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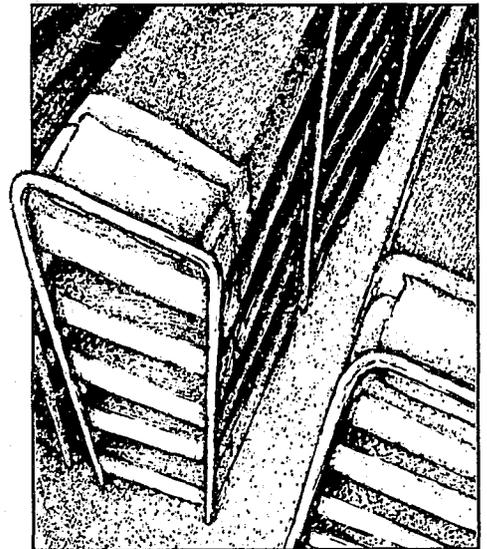
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Managing Crowded Prisons

Richard H. Franklin

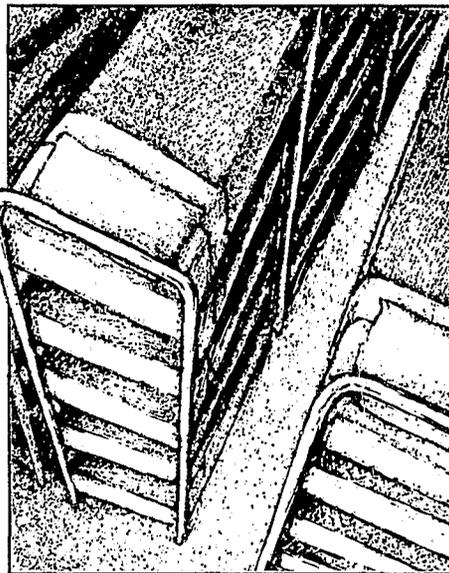
Prison crowding is a condition with which policymakers, prison administrators, managers, and line staff have struggled for years. Dramatic increases in prison populations have resulted in massive new construction projects and remodeling. Yet, the availability of prison beds falls far short of demand. Current projections suggest that this condition will continue for some time to come.

In *Management of Crowded Prisons*, a national overview of correctional management issues as they pertain to crowded prisons, authors George and Camille Camp identify institutional problems that arise or worsen as a result of crowding and recommend management strategies that may be effective in minimizing the impact of crowding on institutions.

The volume, funded by the National Institute of Corrections and prepared by the Criminal Justice Institute, is on the management of *crowded* prisons, not necessarily *overcrowded* prisons. The authors point out that not all crowded prisons are overcrowded, but all overcrowded prisons are crowded. Thus, the study reviews *conditions of crowdedness* that may exist in facilities whether or not their design capacity has been exceeded.

Of the 401 prisons in 49 correctional jurisdictions identified in this study as crowded, nearly 56 percent have become crowded since 1981, and an additional 34 percent since 1976. While the peak years of overcrowding may have passed, crowded prisons tend to remain crowded for a long time.

Since the 1969 Arkansas litigation that successfully challenged management



N. Koing

practices, housing, and conditions of confinement, numerous actions related to crowding and conditions of confinement have invited court intervention in prison management issues. By 1983, prison systems in 38 States had been challenged with varying degrees of success and intervention by the courts. Of the crowded prisons identified in the Camps' study, 62 percent were in court regarding crowding issues when the survey was conducted in 1987. Rulings have demonstrated an overriding concern of the courts that the system be capable of delivering essential services and maintaining a sanitary and safe environment even though crowded conditions may exist.

In studying the kinds of problems caused by crowding, as identified by prison administrators, the authors found some consensus as well as numerous differences. Some administrators identified serious problems that others found only slightly problematic. Such differences may be attributed to differences in the correctional systems or in the managers themselves. Among the problems:

- Common to crowded prisons is the problem of *space*. Inmate privacy, protection of personal property, supervision, and safety become issues of increasing concern and complexity as institutions are forced to double-bunk or use dormitories. As the population increases and housing and program space is shared with increasing numbers of inmates, the availability of services often decreases and tensions and conflict increase. Service areas are often inadequate for the increased numbers.

- Equipment breakdowns and the associated *maintenance* problems are problematic, particularly in aging facilities. Increased wear and tear exacerbates sanitation and repair problems; staff are often unable to meet the need.

- Crowded conditions often result in *greater workloads* for staff, which in turn may increase use of sick leave, staff turnover, and overtime costs. As crowding worsens, staff training becomes more difficult and costly, but essential.

- The increase in *violence*, both in frequency and severity, is often attributed to crowding, but some believe that other forces such as population characteristics and the instability of the inmate populations are at least as important contributors. The effect of crowding on inmate conduct is statistically reviewed in the study, and other inmate-related issues are discussed.

The authors conclude, "Crowding adds to the problems that are normally found in prisons. These problems can be serious, but need not become overwhelming. In fact, despite the numerous problems that can arise in conjunction with crowding, staff morale does not necessarily suffer. Crowding alone does not appear to weaken or strengthen morale. Actually, staff morale may be more dependent on

how administrators react to the crowding pressure, and what they do to manage the situation."

Six approaches to managing crowding

The study describes six approaches to the management of crowded prisons which, though not entirely distinct, are significant practices worthy of review. The labels used to describe the approaches are derived from practices observed by the authors, and in some cases from how the prison managers described their management philosophies.

The first, *Natural Consequences*, was observed in practices and approaches at the Kansas State Prison at Lansing. A unit management form of organization is used to carry out this approach, which reflects a positive and logical "as you sow so shall you reap" philosophy. Non-threatening communication, staff openness, and leadership by example are key ingredients.

The second, *Situational Contingency*, is exemplified at Virginia's Nottoway Correctional Institution at Burkeville. In this interactive approach, the communication of ideas throughout the organization is encouraged, but limits are clearly established that enable the organization to revert to an authoritarian posture under conditions of emergency.

Another, identified at the Federal Correctional Institution, Danbury, Connecticut, is known as *Do Rather Than Be Done*. The operating assumption is that staff and inmates can be motivated to do well. The expectation is that staff will run the institution, crowded or not. Positive reinforcement is regularly given to achieving individuals. Unit management teams rotate shifts and days off, and a

high level of accountability is maintained throughout the organization.

At the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Norfolk, a *Systems Approach* was examined, in which broad involvement of staff and inmates is invited and expected. Among the "systems" in place are a "climate control" program that reviews multiple factors that may reflect changes in the "pulse" of the institution, a unit management approach, and ongoing involvement of an elected inmate council.

At the Minnesota State Prison at Stillwater, managers provide inmates with as much freedom as is reasonable, encouraging the constructive use of leisure time. Referred to as the *Constructive Opportunity Theory*, this approach leads staff to strive to maintain a safe and secure environment in which communication is open and inmates are provided opportunities to engage in constructive activity. Self-help groups, special programs, and living units for special needs groups are provided along with the more traditional correctional programs in the effort to keep inmates constructively involved.

At the Oregon State Correctional Institution at Salem, an approach referred to as *Creative Risk* involves the assumption of reasonable risk, even under crowded conditions, rather than becoming overly restrictive. A sound intelligence system, management that is in touch with daily operations, clear role definition, and substantial penalties to inmates who intimidate others are viewed as key elements in the management of risk.

These management approaches have in common the recognition that the ability to monitor the status of the institution, allocate resources appropriately, and communicate concerns, goals, and values

throughout the institution is essential. The authors identify *candor*, *caring*, *commitment*, and *confidence* as characteristics common to successful managers of crowded institutions.

Specific approaches for management of potentially problematic areas that prison managers have found helpful in minimizing the impact of crowding are discussed in the study, including inmate visiting, food service, programs, housing, institution environment, inmate movement, work, health services, security, commissary, personnel, maintenance, special needs inmates, and others.

Conclusion

The authors recognize that crowding makes an already difficult job more difficult. However, they observed a significant amount of constructive and creative prison management, much of it in crowded institutions. The principles necessary for effective prison management are the same, whether or not the prison is crowded. Good managers manage crowded prisons well, maximizing resources and sharing the challenges and successes.

Copies of *Management of Crowded Prisons* are available from the NIC Information Center, Boulder, Colorado, 303-939-8877. ■

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