staff members. It has been relatively simple because case loads are low, supervisors are in close touch with each case and worker, and criteria or standards have been well understood.

In the parole system the problem is neither as simple nor as well worked out. I am not aware that any agency has effectively achieved an evaluative process which remains in use. The situation is produced in part by such factors as: (1) The unequal background and training of staff members; (2) The absence of articulated standards of work; (3) The excessive case loads which make it impossible to get equally intensive work on all cases, and just as impossible for a supervisor to become familiar with each case handled by a parole officer under his supervision; (4) The fact that supervisors often have more parole officers under their guidance than they can reasonably be expected to deal with and evaluate; (5) The regrettable fact that sometimes these supervisors are themselves ill-equipped for the task of intelligent analysis of the procedures of case workers.

This article attempts to review what has been undertaken experimentally in an agency which has given some thought to the subject—the New York

State Division of Parole. Here the orientation is in case work. The criteria should be those of all case work agencies with the adaptations made necessary by the law-enforcement function in parole. Unfortunately, however, the staff, while for the most part previously trained in some form of case work, is very diversified as to experience and education. Some are graduates of schools of social work; many are not. Most are college graduates. A number hold higher degrees. They come from the family case work field, relief agencies, child placement organizations, correctional institutions, psychological and psychiatric clinics, etc. A few have had no previous case work experience whatever.

Supervisors carry as few as six and as many as ten parole officers—obviously too many. Some are very capable of evaluating case work endeavors, and a few are in this respect inferior to the parole officers whom they supervise.

Case loads range from as low as seventy to as high as ninety, but in no instance does this mean that one hundred per cent of the cases are active. A proportion always represent almost "paper cases;" parolees who, by law, must remain under the jurisdiction of the Board of Parole although they have long since become well-adjusted in the community and require no further service.

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Thus, it is believed, the experience of this agency in evaluation may be in a measure a contribution to the thinking of other parole organizations because, while more fortunately set up and financed than most parole groups, the N. Y. State Division of Parole nevertheless has a number of the handicaps which complicate the problem of evaluation for other parole bodies.

Indirect, Administrative Evaluative Devices

So familiar are they that no discussion is required of the more informal, continuous methods of evaluation that are time-honored in case work generally: the weekly conference between worker and supervisor, and the supervisory or executive conference.

In the first the supervisor has his most direct and intimate contact with the parole officer—his closest vantage point of observation and evaluation. In the second, the supervisor, in the give and take in conference of people with similar functions, is not only crystalizing his thoughts about his workers but standardizing his evaluative techniques through comparison with the approaches of the other supervisors.

Case Reading as Evaluation

The New York State Division of Parole undertook an experiment in evaluation which has proven to be a satisfactory device for getting a rounded picture of a cross-section of a parole officer's work. The procedure was copied from private agency practice and was adapted to the needs of a public agency with law-enforcement responsibilities. It is essentially analysis through case reading.

The parole agency must be concerned with three phases of an officer's work: (1) Qualitative aspects; (2) Quantitative aspects; (3) Personality and capacity factors. We want to know how the officer deals with the problems that confront him (essentially—his case work practices); how well he covers ground, is aware of what goes on, keeps control of the movements of his parolees (law-enforcement functions); and what sort of person the officer is, how well equipped for his task, how orientated, what his biases are, how stable he is, etc. Case reading, while not the sole source of such data nor one which illuminates all the processes of the officer, has nevertheless proven to be the one single process whereby one can get most comprehensively, in one operation, more material in this area than can be secured by any one other method.

Every third case in a given officer's load is pulled and read. The entire folder is studied for background but special scrutiny is given to that part of the record which represents the work of the parole officer who is being evaluated. (Cases are transferred from one officer to another on a territorial basis).

A quantitative analysis is made of "coverage;" the frequency of field contacts in the most recent twelve months. Even when a visit to the home or employment has no case work objective it is nevertheless important as a routine check of whereabouts and activity. A tabulation is set up as follows:

With regard to home visits the table shows the number of cases in which at least twelve visits were made in twelve possible months. Similarly the num-

ber in which eleven, ten, nine, and so on were made until we have the number in which no visits were made in the year studied. The same would be done for employment visits ruling out, however, for the sake of simplicity, cases not employed during all of the twelve month period. Thus the tabulation might read as follows:

HOME VISITS	
Number of Visits	Number of Cases
12 visits in 12 months.....	5
11 visits in 12 months.....	6
10 visits in 12 months.....	8
9 visits in 12 months.....	18
8 visits in 12 months.....	15
7 visits in 12 months.....	5
6 visits in 12 months.....	5
5 visits in 12 months.....	4
4 visits in 12 months.....	3
3 visits in 12 months.....	2
2 visits in 12 months.....	1
1 visit in 12 months.....	1
0 visit in 12 months.....	1
Cases Studied	74

EMPLOYMENT VISITS	
Number of Visits	Number of Cases
12 visits in 12 months.....	0
11 visits in 12 months.....	0
10 visits in 12 months.....	4
9 visits in 12 months.....	4
8 visits in 12 months.....	3
7 visits in 12 months.....	4
6 visits in 12 months.....	11
5 visits in 12 months.....	12
4 visits in 12 months.....	10
3 visits in 12 months.....	5
2 visits in 12 months.....	4
1 visit in 12 months.....	4
0 visit in 12 months.....	1
Cases Studied	62

These figures are then analyzed with regard for such factors as: nature of the officer's territory; transportation facilities; any unusual additional burdens; weather conditions; vacations; sick leaves; number of special prob-

lems that require undue expenditure of time; etc., etc. Such an analysis of course is at best sketchy and liable to overlook pertinent factors in the situation. Consequently the tabulation is to be construed as an indicator only; a possible clue for further study and, only in extreme cases, as valid datum in itself. An analysis such as subsequently enters into the evaluation might read:

Mr. C's coverage quantitatively leaves much to be desired. Of twenty-one cases eighteen had been visited at home three times or less in six months while in only three cases were there more than three visits in that period. Employment checks, as is clear, received even less attention.

However, Mr. C. was ill two weeks during this period. Moreover, he has perhaps the most difficult transportation problems in the district office. These facts alone, nevertheless, are insufficient reasons for the generally poor coverage throughout, a fact supported by the case reading where, as will be pointed out, even field emergencies did not receive the prompt attention they required.

Each case folder is now read. Notes are taken and in addition, for each case, a sheet is set up showing *in that particular instance* (instead of as a statistical whole as in the foregoing): (1) dates of home visits; (2) who was seen each time; (3) dates of employment visits; (4) whether the parolee was himself seen at work; (5) dates when the parolee missed reports and what action was taken; (6) date of last chronological entry.

The case notes include a brief history of developments, comments by the evaluator on specific incidents, activities of the officer, etc. Where pertinent, an exact transcript is made of entries.

As the reader goes through more folders he begins to detect what is typical and what is atypical in the parole officer's work. He sees the emergence of problems, what the officer's strength and weaknesses are. He arrives at a point where he can make tentative generalizations. He jots these down in his notes but on separate sheets, not as a part of the notes of a specific case. For instance, in addition to notes on ten cases read up to that point, a supervisor had built up the following memoranda:

Recording generally slipshod, oversuccinct, sometimes incomprehensible. Not proof-read.

This isn't case work. It's just reportorial recording of what the parolee *says* happened.

P.O. doesn't influence situation. Problems have to come to him. He doesn't show awareness.

Makes many field contacts—but are they meaningful?

Agency procedure and policy carefully observed. See X case for example.

P.O. shows insistence on parolees not missing reports.

How is it P.O. scarcely ever detects delinquency—becomes aware of it only when parolee is arrested or someone complains? Is the case load unusually good or the P.O. unusually poor?

By the time all the cases have been read the evaluator has two sets of notes: one on cases, and one comprised of generalizations, questions, tentative conclusions derived from the reading. Now the report is ready to be drafted.

We try not to circumscribe the evaluation but to let the reading itself dictate what should be included and what emphasized. But generally speaking, the report is built around an outline somewhat as described below:

The basis of selection of cases is explained. The cases read are listed. A general statement as to the purpose and nature of the evaluation is made. An example is this:

In pursuance of my regular policy of consistent case reading. I have gone through the following folders of Mr. B. (Cases listed)

I selected every third case on the December monthly report.

It is true, of course, that the cases selected at random may not be a typical cross-section of Mr. B.'s work. It may also be true to an extent that case reading in itself does not give a complete picture of such other factors as the organization of time, *esprit de corps*, work habits, etc., of the parole officer. Nevertheless, I have found case reading to be the most significant method of evaluating a parole officer's work.

Then is given the analysis of the quantitative aspects of the work already described.

From this point on there is much less uniformity: the evaluation deals with qualitative, hence more subjective, judgmental data. An attempt is made first to give valid generalizations, general characterizations of the officer's work. Validity can be claimed when the majority of cases can be shown to have the characteristics described. For instance: if most cases gave evidence of an over-authoritarian approach it would be pertinent to say so. But if only several do, then this should be made clear so that one does not get the inference that authoritarianism is the norm. Factors and phenomena which might be part of this general statement include, among any and many others which may be pertinent to a given officer's work:

Case Work Considerations:

1. Is there evidence of knowledge of case work?
2. Is there a case work approach? The case work attitude?
3. Are case work techniques aptly utilized and applied?
4. Is there treatment—or principally collection of facts, investigation, diagnoses, analysis?
5. What of the case work treatment? Is it manipulative? Environmental? "Leadership" type? "Therapeutic?"
6. Is treatment sensibly initiated? Is it relatively effective?
7. What biases does the parole officer show, if any? Is he balanced, fair, understanding, prejudiced, erratic, explosive, etc.?
8. Is he too trusting? Too suspicious? Too authoritarian? Too passive?
9. What can be said about his interviewing? Is he able to establish a satisfactory relationship? Is he interested in personality? Does he influence the situation? How? Is he a dynamic part of the process?
10. Is his focus the parolee? Or the family unit? Is he interested in relationships?
11. Does he receive a satisfactory balance in his two-fold function of protection of society and case work service to the individual?
12. Is he alert to symptoms of delinquency?
13. Does he know what is going on?
14. Does he follow up problems satisfactorily?
15. Are parolees allowed, within proper limits, to take responsibility for their actions?
16. What about the officer's work in connection with delinquencies, suspicions, evidence of recidivism?
17. Are community resources adequately known and used?
18. Is there adequate verification and authentication of data when necessary?
19. In general: are we dealing with a case worker, a policeman, a clerk? Is the approach realistic, sentimental, "tough?" Is it "goody-goody," ordering and forbidding, etc.?

Recording

1. Is recording lucid? Grammatical? According to acceptable form? Is it proof-read? Is it too succinct, too lengthy?
2. Do the people dealt with emerge as personalities?
3. Is there sufficient indication of process?
4. Is the parole officer's role in the relationship always clear?
5. Are developments clearly portrayed?
6. Are sources and validations clear?
7. Is correspondence satisfactory? In accordance with policy? Promptly answered?

Procedure and Policy

1. Does the parole officer adhere to office policy and proper procedure?
2. Does he see to it that his parolees do?
3. Do there seem to be conflicts in his mind regarding what is expected of him? How and where does he show it? Does it communicate itself to others? To his parolees?
4. How does he handle parolees' conflicts and resistances with reference to rules of parole? Does he take responsibility for the rules and policies or ascribe them to "the boss?"
5. Does the officer accept responsibility for carrying out policies, or is he vacillating, etc.?
6. Does he take responsibility and make decisions in consonance with policy, or does he pass these on to the supervisor? Or does he blame the supervisor for decisions with which he is not in agreement? Does he communicate such an attitude to parolees?

Organization

1. Are cases dictated on consistently, or at infrequent intervals?
2. Does the folder give evidence of good work organizations? Poor organization?

The evaluation expresses itself first in a generalization arising out of the notes on case reading with some or all

of these factors in mind. Such a general evaluative statement will, of course, take on meaning and validity only if corroboration is given later by reference to specific cases together with indication as to which examples are atypical and which representative of the norm.

One set of generalizations in an evaluation of a parole officer's work follows:

Qualitatively, Mr. C. seems definitely to have a case work approach and to be mature in it. His strong point, in fact, seems to be his intelligent case work approach, particularly in interviewing, in which he shows what he is about, thinks clearly, and makes his records clear. To be sure, there is a difference between a case work *approach* and case work *treatment*. In the latter, Mr. C. is weaker. We are not often aware of the objectives of his treatment (sometimes it is questionable whether he has himself clearly articulated these in his own mind), and treatment, when it is found, is principally on the manipulative level.

Mr. C. seems to be quite active in the performance of manipulative case work—principally in those functions which can be performed from a desk such as telephoning for service, guidance, and advice given in interviews.

His weaker points seem to lie in poor coverage quantitatively and in the mechanics of his work. He is particularly poor in the latter. He fails to follow up matters which obviously require follow-up, etc. His inadequate coverage, therefore, plus his weakness in the mechanics of case work form a regrettable combination in that this seems to limit any influence he may have over a situation to what can be accomplished from the office during interviews.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that, while Mr. C.'s skill in interviewing results in the accumulation of personality data, social data, information on inter-relationships within families, etc., little is

done with this away from the desk. The net result would seem to be that we have a parole officer equipped by understanding and temperament to utilize the case work approach; a parole officer who is activated by case work thinking; one who has *simpatico* and understanding along case work lines but who falls short in the treatment field because for one reason or another his tempo is too slow, his work habits too disorganized.

Sometimes I have the feeling Mr. C. is inclined to be too lenient—unjustifiably, as in the case of X, where he allowed the parolee to own a car though he had no license.

There is also a laxity in carrying out certain procedures. For instance: he is inclined to be lenient in the matter of reporting, and in some, but not all cases studied, he has failed to make the expected checks with Motor Vehicle Bureaus and Police Precincts. Moreover, I have found several instances in which men have been allowed to go out of the State without permission of the Chief Parole Officer. (Reference to particular cases).

There is too much willingness, evident throughout Mr. C.'s folders, in his interviews with parolees and families, to make "the administration" responsible for everything—particularly those things which would be unpleasant to the parolee. Refusing to grant a motor vehicle license or permission to leave the State, for instance, are always placed at the door of people other than Mr. C. (Reference to particular cases). He thus would seem to be somewhat weak and even to vitiate his own meaning in a case work relationship—in that he is unwilling to take responsibility for the case work process.

As to his recording: Mr. C.'s entries are not always organized in accordance with Manual procedure but they are eminently clear; Mr. C. has a very good power of expression. He is a bit redundant in spots, and this may be one cause of waste of time, which is particularly serious in the instance of a man who is in any event of slow tempo. There is an unnecessary circumstantiality in some entries. Meaningless details

are put in. For instance: he will tell us how he made a home visit, asked the superintendent what apartment the parolee occupied, went upstairs, turned left, rang the bell, then knocked, listened a while, knocked again, and someone opened the door. It would seem to me that all we are interested in here is that the officer visited the home and gained entrance. There will, of course, be cases in which it will be significant that it was necessary to knock a long time before there was a response but this was not such a case.

In another instance the officer records that the parolee came to the office and Mr. C. was in a staff conference but left it because he considered it important to see the parolee. It would be quite enough to tell us the parolee came in and was interviewed.

On the whole, I would say Mr. C. has a good case work approach, utilizes some treatment techniques, has potentialities of making a fairly good worker. He has serious handicaps in that his tempo is slow, he lacks drive and he is poorly organized. Also, in delinquency phases of the work he is quite weak.

Another set of generalizations in the case of a parole officer who had entered the service with only one year of previous case work is given below.

One gets the feeling in reading Mr. E's cases that he is a conscientious, serious-minded, fair-thinking parole officer anxious primarily to fulfill his obligations to the community along crime prevention and law-enforcement lines. He seems scrupulous in requiring his men to adhere reasonably to the rules and regulations of parole and he himself gives evidence of being careful, thoughtful and scrupulous in following regulations which parole officers are expected to carry out.

His thinking processes are good in that he knows what is going on, or at least insists on trying to find out, checks intelligently and does not leave unresolved questions in mid-air. Perhaps he is a little too direct in ordering and forbidding so that he might be giving less consideration than desirable to the prob-

lem of the conditioning of behavior. In other words: there is some reason to feel Mr. E. would assume that, because he instructs a parolee to act in a given way, that parolee should immediately begin acting that way even if his nature and personality have not yet been conditioned along those lines. To be sure, this is often necessary when we are dealing with serious matters when delinquency may be the end result of failure to follow instructions and I most certainly would offer no criticism but I think that here and there I find indications that, in the deeper-lying attitudes and reaction-patterns, Mr. E. has a tendency to expect immediate results from the ordering and forbidding technique.

Of course this means that the officer is active and insistent upon influencing the situation—a fact which is not always present in the work of other parole officers. This is laudable but sometimes not the best case work in that it is too direct, too insistent and flies in the face of human nature.

I am not at all sure that my statement is fair; I know the immediate supervisor is much more familiar with Mr. E's thought processes.

There is a careful adherence to office procedure and policy outside of the fact that I find no routine motor vehicle or police checks. (Reference to particular cases). But Mr. E. is on the alert for violations; he warns his men in advance what his attitude will be if they follow certain courses of conduct; he is quick to discover and evaluate suspicious activity. But I am wondering whether his slight tendency toward rigidity may not make it difficult for him to gain the confidence of his parolees?

On the whole, then, I get the impression, which may have little or no basis actually, that Mr. E. is somewhat more interested in a careful check for potential recidivism than he is in case work treatment. This is borne out somewhat by the finding that, while his folders do give some social data, some evaluation of personality and family inter-relationships, some description of personal attitudes, there is not a great

deal of this. On the other hand there is always, when the situation arises, intelligent initiation of contacts with social agencies and adequate followup.

Recording is very clear, free from redundancy yet not too meager although it is inclined to be principally factual and not analytical.

Now it is necessary to support the generalizations with material from specific cases. For each case read, pertinent data from the notes are extracted to give a somewhat running account of salient developments. These are not complete case summaries; they are characterized by the pointing up of the factors pertinent to the evaluation, e.g.:

A particularly dangerous situation with reference to poor coverage occurs in the case of *John Doe*. Here we are dealing with a person in a temporary shelter and our experience should have indicated that these home programs are often unsatisfactory and lead to discouragement and eventual absconding—yet the parole officer, who makes a prompt visit to the shelter twelve days after release (in March 1938), waits until June 2, 1938 to make the next one and October 11, 1938 for the final one!

The initial interview is routine and not very adequate. There is a good follow-up with reference to the parolee's attempt to collect some insurance due him but when he does collect this money he merely tells Mr. B. he put the money in a bank. This is never checked. On 3/22/38 the parolee asks permission to use some of his release money to repay a loan. There are no details as to how much the loan is, where it was taken out, when, or why, and there is no follow-up. . . This, I should say, is an example of the rather superficial approach employed by Mr. B. in many of his cases.

Frequently the case material is quite detailed as in the following:

In the case of *Harry Roe*, coverage is unsatisfactory quantitatively. (Here follows an analysis of dates of visits.)

Employment verifications occur with somewhat greater frequency although the great majority are telephonic verifications . . . (Here follows an analysis).

Leniency with reference to reporting is obvious. (Here follows four pages detailing the failures to report, the reasons given by the parolee, the follow-up, or absence of it, by Mr. B.)

The initial interview is disappointing. It fails to state even where the parolee is to live, work, or any single thing called for in the Manual. We do not even know when the parolee is next to report. Some of the entries are so garbled that it is impossible for me to understand them.

Mr. B. himself investigated the job offer on which this man was released and yet, in the first interview, when the parolee indicates he expects to open a business, Mr. B. does not even ask why the pre-parole job, approved by the Board, is not being considered. He merely writes what the parolee says.

On 4/17/36 the parolee tells Mr. B. he was subpoenaed in a murder case but Mr. B. does not record and apparently does not know, where or when or why—and he never finds out. I regard this not so much as lack of interest on Mr. B's part as an indication of his apparent difficulty in coping with the problems he confronts.

There are some personality data in the folder but what use is made of it for treatment?

The parole officer is naive and would seem to lack a complete understanding of his function in the entry 12/23/36. The parolee says the Division "goes to great pains to psychoanalyze parolees" and he wants to know why we do not do the same for parents. Parole Officer reminded him "that this is done as well as the other." (Personally, I am not aware that anyone on our staff is qualified to do psychoanalysis.)

Mr. B. would seem to have inadequate skill and grasp in approaching this matter. The parolee tells him his father is insane—that he has arteriosclerosis of the brain. The parolee fears his father, who has been diagnosed as insane by physicians, according to the

parolee. "Parolee was asked as to what steps he had taken to re-assure his father and to clear up the situation." It is at this point that the parolee "blows up," understandably, and tells Mr. B. he ought to "spend a little time on some of his parents and take into account the conditions under which they live, the handicaps they suffer with." This is quite apt. If I were a client in a social agency and should tell the worker my father was diagnosed insane and dangerous, I would expect more than the remark that I ought to re-assure my father and clear up the situation by some magic process.

This is a critical period in the family. The father becomes more violent. He attacks people with knives. Mr. B. tries hard to understand and is fairly sympathetic—although not perspicacious. The parolee seems more alert and analytical than the officer. The best Mr. B. can do is to advise the boy to move. He refuses, saying he got into trouble the last time that way.

The business by now has passed out of the father's hands and the parolee supposedly owns part of it; yet there is no investigation as to the situation.

Obviously, with reference to this crucial situation, this was the first time the parolee came to us voluntarily for aid and advice or release of tensions. He had been resistant before this. Here was an opportunity for a skilled case worker. But we leave the boy blocked in relieving tensions and throw him back entirely on his own responsibility . . . yet obviously Mr. B. was trying to be understanding.

Later he becomes more assertive. He sees the mother and the father but seems to be trying to arrive at his own diagnosis and to reason with the father who by this time is perpetually assaultive—has broken a roomful of furniture and made incoherent complaints to the police. Inasmuch as a physician allegedly had seen the man, it would

have been wise to see the doctor, discuss the case in the interest of safety if nothing else, but this was not done.

Sometimes the summary can be brief yet descriptive enough.

In the *Pete Jackson* case Mr. E. has a very satisfactory initial interview which causes the parolee to begin to emerge as a personality in our minds. Coverage is excellent quantitatively: the first home visit being eleven days after release and subsequent visits occurring at least once a month. Qualitatively they are meaningful for we get good descriptive material of members of the family, data on relationships, and what the officer is striving for in each visit.

The pre-parole job does not materialize and Mr. E. takes the trouble to telephone the employer to ask why. He is able to get the employer to promise to take Jackson on the staff and Mr. E. is intelligent enough to say to the employer that he should not make such an offer unless he really intends to employ the man—that there is no compulsion here. This is effective interpretation . . .

The case shows strong manipulative case work, clear insight into the problems of the case, a dynamic, understanding relationship with the parolee.

We now have a practically completed evaluation. The reader can decide for himself whether he thinks the case material supports the generalizations. Now follows a brief summation and characterization and remarks by the evaluator to the immediate supervisor of the officer, suggesting how the evaluation might be discussed with the parole officer, what ought to be emphasized, and what course future supervision should take if the supervisor agrees with the evaluator's findings.