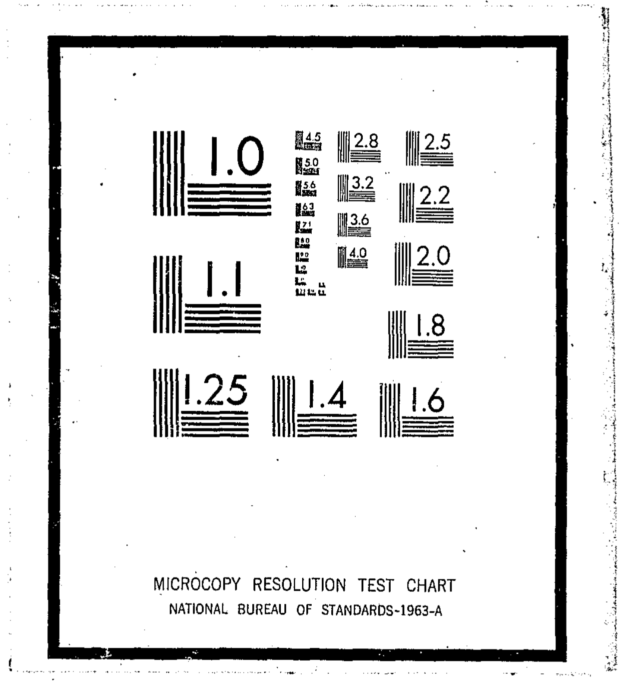

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Address to the

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THE ROLE OF THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST IN THE CANADIAN FEDERAL PENITENTIARY SYSTEM

Some months ago, we received the visit of a high official of the Justice Department of one of the countries of Europe. One of his first comments was to say that he had been surprised to learn that a psychologist was present at the meeting, in his capacity as head of a directorate. In his country this is not even thought of. Psychologists are practitioners and appointed as such; however, no one would think that they would be suitable for becoming managers and administrators. It was mentioned to him that as a matter of fact, two of our directorates at Head Office were headed by psychologists.

We in North America may think that such a comment from a representative of one of the leading European countries was indicative of a lack of progressive thinking. Yet, in Canada at least, the involvement of psychologists in other than a clinical role is quite recent; as a matter of fact, psychologists performing any role in Federal corrections dates back only to the post World War II era. The first psychologist was hired in 1948, but had to operate under the disguise of a classification officer; he found the restrictions on his activities a little overwhelming and left the Penitentiary Service after a few years.

A few more psychologists were hired, but in 1960 there were only 6 or 7 with a caseload of approximately 800 each; needless to say, their impact on policy and planning was not significant.

It was in 1960 that the position of Director of Classification and Psychological Services was established at Head Office to provide supervision and coordination of these two aspects of rehabilitation.

The new appointee was quick to realize that the small nucleus of professionals in the institutions needed some of their own at the institutional level to provide leadership, and positions of supervisors were established in institutions; these positions were not necessarily filled by a psychologist, but a post graduate degree in one of the social sciences was required, and some psychologists were appointed. Their main role was to channelize the enthusiasm of the new recruits and to integrate their activities with those of the institution. They also were to interpret the role of behavioral scientists to the Administration, which had not been done before. Psychologists walked in the institutions with little knowledge of their role, but with the hope of curing everybody. In these attempts, they were not always mindful of the attitudes of management and staff which led at times to unpleasant situations. If the psychologist did not know exactly where he fitted in, neither did the institution. Some staff felt threatened and viewed these greenhorns with suspicion; in spite of their lack of correctional experience, a factor which is always highly valued, they seemed to want to change the system - some even called inmates "Mr."! Some even tried to tell staff how they should handle inmates, and their advice was not always well received. However, management sensed that they could contribute something to the training of staff; unfortunately, it was difficult for them to abandon their academic style, and psychoanalytic explanations were too abstract for the trainees. Resistance, and sometimes ridicule were the results.

I may say that the problems were not all the responsibility of management; insistence on professional status, special privileges, and lack of ability to communicate in the layman's language were often mentioned as reasons for conflict. A strategy had to be developed to make the psychologist accepted and to enhance his contribution to the Service; unless he were accepted as a person, he could not hope to be listened to. ..

At the recruitment level, efforts were made to identify down to earth people; the highly intellectual individual, knowledgeable in all the theories of psychology sometimes had to be rejected in favor of a more concrete person whose ability to relate was more apparent. Employment in the Penitentiary Service was described as a challenge similar to that which psychologists had to meet in the mental health field a few decades before. Psychologists were repeatedly told to make themselves known as people first, professionals second: they were told to write reports in descriptive terms instead of technical jargon, so that "even the Wardens could understand".

There were difficult years ahead; being a pioneer was certainly attractive, but at times the frustrations were too great, and it was tempting to some to go to the mental health field where their role was understood by all. In the correctional field, they were working in isolation and had few people of the same background to relate to. As a result of these factors, there was a considerable turnover, with the result that the orientation of newcomers was a continuous process and there were few psychologists employed long enough to be able to make a really meaningful contribution to institutional management. There were times when there was not a single psychologist in some of our regions, to provide services to some

2000 inmates. The number of positions had been increased, but it was not possible to fill them. If a psychologist were recruited, he found that he had to do his work and that of the three other vacant positions; this meant that he could only do kitchen work and soon became discouraged.

However, some realized that quitting their jobs did not solve the problem of psychology in corrections and decided to stay and try to improve the situation; as the number of psychologists increased, their impact became greater. One was promoted to Deputy Warden; he was followed to senior management positions by other social scientists, and the trend has continued to this day. No longer are behavioral scientists secluded in their offices to hold interviews and submit reports. They are part of the programme team and consulted by institutional managers who now recognize the broader contribution which they can make.

This rather spectacular development - if we look back only a few years - cannot only be credited to the social scientists. It first came also as a result of the willingness of certain field managers to experiment by entering into consultation with them and providing them with an opportunity to show what they could do. Long years of institutional experience are no longer considered as the essential requirement for accession to managerial positions. Many senior positions in the field are now filled by behavioral scientists; two institutional Directors are psychologists; others are sociologists, social workers and criminologists.

Partly as the result of the willingness of management to involve them in the managerial process, psychologists have changed their orientation.

At first, being a manager meant pushing paper and psychologists with all their clinical expertise were not too interested and were sometimes disdainful of people who spent their time doing this. What was the use of having spent all those years of study and internship, to end up as an administrator? Those who did become involved in administration sometimes had the feeling that their professional colleagues did not think much of their abandonment of the profession. Yet, in corrections as well as in many other fields, remaining a specialist has meant limited vertical movement in one's employment history. Psychologists have become eager to assume a more significant role in influencing the environment in which they work and want to help determine the nature of this environment. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary for them to become involved in the decision making process. When they do so, they must deal with problems that could not be further removed from their area of specialization; as one Head Office director once said, "why should I have a voice in deciding whether the piggery at one of the institutions should be renovated or rebuilt?" The making of such momentous decisions certainly requires considerable adjustment on one's part - yet it is all part of the managerial process. Comes another time when because of his background, the psychologist is able to have policy and programmes take into account some factors which may have been ignored, had he not been part of the managerial team.

Until now, this paper has dealt mostly with the increased development of psychologists as managers; it is because I am convinced of the importance which their contribution can have in the planning and implementation of our programmes. However, I realize also the important role which psychologists play as practitioners, and which many prefer to administrative work.

There is a tremendous lot of personal satisfaction in being a helper which cannot always be found in managerial functions.

Our policy regarding the role of the institutional psychologist over the last decade has been that he dispenses services to the normal population and not only to inmates suffering from acute anxiety or other emotional disturbances, although he will of course make psychological assessments on psychiatric referrals; We do not feel that it would be economical to concentrate our psychological forces on the small percentage of acutely disturbed inmates and we prefer psychologists to devote most of their time to those inmates who need assistance in dealing with day to day problems of adjustment, who require to be better motivated and who become upset at the thought of soon being released to society to face the problems from which they have been protected during their incarceration. For that reason, psychologists in our institutions are not responsible to psychiatry but to an Assistant Director of Socialization who has charge of all the social, vocational and academic programmes. The number of psychologists in all institutions is approaching 50. There is a greater concentration of them in our Regional Reception Centres, where the ratio is 1 per 40 inmates to ensure efficient assessment and programme prescription. In our maximum and medium security institutions, the ratio varies generally from 1 per 150 to 200 inmates - which we hope to reduce even if those inmates are not severe emotional cases. In Regional Medical Centres, where psychologists are responsible to a psychiatrist due to the type of patients, the ratio is also 1 per 40.

Since 1970, there has been another change in the traditional role of the psychologist. While our preferences have been for those trained in the clinical field, due to the diagnostic and psychotherapeutic functions involved, we have introduced a Living Unit programme which places greater emphasis on social interaction between staff and inmates; thus, social psychologists are now in demand, and clinical psychologists require to orient their work toward group dynamics. This new orientation is not, I believe, peculiar to our Service, as there is increasing evidence from research that the psychotherapeutic interview, when considered against all the group pressures which an inmate is subjected to, does not have the impact which it was believed to have some years to go.

The psychologist in our Living Unit programme does not cease to perform diagnostic and therapy functions. However, the specially trained correctional officer, because he is in contact with the inmate on a continuing basis is becoming the main socialization agent and is being assisted in this role by the behavioral scientist. In the Living Unit programme, the role of the psychologist is to assist the Living Unit officer to deal, himself, with the problems that arise. One of the advantages of course is that while the psychologist with his heavy caseload could not deal adequately with all inmates, he can reach a much greater number of them through the Living Unit Officers, and concentrate on those special cases which require his attention. The psychologist attends Living Unit meetings and his observations at the post-mortems which follow them, help Living Unit officers obtain a better knowledge of group dynamics and of the type of intervention which is required in various situations. To the traditional role of the clinical psychologist has been added that of programme consultant and staff trainer. In order to meet these new requirements, it is necessary for him to leave the isolation of his office and to mingle with the crowd. This new programme has placed heavy responsibilities on the psychologist and for those who have more experience and training in working with individuals, the emphasis on group interaction requires a drastic reorientation, which some of them, as well as other behavioral scientists view with a certain amount of trepidation - a very understandable situation. Emphasis on communication and interpersonal relationships is characteristic of this decade and it is to the credit of psychologists that a good part of the responsibility for achieving these objectives has been bestowed upon them.

It may have been noted that I have not, until now, mentioned research, an area which is close to the psychologist's heart. We accept, of course, that research is necessary, especially in the area of evaluation of new programmes. Our problem is how to have so many things done by so few; how can psychologists provide services and at the same time devote sufficient attention to research? There is an increasing practice of assigning research projects to outside resources which I feel is the right policy; our psychologists are invited to identify research projects and to comment on results, while the actual research work is carried out under contract; objectivity can be increased by such a practice. It is interesting to note that some years ago, at the time when they were strictly practitioners, psychologists were insistent on having research be part of their duties; it would seem that now, because of their greater involvement in the whole correctional system they find greater professional satisfaction and realize that the research role would be difficult to fulfill in addition to their other functions.

To conclude, the role of the psychologist in our Canadian Federal correctional system, over the last 15 years, has developed at a very fast pace, especially in the last few years. From a mysterious professional, secluded in his office, viewed with some degree of suspicions and scepticism, he has, and this is most important, become a participant in the managerial process, accepted both as a person and as a scientist and now shares the responsibility of being a consultant and adviser in a programme of socialization on which we have founded very great expectations. The pioneering spirit, the great tolerance to frustration which psychologists and other behavioral scientists have shown and are still demonstrating, indicates that they are worthy of our confidence. I am sure that this is replicated in other correctional systems.

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