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ACQUISITIONS

CLASSIFICATION FOR CASELOAD MANAGEMENT
AND STAFF DEPLOYMENT IN WISCONSIN

S. Christopher Baird
Research Director
Case Classification/Staff Deployment Project
Wisconsin Division of Corrections
Madison, Wisconsin

Session: CASE CLASSIFICATION PROCESS IN FIELD AND INSTITUTIONAL SERVICES
Date: Wednesday, August 24, 1977
Time: 10:30 - 12:00 P.M.

Introduction

The primary objectives of Probation and Parole are protection of the
community and rehabilitation of the offender.[1] To achieve these objectives
probation and parole agencies must exert controls and offer treatment.
However, it is well recognized that not all offenders require the same level
of supervision or exhibit the same problems. Most experienced probation
and parole agents utilize an intuitive system of classifying offenders into
differential treatment and surveillance modes, usually based on subjective
judgements of client needs and their perception of the client's potential for
continued unlawful behavior. It seems reasonable to assume that without
this type of caseload management, successes would diminish and failures
increase.[2] However, this untested, highly individualized approach cannot
provide information necessary to rationally deploy staff. The criteria used
in informal classification systems are probably as varied as agents'
experiences, education and philosophical approaches to the job.

Various types of formal classification have been developed and utilized
by field services. Many are based on a statistical measure of the client's
probability of revocation which is used to aggregate offenders into high,
medium and minimum supervision groups. Tests of these base expectancy
measures have often demonstrated that they provide accurate assessments of
risk, yet current utilization is limited. (Use of base expectancy measures'
may expand in the near future. The Government Accounting Office in its 1976
report State and County Probation: Systems in Crisis recommended that pro-
bation predictive models be used more frequently.)[3] One criticism of

predictive tables is that the criteria for success or failure are often limited to whether a conviction for a new offense occurs within the period of supervision.[4]

A clinical approach to classification has also demonstrated some potential for caseload management in probation and parole. The I-level and Quay systems are probably the most extensively developed systems for use in Corrections.[5] The I-level system, however, is geared for juvenile offenders and requires a highly specialized classification interview procedure. The Quay system focuses on institutional problems.[6]

Most clinical classification systems developed for Corrections require substantial psychological and social adjustment assessment, hence considerable training is needed before staff can conduct and interpret the interview correctly. This fact often causes problems for large probation and parole agencies, where the cost involved in training an adequate number of staff proves prohibitive.

The many diverse classification processes developed throughout the nation have yielded the following conclusions which provide direction to any attempt to create a viable classification system:

1. There is little data available which suggest that a simple reduction in caseloads effects a corresponding decrease in criminal behavior. The number of contacts between offenders and agents is seemingly unrelated to success or failure when the assignment is made on a random basis.[7] Evaluators of prior programs suggest that systematic case classification which identifies the type of cases upon which increased effort could be expended is essential.[8]

2. Base expectancy measures appear to be the most promising form of classification developed to date. The California Base Expectancy Classification system, for example, has been tested using thousands of clients over a number of years and has been clearly validated.[9]

3. Intensive supervision _may_ uncover more technical violations.[10] Increased contact with offenders necessarily increases the possibility of uncovering activities which are contrary to probation or parole agreements.

4. It is evident that the first six to twelve months of supervision are critical to successful completion of probation or parole. Violation rates tend to decline as time on supervision increases.[11]

A classification system should, at a minimum, provide a rationale for deploying agency resources, enabling administrators to make efficient use of available staff and to avoid providing services to offenders who do not require them.[12] A complete classification scheme can also assist probation and parole agents in identifying needs and problems of clients and provide a basis for more effective case planning.

Developing and Implementing a Classification System

The large number of offenders entering probation and parole systems usually requires that any classification instruments utilized must be administered by line staff. This is especially true of large county or state agencies. Cost factors generally preclude the initiation of processes comparable .to institutional classification systems where assessments are completed by highly trained staff at reception centers.

Perhaps the principal explanation for the failure of classification systems to gain widespread utilization is that while substantial effort has been expended to develop valid and reliable instruments, less effort has been devoted to implementation problems. Experience with initiating a comprehensive classification in Wisconsin has demonstrated that successful implementation hinges on five factors. They are:

1) The scoring system for any classification device should be made as simple as possible. Complex tabulations will reduce reliability. Even the most sophisticated and valid classification system is of no value if those charged with doing the classifying do not complete it properly.

2) The classification rationale must be readily apparent and accepted by Probation and Parole staff.

If agents feel the classification criteria are inappropriate, the instruments simply become excess forms to complete. Proper attention may not be given to the classification procedure, thus diminishing its validity. Treatment recommendations may be ignored.

Alluding to such problems, Breed (1967) stated that:

> For research to play an effective role in the development of an increased body of knowledge in the field of corrections, it must become participating partners with operational staff in program planning, program development and program evaluation. This does not mean that theoretical research has no place in the future. It does mean that action or practice oriented research will become more important and meaningful in the years ahead. A classification system which is understandable and able to be communicated allows for far greater participation in the research process by line staff. They are able to report in definable terms what their goals for clients are--the progress they are making towards their goals--and impressions as to how their practical experiences relate to theoretical postulations. Research staff should be able to tabulate, scale, and present material in a form that can be used by operational staff.[13]

Including probation and parole staff in the development of a classi-
fication device not only can strengthen the instruments but helps to in-
still confidence and ensure acceptance of the system.

3) Consideration of probation and parole agents' subjective judge-
ment ought to be maintained.

In an age of management by objectives, emphasis on accountability,
and increasing utilization of standards, staff engaged in the provision of
direct services often feel professional discretion is being systemically
eroded. Allowing agent impressions to affect the level of supervision can
provide valuable input and gain agent support which is essential to success-
ful implementation. Because no classification is totally accurate,
Gottfredson and Bond (1961) also advocate utilizing the subjective judge-
ments of professionals:

> In the absence of perfection any predictive system will
> misclassify some persons. The statistician (correctly) regards
> this as "error" and he usually can state its probable limits.
> The clinician, however, may (correctly) regard this as individu-
> ality or uniqueness (of personality or situation) beyond that
> measured by the statistical predictive method. This suggests
> a way to improve our predictive ability. Give the clinician
> the predictive device....[14]

4) Periodic reassessments should be an integral part of any classifi-
cation process.

Reassessments compel probation and parole agents to regularly appraise
client progress. This type of systematic assessment may not otherwise be
done as agents tend to focus on the more immediate demands of a full workload.

Reclassifications are necessary because clients' situations, needs and
even risk of continued unlawful behavior may alter substantially over time.

Gibbons (1975) states that "Variability rather than consistency may be most characteristic of offenders...Behavioral stability in lawbreaking may be more uncommon than implied in (extant) offender typologies."[15]

Recurrent classifications may help move many clients through probation or parole with greater precision. The agent's attention is often focused on a small number of problematic clients and investigations. Hence, relatively problem-free cases may be "carried" in the system because the agent has not taken the time to properly assess their progress and current situation.

5) Classification should be incorporated into the agency's record-keeping system.

Data utilized to classify offenders are data important enough to be collected on a regular basis. Combining classification and data collection documents assures that classification is done routinely and prevents duplication of data collection tasks. Paperwork is certainly a sensitive subject in any organization and classification forms which add to the paperwork burden of line staff, rather than replacing old data collection documents wherever possible, are likely to be resisted.

Classification should also be used by unit or office supervisors as the primary measure of accountability. A comprehensive classification system identifies client needs, problems and risk of continued offending. It follows logically that the original case plan and subsequent reevaluation reports should deal with those needs, problems and risk. This presents an ideal opportunity for supervisor input, including an assessment of agent effort, suggestions of alternative methods of treatment, and recommendations for additional staff training when it is needed.

Incorporating classification into agency data collection and audit systems should accelerate implementation and strengthen the organization's reliance on the classification process.

The following sections of this paper provide an overview of the Wisconsin Classification system including its development, implementation and utilization by management.

The Wisconsin Classification System

A. Historical Perspective

The Wisconsin effort to develop a classification system began as a result of a directive from the State Legislature to improve the effectiveness of service delivery to state probationers and parolees through establishment of a case classification system.[16] The final product of classification was expected to be a method for deploying staff based on total workload.[17]

Several unique aspects of the Wisconsin effort are noteworthy. First, while L.E.A.A. funds were obtained to provide research capabilities, the Division of Corrections, Bureau of Probation and Parole assigned eight agents to devote 50% of their time to the Case Classification Project. In addition, probation and parole staff, supervisors and agents, throughout the state served on various committees involved in the development of standards. Finally, an individual from top management (initially the deputy director of the Bureau of Probation and Parole and subsequently a former regional chief) was appointed as project director to coordinate work between research and line staff. All of these factors underscore the Wisconsin Division of Correction's commitment to develop a viable classification system.

The case classification/staff deployment effort began with the following objectives:

1. The development of a comprehensive classification process which assesses clients according to a) need for services and b) risk of continued unlawful activity.

2. Development of a classification process which would help agents to quickly determine an appropriate supervision strategy.

3. Development of structured levels of supervision including defined criteria for initial placement and movement between levels.

4. Establishment of standards for agent functions.

5. Determination, through time studies, of the time required by agents to meet agency standards.

6. Development of a data system which would enable the Bureau to budget based on workload.

B. Classification Process

The three types of classification schemes described previously--subjective, statistical and clinical--exhibit unique strengths. Therefore, the Wisconsin case classification system utilizes components of each. The Wisconsin procedure requires periodic reevaluations rather than relying on a single classification "score" to dictate the intensity of supervision over an entire probation or parole term. A client's situation, service needs, and even risk of continued criminal activity, may alter substantially over time. A classification procedure which is done only at intake cannot reflect these changes. Thus, an initial classification is completed within the first thirty days of supervision and reclassifications are done at six month intervals.

The Case Classification/Staff Deployment Project (CC/SD) sought to
develop a statistical classification device not based simply on revocation
or discharge as the outcome criterion, but one which would assess a client's
propensity for further unlawful or rule-violating behavior. To accomplish
this, the outcome measures tested included absconsions, rules violations,
arrests, misdemeanor convictions, felony convictions and revocations.
Criminal history and socioeconmic factors were entered in a multiple regression
analysis to determine which combination of variables could best predict future
criminal behavior. Ten factors were isolated and weighted, many of which
have been utilized on other scales. They are:

Age at first conviction

Number of prior felony convictions

Number of prior periods of probation/parole supervision

Number of prior probation/parole revocations

Convictions for burglary, theft, auto theft, robbery,

worthless checks, forgery

Number of address changes in last year

Percentage of time employed in last year

Alcohol usage/problems

Other drug usage/problems

Client attitude

In the interest of community protection and at the behest of the
Wisconsin Division of Corrections all assaultive offenders are placed under
maximum supervision for (at least) the first six months of probation or parole.
At reevaluation, assaultive offenders are assessed like all other clients and
assigned to supervision levels based on classification scores.

This predictive table is used at intake and emphasizes criminal history items. Therefore, persons with extensive prior involvement with courts and corrections will rate as higher "risks" than will most first or second offenders. However, a different scale is used at six month intervals to reclassify clients. The reevaluation risk scale shifts emphasis from criminal history factors to items which reflect the client's overall adjustment while on probation or parole. It includes assessments of client's response to court or corrections imposed conditions of probation or parole, use of community resources and interpersonal relationships. This type of assessment allows clients who have adjusted well in the community to progress to lower levels of supervision and moves clients who continue to exhibit problems to higher supervision levels.

The ability of the classification system to identify high risk clients is attested to by preliminary data from Wisconsin's Madison Region. From August, 1976 through April, 1977 fifty-seven probationers or parolees were revoked. Of these, fifty, or 88%, had been classified as maximum risks. The remaining seven had been classified as moderate risks.

Preliminary indications are that the Wisconsin risk assessment scale is even more successful in identifying low risk clients. No client initially classified as a minimal risk has been revoked to date and 150 have successfully completed their entire probation or parole terms.

Risk of further criminal behavior is not the only factor which determines the extent of agent involvement with a particular client. Clients have both chronic and crisis needs, some of which can be handled through a referral to

the appropriate community resource agency and others that the agent must deal with directly. The Wisconsin Division of Corrections sought to standardize the manner in which agents assess the needs of their clients. This objective led to the development of a table which identified and weighted eleven categories of needs most commonly evidenced in probationers and parolees. The table is primarily a product of Wisconsin probation and parole agents.

The agents involved in the development of the needs assessment table determined that crisis needs should not be considered as classification criteria. An immediate need for shelter or meal money, for example, is usually the result of a more extensive problem such as unemployment, drug abuse or emotional instability. Although an important agent function, crisis intervention generally provides temporary solutions to problems symptomatic of more complex needs.

An extensive list of possible client needs was prepared and used to survey incoming clients over an eight month period in Madison. The eleven categories of needs which comprise the final scale were those most frequently encountered.

The scale is designed not only to be a classification device, but to provide a common denominator for assessing the composite severity of problems, to aid in formulating a case plan and to provide an instrument for uniformly assessing the progress of clients. Because the rating of client needs can result in the assignment of a specific supervision level, a high degree of inter-rater reliability is desirable. Tests utilizing taped interviews of new clients indicated that overall, agents agreed on the severity of each need category approximately 80% of the time.

- 11 -

The assessment of risk and needs provides a measure of the client's propensity for further criminal activity and an indication of the amount of agent intervention required to deal with a client's problems. These determine the _level_ of supervision for each client but do not address the question of supervision strategy. To date, Wisconsin agents have had to rely on subjective judgements in order to anticipate the finer aspects of supervision. Agents need to understand their clients in order to know when to confront and when to support, when to be directive and when not to, when to set rules (and which rules) and when not to, when to trust and when not to, when to recommend psychotherapy and when not to. Those who approach their job by relying too heavily on one method (e.g., always being quite controlling) tend to work effectively with some clients and not others. Agents who develop a better understanding of the individual client and utilize greater flexibility in applying different rehabilitative techniques can respond more appropriately to the needs of the individual and can be more effective with a greater variety of clients.[18]

The Wisconsin Division of Corrections sought to develop a case classification system which would help agents develop appropriate casework strategies. Exhibitionists, armed robbers, murders, marijuana users, drug pushers, wife beaters, check forgers, prostitutes, white collar offenders, those who fail to pay support, burglars, are all labeled criminal. They differ considerably in terms of type of offense, living stability, acceptance of criminal behavior, likelihood of recommitting crimes, emotional needs, levels of education, work skills, honesty, and other factors. Confronted with such a diversity of people and problems,

an agent often needs considerable experience with an individual before formulating an effective treatment strategy.[19] This can create problems in a Corrections setting where agents work with involuntary clients, where time is somewhat limited, and the first few months of supervision are often so critical to successful completion of probation or parole. Therefore, a method which would reduce the time required to develop casework strategies could prove beneficial. To this end, a classification tool was developed which could be easily administered by agents to 1) aid in assessing client needs, 2) provide an objective evaluation to help agents formulate goals at the start of probation or parole and, 3) provide agents with different supervision strategies appropriate to different types of clients.[20]

The clinical classification process (Client Management Classification) consists of a forty-five minute semi-structured interview and utilizes a forced-choice rating instrument. Four groups of clients are identified based on supervision techniques used in working with each. They are:

1. Selective Intervention

2. Casework/Control

3. Environmental Structuring

4. Limit Setting

This classification system is designed to help agents anticipate clients' problems and behavior and provides recommendations for dealing with each type of client. Preliminary indications are that this process presents a valid assessment of clients and that the scoring guide developed ensures inter-rater reliability.[21]

- 13 -

C. Supervision Levels

Based on scores from the risk and need assessment scales, offenders
are assigned to maximum, medium or minimum supervision. The client is
assigned to highest level of supervision indicated by his/her score on
either scale. However, if individual circumstances warrant the assign-
ment to a supervision level other than what is indicated by the scales,
an agent can, after obtaining permission from his/her supervisor, make
the appropriate adjustment. This has occurred in approximately 12% of all
classifications completed to date.

In general, maximum supervision clients either have a relatively
high potential for continued unlawful behavior or have demonstrated
substantial need for agency services. Most clients (87%) with need
assessment totals high enough to warrant maximum supervision also rate as
high risk cases. Medium supervision clients have relatively lower proba-
bilities of continued criminal activity but still require ongoing agent
involvement. Minimum supervision clients manifest relatively few problems
and are very likely to successfully complete probation or parole.

Two differential supervision schemes are currently being analyzed in
Wisconsin. Most agents are operating under standards that require a minimum
of two face-to-face contacts per month for maximum supervision cases, one
contact per month for medium supervision clients, and one contact every
three months for minimum supervision cases. In addition, thirty agents with
caseloads of thirty-five or fewer clients are participating in a study of
more intensive supervision. They are required to see maximum supervision
clients at least four times per month, medium supervision cases at least

twice each month and minimum supervision cases once every three months. Under both sets of standards, the requirements for face-to-face contacts with minimum supervision clients can be eliminated. After six months on supervision, such clients may simply submit a monthly report by mail, provided that the agent and his/her supervisor have agreed that such an arrangement is sufficient.

Under the more intensive standards, up to half of the required agent contacts may be made by a community resource agency. The agent, however, retains responsibility to ensure that the client keeps such appointments.

Prior to case classification, the agency minimum standard for supervision was one contact per month for all clients. This standard has remained in effect in the Green Bay Region of Wisconsin. Outcomes from all three sets of standards will be compared to determine the effects of intensive supervision when based on classification criteria. Client matching will be done to control exogenous factors.

D. Implementation

Considerable emphasis has been placed on implementing case classification in Wisconsin, with the realization that line staff support is essential to success. The system was initiated in one region at a time (Wisconsin is divided into six regions) and line staff were encouraged to suggest changes in both procedure and in the instruments used to classify. This process resulted in many improvements as more people (and their ideas) became involved in classification. Offices were revisited often to answer questions, solicit suggestions and to help ensure a smooth transition.

In addition, classification forms were incorporated into the agency's data collection system to routinize classification and reduce paperwork. The results of these efforts have been very encouraging. A survey of probation and parole staff by the Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice received very favorable responses regarding all aspects of the classification system.[22]

E. Budgeting and Deployment

While Corrections has long attempted to define the optimum, ideal, or maximum caseload that probation or parole agents should be assigned[23] many professionals have maintained that any standard client to agent ratio is an inadequate method of staff deployment.[24] The caseload approach to deploying staff assumes that all other workload is distributed equally. This, in fact, seldom occurs. The courts' utilization of pre-sentence investigations, for example, can vary substantially between counties.

Perhaps the most salient flaw in equalizing caseloads among all probation and parole staff is that differences in offenders are either ignored or it is assumed assignments are made randomly and therefore approximate equalization of workload is attained in the long run. Such an assumption ignores administrative prerogative to utilize special abilities of certain staff members. More importantly, it fails to recognize the effect of local problems, mores and law enforcement practices. However, consideration of local differences is vital if workload is to be equalized. Clients placed on probation in rural Wisconsin may be substantially dissimilar in both need and risk factors to Milwaukee or Madison probationers.

Classification systems should delineate differences in offenders which have an impact on the need for supervision. By establishing time requirements for each supervision level, as well as for all other agency functions, it is possible to ascertain the total workload of each probation and parole office. To determine functional time requirements, a series of time studies were completed by Wisconsin probation and parole staff. Utilizing the results from those studies, agent positions can be now requested and allocated according to workload.

Table 1 presents an example of a budget based on workload. (The example is purely illustrative and does not portray completely the workload of a Wisconsin agent. The time study results presented are based on standards currently in effect in most of the state as discussed previously.) Based on the standards recommended, a full workload for a probation and parole agent could consist of approximately 38 maximum supervision clients, or 77 medium supervision clients, or 153 minimum supervision cases, or 11.5 presentence investigations at any given point in time. Obviously, most workloads will be comprised of combinations of maximum, medium, and minimum supervision clients and presentence investigations. Utilizing the minimum supervision client as a base, 153 units comprise a full workload. Under this system maximum supervision cases generate four units; medium cases, two units; minimum cases, a single unit; and presentence investigations approximately thirteen units of work.

TABLE 1

PROPOSED WORKLOAD BUDGET
(SOUTHERN REGION)

RECOMMENDED WORKLOAD STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION LEVELS				RECOMMENDED WORKLOAD STANDARDS FOR INVESTIGATIONS		
	Time Study Results	Recommended Standards			Longitudinal Time Study Results	Suggested Standards
Maximum	3.07 hrs/mo	3.00 hrs/mo	Full Presentence		9.93 hrs	10.0 hrs
Medium	1.42 hrs/mo	1.50 hrs/mo	Investigations			
Minimum	0.72 hrs/mo	0.75 hrs/mo				

TOTAL AGENT TIME AVAILABLE

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52 weeks x 40 hours = 2080 hours/year

(Less vacation, sick-
leave, holidays      -  240 hours
                        1840 hours
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Less

TIME REQUIRED FOR:

	Time Study Results	Rec. Std.	Hrs.
Professional Development	(3.1%)	4%	74
Program Development	(1.6%)	4%	74
Community Development	(3.7%)	4%	74
Administrative Tasks	(14.0%)	7%	128
Personal Time	(3.1%)	6%	110
		25%	460

Equals

TIME AVAILABLE TO SUPERVISE CLIENTS OR TO CONDUCT INVESTIGATIONS:

(75%) 1380 hours/year ÷ 12 = 115 hrs/mo

PROJECTIONS		June 30, 1978	June 30, 1979	RESULTING AGENT POSITION REQUEST	June 30, 1978	June 30, 1979
Maximum Supervision	35%	832	902	Maximum Supervision Clients	21.70	23.53
Medium Supervision	45%	1070	1160	Medium Supervision Clients	13.96	15.13
Minimum Supervision	20%	476	516	Minimum Supervision Clients	3.10	3.37
Presentence Investigations		702	761	Presentence Investigations	5.09	5.51
				TOTAL POSITIONS REQUIRED	43.85	47.54

Conclusion

Nearly all experienced Probation and Parole agents utilize some kind of intuitive system of classification of their clients, usually based on the need for treatment or surveillance, with the underlying realization that certain clients will demand more of their time than others. However, this untested, highly individualized approach cannot provide the information necessary to rationally budget for Probation and Parole agencies.

Valid predictive devices do exist, yet their use in probation and parole is limited.[25] The responsibility for this underutilization is, in part, due to the lack of communication between corrections researchers and corrections practitioners.[26] Demonstrating the validity of a classification device does not ensure that it can be effectively utilized by probation and parole agencies. Many classification schemes are far too complex to be implemented by an organization supervising a large offender population. What appears to be a simple computation to the statistician may prove cumbersome to line staff whose priorities are in helping people, not in completing scales. Therefore, the value of classifying clients must be readily apparent to probation and parole agents.

If classification is ever to become an integral part of caseload management, researchers must begin to place as much emphasis on practical implementation problems as they have on the development of valid instruments.

The system which has been developed by the Wisconsin Case Classification/Staff Deployment Project is not designed to put labels on clients, or to follow any psycho-therapy-medical model of diagnosis. It is, instead, based upon the needs of the individual and the risks of harm to society through perpetuation of criminal behavior and is designed to help agents develop appropriate supervision strategies.

There is considerable data to indicate that the Wisconsin Classification System does discriminate between clients who require intensive supervision and those who do not. It appears to have the support of line staff and will be implemented statewide by October, 1977.

The Wisconsin Division of Corrections plans to budget and deploy staff according to workload for the Bureau of Community Corrections in the next biennium.

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