Managing the Correctional Enterprise—The Quest for "What Works"

Alvin W. Cohn, D.Crim.
President, eNormaLearning, LLC

Usually it is the…manager who will see the need for change first, and most dramatically, and who must begin the process of mobilizing the entire… [organization]. That process begins with a clear-eyed look to the future, as well as to the present and past—and often starts with fear.

—James Champy

It is a surprising and perhaps even shocking fact that our present-day society is engaged in many activities which have no more support in terms of reliable evidence than the incantations of medicine men and the potions of witches. (Wilkens, 1969:9)

ALTHOUGH WILKENS, at the time, was less than sanguine about the historical results of program evaluation, it has become increasingly popular in recent years to address the question of "What Works?" throughout the field of criminal justice administration and particularly with regard to "successful" correctional practices. But, "what works" may be no more than a mental construct if not an artifact, for as Thomas (1927:1-13) remarked: "Situations which are defined as real are real in their consequences." Evaluation, however defined and practiced, essentially is the quest for universal truths, for an understanding of causal factors. It is an effort dedicated to exploring the "why's" of correctional practice outcomes.

But, this is never as simple as A causes B. We have become more sophisticated in the use of scientific methods, but causal relationships—and truths—may be elusive, and what is true today may not be true tomorrow. What is a crime today may not be a crime tomorrow; thus, explanations for the causes—and

cures—of crime as produced through scientific process may be totally inadequate if the definition of a crime is different from that which is actually studied.

Unlike our experience of mathematics, where there are "truths," we can never be certain in the social sciences that what we discover is indeed the truth. Further, as Wilkens (1969:21) states, we too often resort to "facts and figures" to explain conditions and events, but history suggests that "There is no evidence that human intuition is any more effective in arriving at *socially desirable solutions* than the 'facts and figures approach' especially since we manipulate figures to induce what may be inaccurate facts" (emphasis added).

The terms "facts," "absolutes," and "truths" are similar but different, yet we seek them in our research endeavors. We seek answers, but we probably only achieve "contentions," since in the final analysis "I believe X while you believe Y" as we attempt to interpret research findings. Thus, the results of any assessment process involve values, both personal and organizational—and facts and figures provide corroboration of what I believe and what I value.

"What Works," therefore, is a quest as well as an admission of failure, notwithstanding the results of any research effort. "Evaluation is good" has become the mantra of criminal justice administrators in recent years, but evaluation may actually deflect from the need for an explicit set of goals for both the organization and any program implemented that ostensibly is designed to attain those goals. In fact, the need to identify what works may be a desperate effort to identify a level of effectiveness that otherwise has been elusive. If what works is actually found, it may prove to be organiza-

tionally dysfunctional, especially if it does not seem to meet the needs of the organization.

That is, as Cohn (1998) has suggested, any findings that appeal to an administrator's values may encourage more programmatic "plops" than programs that "fit" within the organization's mandate and/or goals. What should an administrator do when research results clearly indicate a program's failure; that is, when a program doesn't work? Here, practicalities such as the utilization of resources and sound public policy come into play to force appropriate decision-making. But this doesn't always occur, especially if the findings are in conflict with values.

Program evaluation should be viewed as a look backward, for it should address the question of what we did right. The results should serve, then, as the foundation for asking: "What do we do now?" "What works" should be utilized as a tool or vehicle aiding an administrator in his or her decision-making as the next step in the process is followed that addresses the issue of explaining—the "why"— the results.

Earlier Analyses of "What Works"

In the field of corrections, programmatic evaluations have primarily been concerned with changing offenders; that is, analyses of programs designed to reduce violative behaviors and/or to reduce recidivism. Since the evaluation of the Judge Baker Clinic in Boston by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (see, for e.g., 1930, 1940, 1950, and 1968), scientific process has been utilized to seek answers to "what works?" Thus, rehabilitation and the reasons for success or failure have served as

the basis for program initiatives, many of which may not have been grounded in any identifiable theories.

Not much evaluation activity took place in corrections until the 1960s, although research divisions in such states as California, Massachusetts, and New York did indeed make significant contributions to knowledge. Seeking to determine the efficacy of rehabilitation, Bailey (1966) evaluated 100 treatment programs between 1940 and 1960 and concluded that the results were discouraging. Scarpitti and Stephenson (1964) evaluated probation as a treatment program and concluded that it was ineffective for seriously delinquent youth, a conclusion similar to that reached by Petersilia and Turner (1993) for adult probationers many years later.

Robison and Smith (1971) evaluated correctional programs; Lerman (1966) studied programs for institutionalized delinquents; and Robison and Takagi (1968), Takagi (1971), and Ward (1967) all examined adult parole systems and reported the devastating finding that correctional rehabilitation did not work. However, Adams (1975), who evaluated small caseload research, and Dash (1970), who studied the Offender Rehabilitation Project, both offered a modicum of encouragement about rehabilitation effectiveness.

The playing field, however, proved to be not all negative. Criminal Justice Associates (1995) cites a number of "promising" programs under the aegis of the Comprehensive Communities Program; Rhine (1998) identifies an array of "best practices" throughout the fields of adult and juvenile corrections; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (n.d.) lists "promising" programs on graduated sanctions for juveniles; the Development Services Group (2000) identifies various "effective and promising" programs throughout juvenile justice administration; Glick and Rhine (2001) review "best practices" of juveniles in the adult correctional system; Gauthier, et al. (1999) describe "promising" crime prevention programs world-wide; Montgomery, et al. (1994) report on "what works" programs in juvenile justice; Sherman, et al. (1998) discuss "what works" in crime prevention programming; and Adams (1975) and Glaser (1973) review various correctional programs for correctional "success."

Yet, the dearth of ongoing, responsible research in correctional programming has demonstrated two failures: 1) the failure to routinize program evaluation, and 2) the gross inadequacies of the methodologies utilized by researchers as reported in the published literature. The first failure prevents the accumulation of comprehensive evaluation data that demonstrate whether or not a program indeed is successful. The second failure illustrates the inability of responsible researchers to assess the competency of other researchers in their methodologies.

Some authors (e.g., Palmer, 1975 and 1978; M. Gottfredson, 1979; Wholey, 1983; and Nay and Kay, 1982, indicate that much of the reported research is flawed and, as Van Vorhees and Brown (1976:2) state:

> In addition to methodological and technical problems with the research, it should have been clear to researchers and programmers alike, that some of the evaluated programs had been too difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate—but they evaluated, anyway. In fact, many of the evaluations described poorly designed programs which evidenced unclear goals and no clear understanding of what activities would produce the desired results.

Martinson!

The correctional establishment was rocked and buffeted with the publication of "The Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment: A survey of Treatment Evaluation Studies" (Lipton, et al., 1975), which concluded that "nothing works." The "rehabilitative ideal," as enunciated by Allen (1964), apparently died an agonizing death as policy-makers seized upon this to justify forcing a change in correctional goals from treatment/rehabilitation to surveillance and control.

Among the authors of this epochal publication, Martinson (1974) became the popular spokesperson for this "nothing works" message, which turned the correctional enterprise upside down. The book was a compilation of research findings on the "effectiveness of treatment administered to persons adjudicated or convicted for acts of criminal or delinquent behavior….(and) that it is increasingly recognized that treatment would be administered in the light of accumulated knowledge as to treatment effectiveness." (p. 3)

Lipton, et al. (1975:3) go on to state: "Some of these studies are a product of the curiosity of scientists about particular issues; some of the studies are tests of innovative ideas, and some are based upon administrative needs." Unfortunately, while Martinson recanted his overall assessment that "nothing works," it was too late, for corrections changed its *modus operandi*, including the resources utilized for treatment programs. What Martinson's study essentially did conclude was that the *published literature offered no proof that treatment was effective,* primarily because it was difficult to assess the evaluation studies insofar as findings and methodologies were concerned. They state:

> It is extremely difficult to develop a cohesive body of knowledge from disparate studies. Perhaps the most salient difficulty is that the…variables…are defined differently in different studies. Additionally, any summary requires the application of individual judgments as to the confidence to be placed in the findings of the studies analyzed….based in part on the rating system (employed)…and in part on the sizes of the sample population involved…and the evaluation of the methodology used. (pp. 20–21)

Scientific Knowledge is Provisional

A number of authors (Sherman, et al., 1998) analyzing "what works" in the area of crime prevention state:

> The most important limitation of science is that the knowledge it produces is always becoming more refined, and therefore no conclusion is permanent. All of the conclusions (presented in a report to Congress)…. are provisional—just as all scientific knowledge is provisional. As the U.S. Supreme Court has noted in its analysis of scientific evidence…, no theory (or program) of cause and effect can ever be *proved* to be true. It can only be disproved. Every test of a theory provides an opportunity to disprove it. The stronger the test and the more tests each theory survives, the more confidence we may have that the theory is true. But all theories can be disproved or, more likely, revised by new findings. (p. 3)

Latent Versus Manifest Goals

Although the search for truth can be both cumbersome and enigmatic, another factor that complicates evaluation is distinguishing between "latent" and "manifest" goals. One characteristic of organizations as well as of individuals is what Merton (1957:199) has called "displacement of goals." An agency or program originally created for one purpose frequently acquires additional functions that often are unofficial, and the organization or the program may be directed more by the

acquired objectives than by the purposes or goals initially established.

Official goals generally are called *manifest*, since they are contained in legislation, administrative directives, or formal announcements under which programs are created and/or policy is publicly justified. Further, as Glaser (1973: 5–6) states: "Actual goals must be inferred from the behavior of functionaries within an organization, in terms of the objectives they seem to have. Those interests and objectives that seem to account for policy and practice, but are different from the publicly proclaimed objectives of an agency or a program may appropriately be called its *latent goals.*"

Sometimes, agency administrators or program directors are consciously aware of their latent objectives and even admit them informally, that is, off the record. At other times, these persons may "drift" into the pursuit of these latent objectives as a consequence of exigencies, changes in resources, or developing needs. Thus, they may be unaware of shifts in goals or unwilling to admit that these have occurred.

The supplementation or even the replacement of manifest goals by latent goals may be readily observable in a police department, as an example, when command staff emphasize the need to ticket motorists for speeding in order to increase revenues instead of enhancing pedestrian safety. In a probation department, an administrator may develop an intensive supervision program with the manifest goal of increasing offender supervision to reduce continued criminal activity, but instead have a real but latent objective of developing such a program to "match or better the programs colleagues in other departments have initiated." Glaser (1973:8) comments on such goal displacement and states:

> My concern…is not with evaluating the relative merit of different goals. Rather it is with stressing the need to be aware of all of them, so that one may guide agency action effectively with respect to any one of them. *It is in the public interest that latent goals be made manifest, by determining what they are and stating them explicitly.* Only if a goal is recognized can the effectiveness of efforts to achieve it be evaluated, and the consequences of pursuing one goal for attainment of others be measured.

If correctional agencies are to be made more responsive to the public interest, they must make the purposes of their case decisions and programs explicit, and the consequences of their decisions must be evaluated to determine the extent to which they accomplish their pur-

poses—purposes that reflect explicit goals and not artifacts (Selznick, 1957:27).

In the police ticketing example, it indeed is possible to measure the latent objective of enhanced revenues, but the public might justifiably be alarmed that the manifest goal of public safety has taken a back seat. If the administrator fails to inform an evaluator of the latent objective of the activity, only public safety will be measured, which, obviously, will not satisfy the administrator.

If the intensive probation supervision program has a latent goal of "keeping up with the Joneses," the mere fact that such a program was developed by the agency will result in a conclusion of success, but then, "so what?" If, on the other hand, an evaluator assesses the degree to which the program's manifest goal of crime reduction is being achieved, an actual measurement will determine the degree to which such a goal was attained.

Definitions of "Evaluation" and "Success"

Two reasonable definitions of evaluation are "the procedure by which programs are studied to ascertain their effectiveness" and "measurement of accomplishment with respect to a program's particular target" (Caro, 1971:155). It becomes obvious that these definitions readily can be applied to a business organization where profitability is the primary goal. But they may have limited applicability for a people-serving organization, especially where there are *multiple goals*. In corrections, rehabilitation of offenders, societal protection, and service to the courts may all be appropriate manifest goals.

An electronic monitoring program may have such goals as reduction of institutional populations, implementation of community-based alternatives, and societal protection. In a police department, the goals of "protection" and "service" often appear in mission statements.

From a simplistic perspective, "success" means that a goal or goals have been achieved. But, is a program successful if it achieves only 50 percent or 85 percent of the stated objective? It is critical that both administrators and evaluators clearly recognize that goal attainment may be *matters of degree* rather than *all or none* phenomena. As a consequence, *judgments* need to be made if a program achieves partial success; that is, the program resulted in some but not total accomplishment. This also means that consideration should be given to alternatives to success, ranking some as

more important or desirable, but not neglecting any that have appreciable importance.

If an agency engages in a treatment program with manifest goals of reducing substance abuse and criminal activity, and an evaluation study demonstrates that offenders in the program reduced their use of illicit substances by 37 percent with a consequent reduction in criminal activities (as measured by new arrests/convictions) of 42 percent, would one be justified in claiming programmatic success? Based on personal values, one might suggest that the program was a failure, because 63 percent of the involved offenders did not reduce substance abuse and/or criminal behavior continued at a rate of 58 percent.

This is a matter of judgment and values, but it also depends on how the agency wants to present itself to the criminal justice and public communities. Historically, correctional officials discuss recidivism rates in terms of "failure." But, if a given offender population in a probation or parole agency is technically violated at a 33 percent rate, why is this referred to as a "failure" rate? Why shouldn't this be viewed as a "success" rate, since 33 percent of these offenders who did violate the terms and conditions of their community supervision appropriately were violated by their supervisors? Or, why does the agency dwell on the 33 percent figure instead of the 67 percent "success" rate?

This is more than an issue of success definition, public relations, and/or value judgment. It goes to the heart of the role if not the mandate of the correctional enterprise and reflects a demand for understanding the meaning of and implementation of *public policy*; that is, what is in the best interest of the clients and communities being served by the organization as well as the most appropriate utilization of resources.

The Strategy of "What Works"

Sherman, et al. (1998:4) comment that when examining an evaluation report for correctional activity, other issues should be considered in addition to the manifest goals of the program and especially the degree to which an impact assessment, in the final analysis, indicates a level of crime reduction. The authors suggest that there are many potential costs and benefits to any program. Further, "Evidence about these costs and benefits might change the overall assessment of whether the program works." (p. 4) For example, what resources were needed and ex-

pended to attain programmatic success can and should influence the future of the program, as will be discussed below.

Similar to Martinson's procedure in evaluating correctional treatment programs through the use of a scale, Sherman, et al. (p.6) evaluated prevention programs, ranking each reported study according to a scale of 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest) on overall internal validity. But the researchers faced a dilemma: "How high should the threshold of scientific evidence be for answering the…question about program effectiveness?"

They respond as follows (p. 6):

Based on the scientific strength and substantive findings of the available evaluations, the report classifies all programs into one of four categories: what works, what doesn't, what's promising, and what's unknown.

It will be useful to review their definitions of the above categories:

— **What Works.** These are programs that we are reasonably certain prevent crime or reduce risk factors for crime in the social contexts in which they have been evaluated and for which the findings can be generalized to similar settings and in other places and times…with a preponderance of effectiveness.

— **What Doesn't Work.** These are programs that we are reasonably certain from available evidence fail to prevent crime or reduce risk factors for crime, using the identical scientific criteria used for deciding what works.

— **What's Promising.** These are programs for which the level of certainty from available evidence is too low to support generalizable conclusions, but for which there is some empirical basis for predicting that further research could support such conclusions.

— **What's Unknown.** Any program not classified in one of the three above categories is defined as having unknown effects.

The above typology should have considerable utility for researchers and practitioners alike in that it handily dismisses the need for an "all or none" conclusion of any evaluation effort. It will be a judgment call, however, if the end result of a research effort demands a "what works" conclusion rather than satisfaction merely with "what's promising." Obviously, the nature of the evaluation effort in terms of the data available and the methodologies involved will have a de-

cided impact on any study's results. But, the administrator must decide what level of satisfaction is desired and/or acceptable.

This also means that one should seek definitions of success that are useful rather than sacred. It also means that care must be taken to distinguish between "prediction" and "preference." The former is concerned almost exclusively with an analysis of those factors (variables) which have predictive value insofar as the expected results are concerned. The latter is concerned with personal values on what is wanted or desired irrespective of the "facts" or conclusions which actually obtain as a consequence of the evaluation activity.

Public Policy

As Caplow (1976:185–199) notes, "no organization can be completely insulated from the currents of social change in the surrounding society." He discusses demographic shifts and changes in public policy and social values as key components of social change, all of which have a direct impact on criminal justice administration and practices. Hudzik and Cordner (1983:118) enumerate some of these changes, which include new laws and regulations, court decisions, elected officials' administrative requirements, and vested interest groups' demands, among others.

They go on to state (pp. 118–119): "All such changes in public policy require criminal justice agencies to react, and those that have been paying attention to their environments will be more likely to have foreseen the changes and to have adapted in a timely and successful fashion. Further, as Caplow (1976:191) concludes:

…changes in social values are even more unpredictable in the long run than changes in public policy, but since they are much less abrupt, they permit more intelligent planning and adaptation.

A correctional administrator who initiates evaluation research is always mindful of the facts and figures associated with the research: facts, which are the resultant findings of the research (provided the data upon which they are based have both validity and reliability) and figures, which essentially are the data from which the findings or facts are obtained. Moreover, it has been pointed out that while researchers ostensibly are "value neutral" with regard to judgment calls as to the worth of a program being studied, an administrator generally is not so constrained.

And his or her values do indeed impact judgment calls, for what is deemed to be worthy or without worthiness insofar as the research conclusions are concerned is an administrative decision. If the administrator is honest and is prepared to make ethical choices (see, e.g., Henry, 1999), he or she will be prepared to accept the outcomes of the research as they exist and not as he or she would want them to be.

To build a body of scientific knowledge, as Sherman, et al. (1998) discuss, correctional administrators must not only commit themselves to evaluation research, but provide the resources for such an activity, accept honestly the outcomes, and recognize that deciding how to utilize programmatic resources should require a public policy perspective. The basic question to be addressed, then, is whether the outcomes derived from the program evaluation are worth the resource costs and, if so, whether the program should be continued, modified, or quashed. Further, to what extent (assuming the outcomes are appropriate) does the evaluation effort demonstrate that the program accomplished its explicit objectives, and at what cost?

To answer these questions, an administrator must view the program in terms of public policy as well as organizational effectiveness. Here, a critical decision must be made regarding both personal and organizational values, which can produce a dilemma. If the administrator "likes" a program and it costs X to produce Y results, is this sufficient to continue the program? Should it be continued if it takes X + 1 to produce Y + 2 results, results which are desired and/or needed; that is, is the additional expenditure worth it?

If a probation intensive supervision program costs $1,000 per year per offender and the program has a 55 percent "success" rate, should the administrator expend $1,500 to achieve a 60 percent success rate—assuming this is possible? Suppose it costs $2,000 or $3,000? An administrator, of course, has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure appropriate cost-benefit outcomes for any program initiative, but where are the guidelines that assist in the decision-making process? How does one make a determination that the expenditure of any funds—even if the program is "successful"—truly meets public policy concerns?

Administrative Decision-Making and Change

The danger in this kind of decision-making is that an administrator may decide to develop and/or continue a program as a result of "preference" rather than as a consequence or result of any evaluative research, especially if the program meets his or her personal needs/values. As Nelson and Lovell (1969:5) long ago indicated:

> (An)…attribute of correctional management has been a particularistic approach to program development and change. This approach has been characterized by faddism, a somewhat frivolous subscription to "new" ideas and generally non-rigorous, nonscientific rules of thumb, for determining what to delete from the old system and what to add to it…which has led to tokenism in the launching of new measures.

Although their commentary was written over a quarter century earlier, what they have to say does have contemporary meaning. They go on to state (p. 5):

> Correctional administrators are not so much responsible for this condition as they are the victims of two realities: society's uncertainty about the causes and solutions of the crime problem; and the present inability of social science and research to provide a solid frame of reference for considering alternative courses of action and estimating their consequences.

Today, evaluation research has been gaining a strong foothold in correctional operations, but it remains a strange and somewhat frightening specter to most administrators. They tend to see research as a worthwhile endeavor and are supportive generally, but its methods, its vocabulary, and the researchers themselves cause them a great deal of apprehension.

Furthermore, many correctional administrators worry about the consequences of its widespread use. Nonetheless, as *stewards of their charters*, these administrators will have to exercise leadership and adjust themselves to the tentativeness of available knowledge. They will need to understand and appreciate the importance of program evaluation, including its capacities and its limitations. Nelson and Lovell (1969:16) suggest:

> The correctional administrator who is aware of past efforts to understand and control criminality can avoid impulsive commitment to the succession of seemingly new "solutions" which achieve a transitory visibility and then pass from sight. Hopefully, he will be equally able to recognize genuine innovations when they do appear.

D.M. Gottfredson (n.d.:133) examines the relationship between correctional decision-making and the role of the correctional administrator as a change agent. He suggests that the process can be compared to a three-legged stool. One leg is the quality of the information on which decisions must be based. Another is the goal or set of goals that he or she wants to achieve. The third is his or her knowledge of the *relationships* between the information with which to work and the *probable* consequences of his or her various decision alternatives.

The change agent is required to sit on this stool because as an administrator decision-making is a requirement. If the administrator sits cautiously, it is because he or she knows that not all three legs of the stool warrant confidence. The administrator is less likely to be floored, however, if he or she adopts as part of basic managerial equipment some of the attitudes and methods of science. Through his or her role as a "scientist," the administrator can sit more confidently; meanwhile knowing that by pursuing the evaluative process, performance can not only be evaluated, but ultimately in many cases improved.

Leadership

Today, more than ever before, the field of correctional administration has a fourth leg on that stool—namely, public policy. As an administrator, as a change agent, and as a leader, the field demands—and appropriately so—that this executive be ever mindful of what is good not only for the organization, but also for the ultimate customers: the general public. It is this group that currently demands quality performance, a commitment to the reduction of crime and victimization, and an organization that is both effective and efficient (see, for e.g., Cohn, 1994).

While the general public tends to have little awareness of correctional operations, it nevertheless demands tangible results. Meaningful programming can produce outcomes that will meet this mandate, provided that evaluation efforts really substantiate "success." The correctional leader knows this and should guide the organization toward fulfilling this mandate responsively and with a high level of responsibility and accountability. He or she should be committed to appropriate programming and meaningful outcomes at a level consistent with public demand.

In effect, our public customers have a right to expect correctional leadership, which appears to exist at higher levels of frequency than ever before in history. Ingstrup and Crookall (1998:53), perhaps, summarize it well:

> Leadership helps an organization develop a shared vision and a unity of purpose. It is central to building teams and networks, to forging the all-important trust that binds an organization, and to ensuring the organization has the skills to meet the mission. In an era of relentless change, leadership allows well-performing organizations to maintain their excellence. Leadership is now a strategic instrument, not a personal idiosyncrasy.

Attempting to identify "what works" undoubtedly is a worthwhile endeavor in the correctional arena as well as throughout the field of criminal justice administration. But successful evaluation will not happen automatically. It will require leadership by the administrator, a commitment to evaluation research that flows from explicit goals, and a willingness to identify and accept public policy as an inevitable aspect of responsive and responsible decision-making.

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