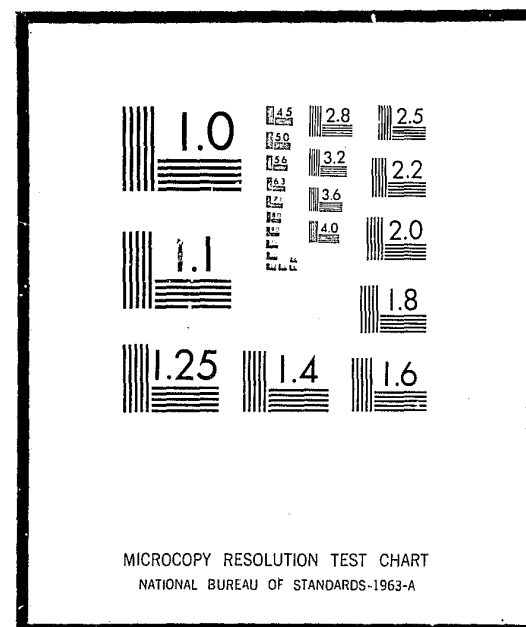


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PAROLE DECISION MAKING THE UTILIZATION OF EXPERIENCE IN PAROLE DECISION MAKING: A PROGRESS REPORT

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
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PREFACE

This report summarizes a series of progress reports prepared by the Parole Decision-Making project. The other nine reports referred to in this interim report can be obtained from both the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), LEAA, Washington, D.C. 20530 and the National Technical Information Service (NTIS), 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, Virginia 22151. The overall aim of the study is the development and demonstration of model programs for provision of information to paroling authorities in order to improve parole decisions by an increased utilization of experience in these decisions. The program, which is being conducted in collaboration with the United States Board of Parole, is supported by a grant from the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and is administered by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center.

Advisory groups include the National Probation and Parole Institutes' Advisory Committee (with representation from the Association of Paroling Authorities, the Interstate Probation and Parole Compact Administrators' Association, the United States Board of Parole, the Probation Division of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, and the Advisory Council on Parole of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency) and a Scientific Advisory Committee selected by LEAA, the United States Board of Parole, and project staff.

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Many people have aided directly or indirectly in the preparation of this report and related ones from the Parole Decision-Making project. Although only four authors are listed in the interest of brevity, this report reflects the contribution also of the additional staff listed. For example, the section of this report describing the structure and functions of the United States Board of Parole was prepared by Mrs. Marilyn M. Turner.

In addition to the active support and collaboration of the members and former members of the United States Board of Parole and of the members of the project's advisory groups, Mr. Bernard Wrenn, Hearing Examiner for the United States Board, has been especially helpful.

The cooperation of Director J. Edgar Hoover and Inspector Jerome Daunt of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in making information resources available to the project, has been sincerely appreciated. Similarly, Director Norman Carlson has provided access to records of the Federal Bureau of Prisons; and Mr. Merrill Smith, Chief, Division of Probation, and Mr. James McCafferty, Assistant Chief, Division of Procedural Studies and Statistics, Administrative Office of the United States Courts, have done the same.

Mr. John P. Conrad and Mrs. C. Ann Sadowsky of the staff of the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration have contributed substantially to whatever merit the results of the investigation may have, and their active interest and useful advice have been much appreciated.

None of the above may be blamed for shortcomings found in the report, for which the authors accept responsibility.

SUMMARY

In collaboration with the United States Board of Parole, the utilization of modern technology in decision-making is being explored. This report summarizes progress made in the first 21 months of the planned three-year project, including reports on various separate but interrelated studies.

The background to the project as a collaborative effort of decision-makers and researchers is discussed (pages 1-10), the structure and functions of the United States Board of Parole are described (pages 10-18), and the project's advisory groups are indicated (pages 18-19).

The general aim of the project is to develop, test, and demonstrate programs of improved information for decision-making--by providing objective, relevant information for individual case decisions, and by summarizing experience with parole as an aid to improved policy decisions. Since the prompt availability of information may be a requirement, the use of an on-line computerized system for retrieval and analysis of information for decisions is being explored. Further aims (pages 19-22) include the definition of paroling objectives, the description of paroling decisions, the testing of relationships between information available for decisions and the decision outcomes, the evaluation of new procedures, and the dissemination of results to parole systems of the United States.

The collaboration of other agencies is necessary to the project's success and has been extended by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and most adult parole systems in the United States. A national meeting in June, 1971, met a dual purpose of explaining the program to representatives of 40 parole agencies and of enlisting them as participants in the study (pages 23-26).

Although the decision problems involved are complex (pages 28-29), there is considerable agreement among decision-makers on general goals (pages 30-31); and their

hypotheses concerning information items relevant to the decisions can be tested (page 31).

Examples of results of initial studies and developmental work include the following:

- * A data base for study of federal paroling decisions has been developed (pages 32-34 and Reports 2 and 3). The nature of the case files sets limits upon the quality of data which can be extracted from them; however, data have been coded for a large sample (about 7,000) of persons currently appearing for parole consideration and for several smaller, retrospective samples of persons paroled in recent years. For these offenders, a large number of items concerning the life history and present circumstances has been coded.

- * Preliminary studies of experience tables show the following:

- A number of offender attributes discriminate between favorable and unfavorable parole outcomes (page 35).
- California Base Expectancy scores are valid for adult federal offenders but not for federal youth samples (page 36).
- A Uniform Parole Reports based classification method provides a valid experience table for federal offenders (page 36).
- A modified Bureau of Prisons' experience table is valid for Youth Corrections Act cases (page 36).
- A twenty-item "Burgess type" experience table has sufficient predictive validity to support its experimental use by the Board of Parole (page 36).

- * Exploratory studies of the use of experience tables in individual case decision-making support the following conclusions:

- Although decision-makers consider even reliable and valid experience tables to be of marginal utility, there is some evidence that this information may shift the average time held before release (page 37).
- Decision-makers' clinical evaluations of parole risk are influenced by experience tables (page 40).
- With increased attention focused upon risk, the use of experience tables does not make the decision easier or more difficult (page 40).
- The question of impact of use of experience tables on decision outcomes requires more study; results were mixed in the experiment described (page 40). Present evidence is that the use of experience tables does not affect the proportion paroled but results in shorter continuances (page 40).

- * From a set of four rating scales completed by board members at the time of decisions, a method of describing and articulating paroling policy was demonstrated (pages 41-42). Expected decision outcomes may be obtained from the decision-makers' judgments concerning offense severity, program participation, institutional discipline, and parole risk; thus, implicit policy may be made explicit in order to provide a tool for policy formulation and assessment of equity.

- * Individual patterns of search by different decision-makers may be important to development of useful new modes of information presentation for decisions (pages 42-46). Decision-makers may be of various "types."

* Exercises simulating computer retrieval of information for parole decisions (pages 42-46) suggest that

- Persons paroling, compared with persons not paroling, seek different information.
- Different items of information are considered important for different cases.
- Different information may be used by different decision-makers to arrive at the same conclusion.
- Information may reduce confidence in the decision as well as increase it.
- There is no unanimity among decision-makers as to the relative importance of information available.

* An on-line retrieval system for parole decision-making has been developed and its use explored (pages 46-47). Analyses requested by the parole board have been completed, and a manual for use of the system has been completed.

* Various studies suggest that with data such as those available from coding case files for this study, some "less sophisticated" methods of statistics may end up, in practice, as better than the more sophisticated techniques (pages 48-50). An implication--important for both research and practice--is that major advances in both must await the development of better quality data.

The United States Board of Parole has been able to work in close collaboration with research workers of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency to explore ways in which modern technology might be utilized in their decision-making process. The technology includes both what has been termed "hardware" (computer terminals enabling displays of data) and the related "software" (statistical and other forms of analyses of information). While some aspects of the resulting studies relate to matters of concern specifically to the United States Parole Board, most of the investigations could have significance not only for the decision procedures of other parole boards, but also for other decision points in the criminal justice field, such as those involving police, prosecutors, judges, probation officers, and correctional institution staff.

A series of publications describing the studies has been initiated; some are summarized in this report. Some will, of necessity, be rather technical, while others will relate to the practical problems of those who have to make decisions about individual offenders and general policy at the "operational" level.

One of the most debated "aids" to the parole decision is the "prediction" or "experience" table,¹ which proposes to provide methods of estimation of the probabilities of various outcomes to the decisions which must be made. Few parole boards have made use of "aids" of this kind in individual case decision-making.²

Actuarial life tables have been in use for other purposes since the seventeenth century. It is no new idea that aspects of human activity can be predicted (to a greater or lesser degree) and that the use of estimates of probability could help with decisions

¹Examples of the various debates are found in the July, 1962 issue of Crime and Delinquency, which was devoted to the topic of parole prediction and its use by parole boards ("Parole Prediction Tables," Crime and Delinquency, 8(3): 209-297, July, 1962).

²Such methods have, however, found other uses; see, for example, Gottfredson, D.M., Research Significance for Parole Operations, a paper presented in the Association of Paroling Authorities program, Centennial Congress of Corrections, American Correctional Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 13, 1970; and Wilkins, L.T., "What Is Prediction and Is It Necessary?" in Research and Potential Application of Research in Probation, Parole and Delinquency Prediction, New York: Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Research Center, New York School of Social Work, Columbia University, July, 1961.

concerning individual persons.³ It is not so much the feasibility or even the utility of probability estimates that has been in doubt, but rather the "ethics" of the use of such forms of information in decision-making concerning individual placements.

Among the first experience tables designed to be of use to paroling authorities were those developed in Massachusetts at the invitation of Mr. Sanford Bates by Professor S.B. Warner and published in 1923. Warner described the policy considerations which influenced the board in granting of parole at that time as follows:

1. Whether a man had profited by his stay in the institution;
2. Was so reformed that he was unlikely to commit another offense;

³For a review of the prediction problem generally, with special reference to areas of delinquency and crime, see Gottfredson, D.M., "Assessment and Prediction in Crime and Delinquency," Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967, pp. 171-187. Concerning parole prediction studies, see also Mannheim, H. and Wilkins, L.T., Prediction Methods in Relation to Borstal Training, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1955; Simon, Frances H., Prediction Methods in Criminology, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971; and Gottfredson, D.M., Wilkins, L.T., and Hoffman, P.B., Summarizing Experience for Parole Decision Making: Report Number Five, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972, (draft).

3. His conduct in the institution;

4. Whether suitable employment was awaiting him on release;

5. Whether he had a home or other proper place to which to go;

6. His ability to tell the truth when questioned by the board;

7. The seriousness of his offense and the circumstances in which it was committed;

8. His appearance when interviewed by the board; and

9. His behavior on former parole (if applicable).

Warner related his data to the criteria applied by the board and suggested that there appeared to be little or no foundation for many of their assumptions. For example, the board regarded the commission of a sexual offense as counting against release, while the success rate for sexual offenders was higher than that for most other categories of offense. There is, of course, no reason why the factor being considered as justifying a longer period of detention for sex offenders should not be met by criterion seven above (i.e., a value judgment that sex offenses are more reprehensible and hence require more of the element of punishment), but the assumption that the probability of success was lower

(criterion 2) was not supported. Warner also concluded that the quality of information available to the board was suspect. "Without a complete change," he wrote, "both in the methods of obtaining information for the board and the nature of the information obtained" no considerable improvement in the decisions could be expected. He placed the blame for the state of affairs upon the lack of development in the scientific methods, rather than upon those of either the Board of Parole or the Department of Corrections.

Since that time hundreds of papers have appeared (the majority of poor quality) discussing from various viewpoints the construction of experience tables. Often these have been termed inappropriately "prediction tables." By far the majority of such tables have not been checked for power against samples other than those upon which they were constructed. The technical and practical difficulties which apply in the use of certain or perhaps all statistical methods in this area of inquiry have become more evident. The easy success which was expected in the initial studies reveals the lack of sophistication of research workers in the criminological area. Few research workers have been familiar with all the legal, moral, administrative, and technical issues which must be taken (equally?) into account if

development is to be assured. Indeed, it would seem to be impossible for any one person, no matter what his genius, to cover adequately the vast field of knowledge required. Only recently has it been feasible to use research teams in these kinds of studies; and perhaps of equal significance, it is only in recent years that it has become possible to utilize the computer to deal with the highly complex data and the involved analyses which we now know to be required.

The development of this area requires an admixture of the practical, the highly theoretical, and even the abstract. Abstractions are not necessarily irrelevant--sometimes it is only through employment of extremely abstract concepts that the problems may be approached in order to be able to see the practical implications. It is strange to note that the first studies were addressed to the question of "decision-making," and that it is this emphasis which has now returned to direct the nature of our thought and work. However, soon after the initial studies were published (around 1930), the philosophy of certain persons who became dominant in the field moved the research inquiry away from the decision orientation toward a search for explanation of criminal behavior.

The impact was to divert work from providing assistance to decision-makers toward attempts to explore causes of crime and delinquency. This, in turn, resulted in an almost total concentration upon the second of the criteria spelled out by Warner, namely, the probability of the offender, once convicted, committing further crimes. This work also became confused with prediction of delinquency concerning persons who had not been found guilty by due process of law but who revealed what were described as "delinquent tendencies." Thus, the concerns of parole boards, and indeed of other decision-makers in the field of criminal justice, with factors other than "prediction" came to be ignored. Even the fact that a repetition of a serious offense might receive more and different consideration from other "failure" became obscured.

Perhaps this was not too surprising, since almost all statistical data with respect to criminal behavior fail to take much account of the "seriousness" of offenses, even though the variation within a particular legal category (e.g., robbery) may be extremely large. Further, it was not until recently that any exploration or serious attempts at measurement was made of the

concept of "seriousness" of offenses.⁴ In parallel with these directions in "prediction" research came an increased emphasis on the idea that offenders could and should be given "treatment." The medical analogy was taken to considerable limits, such that the concept of a "just" punishment was not usually considered relevant. All these and other related philosophies added up to the fact that those concerned with practical decisions regarding dispositions of offenders were not helped by more than a small fraction of the research.

Parole board decision problems are both practical and, as we see it, scientific. The problems may be posed in the form, "given the present state of knowledge, what is the best thing to do (decide) about this individual, now." The conditions surrounding the "now" will differ. Interpretations of the meaning of "best" will differ. But despite this fact--that interpretations of the meaning of "best" will also differ--it is still possible to ask, within this framework, what is a rational decision under conditions of uncertainty. Developments in scientific thought, specifically as a by-product of the application of science in wartime

⁴Sellin, T. and Wolfgang, M.E., The Measurement of Delinquency, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964.

through "operations research," have led to some convergence between the decision-makers and the research scientists. The late 1940's saw the origin and rapid expansion of a new field termed "decision theory," and there have been other changes and developments which now enable inquiries to proceed along more strictly practical and relevant lines, which nonetheless can employ the strict scientific method.

Perhaps we may even begin to approach the problems of "causation" which have been resistant to frontal attack, from an oblique "engineering" approach. Perhaps this might even be achieved with more rigor than the direct attack, which must of its very nature be conditioned by the particular frame of reference of the individual research worker. In other words, the changes of conceptual structure in the statements of the problems (in some sense, back to close to where it was in the 1920's) facilitate the necessary team approach to problem solving in parole and other criminal justice decision issues.

The study here reported is an example of a team approach, involving as it does a concentrated attempt at collaboration among the decision-makers themselves, the research staff, parole decision-makers in other

jurisdictions, and, indeed, staff of the funding agency. The objective has been one of seeking to capitalize upon not only the experience and technical skills of the research staff, but also the experience and knowledge of practitioners in posing the problems to be solved, appropriate strategies for solution, and realistic steps necessary to the problem resolutions. Thus, the project was not conceived as a situation in which the decision-makers concerned were "on top," with the researchers "on tap"; neither was it assumed that the research staff had the ultimate responsibility for suggesting the hypothesis to be tested, for seeking ways of improving the information base requisite to decision-making, or for the implementation of results. Rather, the program has been considered to be a serious attempt at a truly collaborative effort between the United States Board of Parole members and staff and the research workers involved.

The Study Setting: Structure and Functions of the United States Board of Parole

The United States Board of Parole,⁵ created by Congress in 1930, is comprised of eight full-time members,

⁵The information in this section relating to the structure and function of the United States Board of Parole has been abstracted from the following documents: United States Board of Parole, Annual Report 1964-65, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1965; (cont.)

appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, who serve overlapping six-year terms and are subject to reappointment. The Attorney General of the United States appoints one member of the Board to be chairman. In addition, the Attorney General assigns three members of this eight-man Board to serve as members of the Youth Correction Division and appoints one of the three thus assigned to be chairman of the Division.

In support of the Board's activities, a staff director, legal counsel, parole and Youth Division executives, eight hearing examiners, and a small clerical staff are employed at the Board's headquarters office in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the Board is assisted by the caseworkers and administrative personnel in the various federal correctional institutions and by the United State Probation Officers who are employed by the various federal district courts and who serve as field agents for the Board.

⁵ (cont.) United States Board of Parole, Annual Report 1965-66, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1966; United States Board of Parole, Annual Report 1967-68, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1968; United States Board of Parole, Biennial Report 1968-70, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1970; United States Board of Parole, Functions of the United States Board of Parole, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1964; and United States Board of Parole, General Factors in Parole Selection, an internal memorandum revised 11/10/69.

The Board of Parole is authorized by federal statute to exercise parole authority over federal prisoners serving 181 days or longer wherever confined. This authority covers adults who have violated the laws of the United States, youth offenders committed under the Youth Corrections Act, juvenile delinquents committed under juvenile procedure in the United States Courts, and individuals committed under the Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act. The explicit major powers of the Board include authority

1. to determine the date of parole eligibility for adults committed under the "indeterminate sentencing statutes";
2. to grant parole at its discretion;
3. to prescribe terms and conditions governing the prisoner while on parole or mandatory release;
4. to issue warrants to recommit parole and mandatory release violators;
5. to revoke parole and mandatory release and to modify the conditions of supervision;
6. to reparole or rerelease on mandatory release;
7. to conduct administrative hearings on applications for exemptions from the provisions of the Labor-Management Act, which prohibits certain law violators from holding positions in labor unions.

A federal prisoner, sentenced to a term of at least 181 days, becomes eligible for parole according to the type of commitment he received from court. The most commonly used commitments are: adult "regular"; adult "indeterminate"; Youth Corrections Act commitments; Federal Juvenile Delinquency Act commitments; and Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act commitments. Under the adult "regular" sentences, parole may be granted after service of one-third of the maximum sentence specified by the court. Parole may be granted at any time to individuals sentenced on adult "indeterminate" commitments; or the minimum time to be served, which must be less than one-third of the maximum sentence, may be specified by the court. Individuals committed under the Youth Corrections Act may be paroled at any time, but not later than two years before expiration of the maximum term imposed. Parole may be granted to Federal Juvenile Delinquency Act commitments at any time. Persons committed under the Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act may be paroled to an after-care program after six months of institutional treatment.

Parole is regarded by the Board as the opportunity offered a prisoner to complete the balance of his term in the community rather than in confinement. In granting parole, the Board is guided by the following statutory

requirements: the prisoner must be eligible by law for parole; the prisoner must have substantially observed the rules of the institution in which he has been confined; there must be reasonable probability that the prisoner will live and remain at liberty without violating the laws; and the prisoner's release should not be incompatible with the welfare of society. Additionally, according to an internal Board memorandum titled General Factors in Parole Consideration as revised 11/10/69, the Board is guided by the following supplementary factors in selecting individuals for parole: sentence data, facts and circumstances of the offense, prior criminal record (detainers do not necessarily preclude parole consideration), changes in motivation and behavior, personal and social history, institutional experience, general adjustment, community resources including release plans, results of scientific data and tools, and comments by hearing member or examiner.

At least one personal hearing is conducted by the Board with each prisoner in a federal institution serving a term of more than one year. This hearing occurs either near the time he becomes eligible for parole if he applies or at the time of the initial hearing. The latter usually occurs within two months after commitment. In some cases the decision regarding parole is made on the

basis of the initial hearing; but more often than not at least two hearings are held for each prisoner.

Bi-monthly visits to each federal institution are made by the members and hearing examiners to conduct personal hearings with prisoners who recently have been committed, are eligible for parole, are scheduled for a review hearing, or are entitled to a revocation hearing. Upon return to headquarters, the member or hearing examiner meets with other members to further consider the file and vote for parole, for continuation to a specified date, or for continuation to expiration of sentence, less good-time credits.

Generally, the Board does not sit as a group to vote, but rather each member votes on an individual basis. Each official decision requires a concurrence of at least two members. There are some situations, however, in which it is deemed necessary for a larger group of members to consider parole--for instance, when the following conditions exist:

1. National security is involved;
2. The prisoner was involved to a major degree in organized crime;
3. There is national or other unusual interest in the offender or his victim;

4. Major violence has been perpetrated or there is evidence it may occur;

5. The sentence is for 45 years or more.

Any member may request an "en banc" consideration. At such proceedings, a member of the Board's staff presents an oral summary of the case and members discuss its elements before arriving at a decision. A majority of members must be present to constitute a quorum for the consideration and the resulting decision.

Reviews of the Board's decisions are not automatic, but these are scheduled by the Board at times when it may wish "to determine progress in reaching institutional goals, to evaluate adjustment to confinement, to ascertain changes in attitude, or to reappraise plans for community living after release."⁶ Reconsiderations may be initiated also by the prisoner or his family, friends, or other persons interested in him. In addition, special interviews may be granted a prisoner if requested by either the warden or one of the Board members or if he has a sentence of 40 years or greater.

Prisoners serving regular adult or juvenile sentences who are not paroled may be released before the end of

⁶United States Board of Parole, Biennial Report 1968-70, Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1970, p. 17.

their sentences by earning "good-time" credits. They earn a specified number of days according to a formula contained in the statutes and may earn extra good time through exceptionally meritorious behavior or by receiving assignment to a Prison Industries job or to a minimum security camp. The number of such credits vary according to the maximum term imposed by the court, but in long-term cases, as many as ten days may be accrued for each month. Such persons are called "mandatory releasees" and come under the Board's jurisdiction as if on parole. They must abide by the same conditions as parolees and are subject to revocation and return to the institution in the same manner. A basic difference is that the last 180 days of an adult mandatory releasee's term is dropped from his supervision period. A releasee who has fewer than 180 days remaining on his term does not receive community supervision, but is considered to have been released at expiration of his sentence. A juvenile's term is not so shortened. An offender committed under the Youth Corrections Act is not mandatorily released, but, by law, must be paroled no later than two years before the end of his sentence. The offender's term is not shortened by law, and he remains under the jurisdiction of the Youth Division for his entire term unless discharged earlier by the Division.

It is the opinion of the Board that release under some form of official supervision and control is more likely to achieve success than outright release without such supervision and control.

Advisory Groups

In addition to the United States Board of Parole as a whole, three advisory groups have guided the direction of the project.

1. The National Advisory Committee of the National Probation and Parole Institutes. This group has representation from the United States Board of Parole, the Parole Council of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, the Association of Paroling Authorities, the Interstate Probation and Parole Compact Administrators Association, and the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. It provides an overall advisory function to the project.

2. The Research Committee of the United States Board of Parole. This committee consists of the chairman of the board and two members; it provides an advisory function particularly focused upon parole policy and administration and offers an opportunity for collaborative work additional to that involving the entire board.

3. A Scientific Advisory Group, comprised of persons nominated by the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, by the United States Board of Parole, and by the project's codirectors. This committee provides an advisory function especially focused upon the scientific aspects of the program.

General Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the project is to develop, test, and demonstrate programs of improved information for parole decision-making. Thus, the general goals are to provide objective, relevant information for individual case decisions; to summarize experience with parole, as an aid to improved policy decisions; and to aid paroling authorities in more rational decision-making for increased effectiveness of prison release procedures.

Two general classes of decisions are made by paroling authorities: they make decisions on individual persons (case decisions); and they make "decisions about their decisions," i.e., paroling policy decisions. The project includes the study of each of these types. The general problems in each case include the identification and definition of decision objectives, of information elements demonstrably relevant to the decision (i.e., to the decision

outcomes), of the available decision alternatives, and of the consequences of those alternatives.

The information provided, if it is to be useful in decision-making, must meet the usual tests of reliability and validity. In this context, however, the issue of validity hinges upon definitions of the objectives of the decision. The explicit definition of the objectives of individual parole decisions (or of policy decisions) is not nearly the straightforward task that it might appear to the uninitiated observer. The parole decisions are complex; even in a context of general agreement as to aims, considerable disagreement concerning specific objectives may be expected; and various measurement problems will be encountered in seeking the clear, consensually validated, definitions that would serve as anchoring points for the program.

On the assumption that a further requirement should be that the information for decision-making must--if it is to be useful--be immediately available at the time of decision, an on-line computerized system for retrieval and analysis of information for decisions is being developed and its use explored.

A series of meetings has been held with staff and members of the United States Board of Parole, and with other paroling authorities and representatives, which

have sought to help define decision objectives, the available alternatives and constraints, the information presumed to be relevant to these decisions, and the decision consequences (i.e., the outcome criteria) which ought to be included within the scope of the study.

Further objectives include the following:

1. Develop a data base containing information on the offenders, the paroling decisions, and the outcomes to parole, mandatory release, and discharge; and then measure the relationships among offender attributes, decision outcomes, and decision consequences. This includes (but is not limited to) the development and validation of "experience tables." It includes the study of all methods of prison release, rather than only of parole, in order to permit examination of the major decision alternatives which are discretionary to the board (parole, continue) and of the consequences to the major forms of prison release (parole, mandatory release, and discharge).

2. Develop and demonstrate procedures for rapid retrieval of both numerical data and case history abstract information pertinent to individual case decisions. This includes the development and demonstration of models and assessment of their probable utility. (The provision of such a system for retrieval of this information for

all parole decisions in the federal system would be beyond the scope of the project; the project aims, rather, to develop models for procedures which could be usefully employed.)

3. Develop procedures for assessing the degree to which the information provided by the models is utilized in individual case decisions and for assessing the consequences of the use of the model versus its nonuse. As an aspect of the latter study, the estimated cost and utility for full use of any procedures developed, for all paroling decisions, should be assessed.

4. Develop monitoring or "policy control" procedures to advise the board periodically and on short notice concerning general trends in their decision-making, significant deviations in trends, deviations from established policy, and on simulated consequences to policy modifications which might be considered by the board.

5. Conduct a series of seminars with staff of the United States Board of Parole for development and demonstration of these procedures, and conduct similar seminars with other paroling authorities in the nation.

In short, the objectives of the project are to define parole objectives and information needs clearly, to describe parole decisions, to test the relationships

between information available for parole decisions and the outcomes to those decisions (whether persons are paroled, mandatorily released, or discharged), to present relevant information quickly when needed for decisions, to evaluate the utility of any new procedures developed, and to disseminate the results to parole systems of the United States.

Collaborating Agencies

A study of this nature obviously hinges, for success, upon the active support and collaboration of others; and the project staff and the United States Board of Parole have been fortunate in having the cooperation and active assistance of various related criminal justice system agencies. An important requirement to completion of the study as planned, without which the results reasonably to be expected would be severely limited, is access to the arrest records (of the federal offender samples studied) which are maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The approval for obtaining the needed data has been given by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, and initial requests for data have been promptly and efficiently provided to the United States Board of Parole by the staff of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Crime Information

center. Similarly, the cooperation of the Division of Procedural Studies and Statistics of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts has been excellent; and arrangements have been made and used for follow-up data collection from their files, supplementing the information available in the United States Board of Parole offices. Staff of the Federal Bureau of Prisons have furnished the project staff with descriptive materials on the Bureau's developing information system and the Bureau's Director, Mr. Norman A. Carlson, has approved the provision of listings of the dates and modes of release of each offender released from federal prisons. These collaborative arrangements are essential to the follow-up program concerning the outcomes to paroling decisions.

During the first year of the project, 17 state parole systems (Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin), the District of Columbia Board of Parole, and the National Parole Board of Canada volunteered to participate as "observers" of the project. These 19 agencies contributed data on a "parole opinion survey" aimed at providing information on perceived objectives and information needs of the paroling decision.

The number of "observer states" increased, however, with a national meeting held in Washington, D.C., in June of 1971. Representatives of 40 paroling agencies from Hawaii to the eastern seaboard states participated with the United States Board of Parole in that meeting.

The program served the dual purpose of explanation to participants of the project objectives and methods and the enlistment of participants as active contributors to the research effort. Thus, following presentation of an overview of the project, describing its history, objectives, and methods, a series of small group sessions were conducted in order to provide a further orientation to the methods of the project and to obtain assistance in further clarification of the simulation models being developed. These sessions included a demonstration of use of the on-line retrieval system using the computer terminal and a series of exercises; a simulation of terminal use for case decisions; a group task to clarify issues concerning information selection in parole decision-making; a discussion based upon the questionnaire regarding parole board goals and information needs; an exercise in parole decision-making from short case abstracts which examined the role of base expectancy measures in parole decision-making; and a discussion concerning constraints in parole decision-making. Further, a general critique of the

project was obtained from participating agency representatives which was followed by a questionnaire interview concerning the project and the meeting itself.

The collaborative nature of the project is thought to be especially important to the development of useful procedures for providing information. Similarly, it is thought to be especially important to the possible utilization, later, of any such procedures. Information, if it is to be used, should have a degree of acceptance in the field as relevant and practically useful. That is, if utilization is to be increased, the information must be perceived as useful by the decision-makers. It may be argued that valid information, demonstrably related to the decision-makers' goals, will be ignored in the decision process unless the person responsible for the decision perceives the information as relevant and useful. Thus, two approaches aimed at increasing the likelihood of utilization of project results are being taken: (1) development of the information in concert with the decision-makers themselves and (2) seminars conducted for the decision-makers in order to bring additional, possibly relevant information to their attention.

Some Problems, Methods, and Preliminary Results

Dialogue with Decision-Makers

A variety of methods have been employed in seeking to attain the objectives indicated above. Some of these methods are commonly used, and straightforward; others have been invented in response to specific needs of the project.

In seeking more adequate definition of paroling objectives and information needs, a variety of procedures have been followed. This has included the questionnaires mentioned above; group discussions with the United States Board of Parole, with the advisory groups for the project, and in the national meeting; individual interviews and discussions with paroling authorities; and a series of small group exercises further explained below.

It has been emphasized above that an important part of the approach taken in this study has been a continuing dialogue among the project staff, the members and representatives of the United States Board of Parole and representatives of the funding agency, i.e., the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice. An interesting feature of the program has been the convergence of objectives among persons of quite different orientations. At the American Congress of Corrections, meeting in

Miami Beach, Florida, in August, 1971, one member of the United States Board of Parole, Dr. William Amos, and a representative of the National Institute, Mr. John Conrad, both were called upon to explain the objectives and progress of the project. Their papers, attached as Appendices A and B, do not necessarily represent the views or endorsements of the United States Board of Parole or of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, but they do indicate the views concerning the project on the part of one member of the board and one representative of the funding agency.

The Nature of the Decision Problems

It was mentioned above that two kinds of decisions are made by paroling authorities, and both of these general classes of their actions are being studied. Corresponding to the different types of decisions are different (but overlapping) sets of information relevant to the decision problems. Paroling authorities make individual case decisions. They also make paroling policy decisions which set a broad framework within which the individual case decisions are made. The major problems of both individual decisions and general policy decisions involve the identification and definition (1) of objectives, (2) of information items demonstrably relevant to the decision (i.e., to the decision outcomes),

(3) of the available decision alternatives, and (4) of the consequences of the decision alternatives (in terms of the objectives).

Also mentioned above was the point that the issue of validity (of the information used) hinges upon the definitions of the objectives of the decision. The nonuse of experience tables, in the several jurisdictions where these have been developed, emphasizes the need for clear and adequate identification of objectives. Research experience in this area is extensive enough that it is a straightforward task to develop adequately reliable and reasonably valid experience tables with respect to a single, somewhat crude dichotomous criterion of "success" or "failure" on parole. Only the quite unsophisticated would argue, however, that the measurement of parole risk in these terms is the only (or even the over-riding) issue in parole decision-making. Other concerns relate to sanctioning, to due process, to system-regulatory, and to citizen representation objectives. A more rigorous and thorough attention to decision objectives is needed, and then the question of validity of information for decisions must be addressed for each of the major objectives of the decision-makers.

Perceived Goals and Information Needs for Individual Decision-Making

A survey of perceived goals and factors considered in parole selection was completed early in the project. Questionnaires were sent to state and federal parole board members asking them to rate 26 goals and 101 factors considered in granting parole. The ratings were requested on a scale ranging from "very unimportant" to "very important." Fifty-seven state and twelve federal parole board representatives responded.

Federal and state paroling authorities agreed in rating three suggested goals as most important: (1) protection of the public, (2) the release of inmates at the optimal time for most probable success on parole, and (3) the improvement of inmate adjustment in the community after release. These general statements of goals obviously require more precise definition in operational terms for adequate measurement; nevertheless, they provide a general framework of consensus from which such work can proceed.

Other goals rated as important by federal parole board members were the encouragement of inmate program participation and the release of persons on the basis of individual response and progress within the prison. A summary of the items and the responses to each is available

upon request from the NCCD Research Center. In general, the ratings appear to reflect the view that a major function of the board is the protection of the public and that the public may be best protected by release of offenders at the optimal time for most likely success on parole. Generally, there was considerable agreement in the ranking of goals by the federal parole board members and their counterparts in state paroling authorities.

The kinds of information thought to be important by representatives of the federal parole board in making individual case decisions are of interest, particularly as many of them may be considered to represent hypotheses which may be tested in the course of the study. Examples of information items rated as very important are the adequacy of the parole plan, presence of a past record of assaultive offense, the offender's present family situation, the attitude of the inmate's family toward him, or the use of weapons in the offense.

Since one focus of the study is upon the possible utility of experience tables, it is noteworthy that these are not generally thought to be of much importance. Of the 101 items, an item "statistical prediction of likelihood of parole violation (base expectancy)" ranked 68th in importance by the federal parole board representatives and it was 70th in rank according to ratings by the representatives of state parole systems.

Developing a Data Base

In order to provide an information collection system which can enable the achievement of the diverse objectives outlined above, a variety of procedures have been developed. They are described in detail in two separate reports.^{7, 8} The resulting data base includes information abstracted from records of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the United States Board of Parole, the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The major source of information on offenders, on the paroling decisions, and (for persons who are paroled) on outcomes during supervision is the case files used by the United States Board of Parole. Unfortunately, these files are not uniformly complete, frequently include conflicting information, and thus set limits upon the quality of information which may be extracted reliably from them. This source of data is augmented by information available from the additional federal agencies mentioned above.

⁷Singer, Susan M., and Gottfredson, D. M., Developing Data for Parole Decision Study, Report Number Two, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

⁸Gottfredson, D. M., and Singer, Susan M., Parole Decision-Making Coding Manual, Report Number Three, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

There are four sets of data available for study (in addition to questionnaires or other forms completed by decision-makers for special studies). They are as follows:

1. Information on cases "currently" appearing for parole consideration. Since August, 1970, samples of offenders considered for parole have been taken. This set includes a 50 percent sample of all persons considered for parole between November 1, 1970 and October 31, 1971 (a full year).

2. Information on retrospective samples assumed to be representative of persons who were paroled earlier.

These include:

a. Persons paroled in fiscal year 1968 (430 offenders), with a two-year follow-up study;

b. Persons paroled in fiscal year 1966 (270 offenders), with a three-year follow-up study; and

c. Persons sentenced under the Youth Corrections Act and paroled in fiscal year 1969; the coding for this sample is still in progress.

Discussions of the specific sampling procedures, the parole outcome criteria used, procedures for selection and coding of reliability samples, the coding forms used, and related operation rules are included in the report cited.⁹

⁹Singer and Gottfredson, op. cit., supra note 7.

The items of information included, together with the instructions for coding which constitute their definitions, are given in the coding manual for the project.¹⁰

The information on "current" cases will permit description of the persons paroled in comparison with those who are not. It will allow the development of procedures permitting the parole board to assess its trends in decisions over time; and it will enable the development of a systematic program for periodic assessment and revision of experience table type information. Further, it will provide the basic information needed for a comparison of various decision outcomes with the later consequences in terms of offender performance after prison release.

A major resource which provided a stepping stone for developing these procedures was the Uniform Parole Reports project's methods and data file. This data base includes information on more than 100,000 offenders paroled since 1965 by the various states and other jurisdictions.

Developing Experience Tables

Preliminary studies of the validity of some existing experience table methods when applied to federal offenders have been completed, and one prediction method has been

¹⁰Gottfredson and Singer, op.cit., supra note 8.

developed on the basis of the adult federal offender retrospective samples. This work has called into question the usefulness and applicability of the more "sophisticated" statistical manipulations commonly applied, given the quality of data available for parole decision-making for federal offenders.

Discussion of the relevance of experience tables to individual parole decisions, of prior studies of parole prediction, and of the results of the preliminary studies are given in a separate report.¹¹ The results support the following conclusions:

1. Examples of offender attributes which discriminate between favorable and unfavorable parole outcomes are the commitment offense, the admission type (new case or parole violator), the history of probation or parole violations, time free in the community without commitment, prior records of commitment, sentences, and incarcerations, prior juvenile delinquency convictions, the employment history, the prison custody classification, the punishment record and escape history, a prior history of mental hospital

¹¹Gottfredson, D. M., Wilkins, L. T., and Hoffman, P. B., Summarizing Experience for Parole Decision-Making, Report Number Five, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

confinement, and aspects of the parole plan. Most of these examples confirm the results of earlier studies.

2. Two forms of a base expectancy measure developed from study of California adult parolee samples were found to be valid with respect to adult federal offenders (with validity equivalent to that for California adult parolees) but not valid for use with federal youth samples.

3. A classification method based upon Uniform Parole Reports data was found to have some validity as an experience table for federal parolees.

4. A modification of a Bureau of Prisons' configuration table (experience table) for Youth Corrections Act releasees provides a valid prediction method for these cases.

5. A twenty-item "Burgess" type experience table has some predictive validity as well, sufficient to support its experimental use by the United States Board of Parole.

The same report lists a number of specific steps suggested toward the improvement of experience tables, discusses some technical problems arising from the use of relatively unreliable data, and includes a comparison of the consequences of use of several experience table methods, under two hypothetical release policies.

Do Experience Tables Matter?

An experiment was conducted at the June, 1971, national conference on the Parole Decision-Making project in order to elicit participant attitudes toward base expectancy devices and to examine the effect of a base expectancy score on their decisions (on hypothetical cases). Although the reactions of the participants suggested that even a reliable and valid base expectancy measure or experience table would be of marginal utility, the results of the experiment indicated otherwise. The presentation of a base expectancy score did not appear to reduce the variation in the decisions within the various experimental groups, but the presentation of different base expectancy score for the same case did appear to shift the average time held before release among the groups. A full report of the study is given in a separate report.¹²

Operational Use of an Experience Table

Although a large number of studies conducted since the early part of this century have been aimed at the development of statistical aids for parole selection,

¹²Goldstein, H. M., and Hoffman, P. B., Do Experience Tables Matter? Report Number Six, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

the results of these efforts have found little use in practice. This situation is not unique in the world of correctional research, and considerable attention is now being focused upon issues of research utilization. Since one objective of the Parole Decision-Making project is the development of experience tables for operational use by the United States Board of Parole as aids in individual case decision-making, the issue of research utilization is an important consideration.

A separate report describes the interaction of parole board members and project staff in the development of an experience table acceptable to the parole board for operational use.¹³ In addition, it describes the development of a research design to test the impact of the presentation of the experience table upon paroling decisions, the implementation of this design, and the initial evaluation of results.

In November, 1971, the United States Board of Parole began using, on an experimental basis, a "Burgess" type experience table as an aid to individual case decision-making. Predictive score sheets were calculated by

¹³Hoffman, P. B., Gottfredson, D. M., and Wilkins, L. T., The Operational Use of an Experience Table, Report Number Seven, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

project staff for a 10 percent sample of upcoming case decisions and placed in the case folder for parole board consideration. Each parole board member considering the case was asked to adjust the predictive score (independently) in light of his clinical case assessment and to give also a subjective rating to the ease or difficulty of the decision. In addition, data concerning two comparison groups of 10 percent each were collected. For one group, each parole board member was asked to give independently a clinical predictive estimate and an ease-difficulty rating for each case; the other group was processed without any forms (that is, according to the usual procedure). Assignment to the groups was by the last digit of the offender's identification number, a procedure assumed to approximate random allocation. Statistical prediction scores were calculated for each of the comparison groups after the actual decision, and decision outcomes and case information were recorded for all groups.

Comparisons based upon a small sample show that the parole board members' clinical estimates were significantly closer to the statistical estimates for that group for which the statistical estimates were given. The correlation between statistical and clinical estimates also was significantly higher for this group. In addition, there was significantly greater agreement among parole board members

considering the same case in the group with the statistical estimates given. These results lead to the conclusion that the parole board members were actively using the statistical scores in forming their clinical estimates. On the other hand, the subjective ease-difficulty ratings showed no differences among the experimental groups.

Results concerning impact on the decision outcomes were mixed. The proportions paroled were not significantly different among the three groups. The average time continued, however, was about three months less for the experimental group than for each control group. The statistical estimates, in general, gave a higher estimate of success than the clinical estimates. Thus, the empirical evidence presented by the experience table may have increased the optimism of the parole board, resulting in shorter continuances. Contradictory results appeared, however, when the correlations between the statistical scores and actual decision outcomes were calculated. The group in which only clinical estimates were requested showed a higher correlation between statistical scores and actual decision outcomes than either of the other groups! A tentative conclusion attributes this to greater psychological investment of the parole board members in the risk concern (or to a greater commitment to the members' own clinical estimate) for this group.

Several major limitations are apparent. Only a small number of cases during a short time span are included in these analyses and the initial comparability of the three groups is yet to be checked further. Consequently, the results mentioned above must be considered tentative. The experiment and data collection are continuing and further analyses are planned.

Paroling Policy Feedback

While individual parole decisions are quite specific, the general paroling policies which guide them may or may not be explicitly stated. The lack of clearly articulated policy guidelines may lead to the problem of disparate decisions.

A study in collaboration with the parole board members of the Youth Correction Division of the United States Board of Parole was conducted with the aim of providing a feedback device describing the implicit policy used in case decisions. Thus, the relationship between decision-makers' evaluations of specific case factors (the severity of the offense, institutional program participation, institutional discipline, and chances of favorable parole outcome) and paroling decisions were studied. From these relationships, implicit paroling policies may be inferred and made explicit. Such a

feedback device may enable the parole board members to:

1. Compare the actual policies with those desired, and take correction action if wanted;

2. Reduce criticism leveled against them as having unfettered discretion and an absence of policy guidelines; and

3. Assess the equity of individual case decisions, by noting decisions which appear to vary substantially from usual policies.

From a set of four rating scales completed by parole board members for a sample of cases at the time of decision-making, a method of describing and articulating paroling policy was demonstrated. Through the statistical methods used, the expected decisions for given factor combinations (according to the decision-makers' judgments) may be determined. The study is described in detail in a separate report.¹⁴

Information Selection and Use in Parole Decision-Making

Observation of the parole decision-making task suggests that different decision-makers go about the process of their decision-making in different ways. For example, the pattern of search for information appears to differ

¹⁴Hoffman, P. B., Paroling Policy Feedback, Report Number Eight, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

among members as attempts are made to "digest" the case file, identifying aspects of the life history thought significant. In a given case or in general, a specific bit of information may be regarded as highly significant by one member but thought to be unimportant by another. Some members may prefer a reliance upon the objective features of the case file, while others may place more emphasis upon a subjective assessment. Some may approach the task with a prominent set toward evaluation of the offender in terms of the risk of new offenses or parole violation; others may emphasize concerns for equity in time served by persons in comparable circumstances, for issues of deterrence, for institutional adjustment, or for the potential impact of the decision upon the correctional system as a whole.

If these observations are correct, then it may be possible to describe the different processes used and to indicate that there may be very significant consequences which derive from these differing processes.

Our task in the Parole Decision-Making project is to "improve" parole decision-making. The term "improve" is a difficult one to translate into specific methodologies; it seems clear, however, that a greater clarity and awareness of issues, procedures, decision outcomes, and consequences is relevant to the general task.

In attempts to "improve" decisions, it has become a common practice to utilize methods of information feedback. If the decision processes used differ among decision-makers, however, then the feedback of information derived from one form of decision processing to a group or persons who utilize a different form may not be helpful.

Decisions are made with reference to information about offenders; and there are, of course, varying qualities, types, and quantities of information to be explored. But it is now clear to us (from discussion with parole board members, from the questionnaire data obtained, and from the exercises described elsewhere in this report series) that decision-makers have preferences for kinds of information and for methods of presentation. It seems clear also that their decision outcomes are associated with the methods of presentation as well as with the qualities of the information itself. Further, the decision outcomes may be associated with the ways in which the information is "processed" by decision-makers.

These concerns are the topic of a separate report.¹⁵ Following a general discussion of the problem, a "theoretical and speculative contribution" suggested that decision-

¹⁵Wilkins, L. T., Gottfredson, D. M., Robison, J. O., and Sadowsky, C. Ann, Information Selection and Use in Parole Decision-Making, Report Number Nine, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

makers may be of several "types." That is, apart from differences in personality factors as usually considered in terms of attitudes and abilities, it seems likely that there are important differences in problem-solving behavior. The possibility that these differences, as they relate to information search strategies, are of importance in relation to the planning of computer assisted decision analysis must be considered.

A series of experiments was conducted in order to further identify ways in which information is selected and used in parole decision making; in part, they may be seen as "simulating" operations performed by means of computer assistance. A first study employed an "information board" similar to that developed by Wilkins and formerly applied to examine probation officers' presentence recommendations.^{16,17} The second study extended this procedure to the use of a random access slide projector for the computer retrieval simulation.

From these experiments several general results stand out. Persons paroling, compared with persons not paroling, sought different information. Different items of information

¹⁶Wilkins, L.T., and Chandler, Ann, "Confidence and Competence in Decision-Making," British Journal of Criminology, 5(1), January, 1965.

¹⁷Lohman, J.D., Wall, A., Carter, R.M., "Decision-Making and the Probation Officer," San Francisco Project Research Report No. 7, Berkeley: School of Criminology, University of California, June, 1966.

were generally considered important for different cases. The same decision often was made on entirely different bases; that is, different information was used by different people to arrive at the same conclusion. Information may reduce confidence in the decision as well as increase it. There is no unanimity among decision-makers as to the relative importance of information available to the decision; and procedures for improvement of information as aids to the decision may have to be based upon an improved understanding of differing "styles" of decision-making.

Use of an Information Retrieval System for Parole Decision-Making

The development of an on-line system for retrieval of information from the data base described above is described elsewhere.¹⁸ The DIALOG system, which is in wide use in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Office of Education, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the European Space Research Organization, has been used. By means of a terminal at the offices of the United States Parole Board, data may be retrieved instantly,

¹⁸Wenk, E.A., Gottfredson, D.M., Summit, R.K., and Radwin, N.S., "Progress in Combining a National Data Base with DIALOG, a General Purpose On-line Retrieval System for Computer Assisted Parole Decision-Making," in Proceedings of the National Symposium on Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Systems, Buck, G.A., ed., Sacramento, California: California Crime Technological Research Foundation, 1970, pp. 171-181.

and a variety of analyses conducted, from the data loaded in a computer at the Lockheed Missiles and Space Company's Information Science Laboratory in Palo Alto, California. The terminal consists of a video screen with key boards and a teletype for printed output. A manual describing how to use the terminal and the retrieval system has been prepared, and it is included, with examples of requests and analyses initiated by the parole board, in a separate report.¹⁹

The Problem of Overlap in Experience Table Construction

Statisticians have devised a variety of procedures for combining information (such as items concerning offenders taken from case files) in order to use them efficiently in predicting later behavior or administrative action (such as parole violation). The concept of efficiency can take a variety of meanings, but one meaning relates to the question of whether or not all the information is needed or contributes usefully to the accuracy or validity of the prediction.

Many items "overlap" with one another; that is, they

¹⁹Zeigler, M., Singer, Susan M., and Hoffman, P.B., Use of an Information Retrieval System for Parole Decision-Making, Report Number Ten, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February 1972 (draft).

are correlated among themselves. For example, auto thieves tend to be younger than offenders in general; persons with more prior convictions tend to have more prior arrests and sentences; and those with prior parole violations necessarily have had prior prison terms. Statisticians, therefore, have invented procedures which take such overlapping into account. When this is done it typically is found that only a few items, appropriately weighted, may be expected to do the work--in prediction--of a much larger number.

From various studies in correctional systems, however, it now appears that less sophisticated methods of combining the information--such as simply adding favorable items together without weighting--may end up in practice as better than the more sophisticated techniques. This curious result suggests not that the statistical theory is wrong but that the nature of the data does not satisfy the assumptions which are made in statistical theory.

In a separate report, these concerns are discussed more fully.²⁰ An implication--thought to be extremely important for both research and practice--is that major

²⁰Wilkins, L. T., The Problem of Overlap in Experience Table Construction, Report Number Four, Davis, California: Parole Decision-Making Project, National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, February, 1972 (draft).

advances in both must await the development of better quality data.

Doubtless some persons concerned with the correctional management system will regard this finding as a blinding glimpse of the obvious. Everybody, it may be claimed, who is closely connected with the processing of offenders knows that the recording of information is not treated with any great respect; and that in some establishments the offenders themselves have some responsibility for some of the recording procedures. To arrive at this result, the research workers, as usual, have gone the long way around and have introduced plenty of inconsequential theory! Perhaps the poor quality of the basic data is obvious to some persons, but those persons presumably use the information recorded, or some of it, to make their decisions regarding disposition of offenders, provisioning, or transportation and other questions. It has, it must be assumed, generally been regarded that the quality of the information was "good enough" for its purpose and that any investment of money to increase the quality of data was unjustified. This is now clearly shown not to be the case. As a temporary measure to accomodate poor quality data, we may apply less sophisticated methods to the utilization of it, because this strategy provides a better result than that which we can obtain by the use

of higher grade methods. There is some analogy with extraction of minerals: high quality ore is needed if powerful methods of extraction are to be used; poor quality ore can be used in rougher methods of extraction. But data are not natural products over which we have no control; data about offenders are generated within the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system is the "consumer" of that data, and the same system is concerned (or should be) with the quality of the product. The products generated out of data are decisions. Decisions cannot be better than the data upon which they are based, no matter what techniques of handling the data may be employed. The conflict of statistical theory with experience in the practical world of decision-making in criminal justice has revealed a fundamental problem of the quality of the raw material, and it has shown beyond all reasonable doubt that the quality of the basic information is not inconsequential.

APPENDIX A

THE PAROLE DECISION MAKING PROJECT OF THE
UNITED STATES BOARD OF PAROLE¹

William E. Amos
Member, United States Board of Parole

Mr. Chairman, fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen: my topic today is to explain our demonstration project. This is a topic that is of great interest to practically all people. It is a topic perhaps a bit like women. Everyone's an authority, but when you get down to it, really how much do you know? And I think perhaps this is, in a way, where we are in the behavioral sciences. We're searching, we're looking, we're concerned, we're conscientious.

So to begin, let me say something like this, something I once, as a very young lad in Oklahoma, heard Will Rogers say. He had been introduced to a group of people and he looked out over the audience before he began to speak and he said something like this: I'm sure there are many, many people in the country who are better qualified to talk on this topic than I am, but since none of them are in the audience today I'll go ahead. Well, I'm not sure that's true, however I am going to comment on a research project that I have been rather close to. I'm not going to say I know more about it than people in the audience because Don Gottfredson, the Project's director, is sitting out there.

¹Address presented at the American Congress of Correction, Miami Beach, Florida, August, 1971.

But as a member of the Board, I am concerned with it, I am interested in it, and I would like to pass on a bit of information and some observations.

When Chairman Reed made some of his opening comments this morning, and then the first speaker, the Chairman from Oregon, made his, I could see perhaps a thread weaving through that I could fit my comments into rather neatly. We talked about the different criteria that various state boards of parole have established in reaching a decision and making a decision concerning the life of a human being. All of us in the correctional field know the type of information we need in reaching a decision: the history of the man, the social history, adjustment in the institution, his prior record, community resources. We can trace the pattern of the types of information and to what degree we use them. But there is an area which I think is too often overlooked.

When our Board was reorganized within the last two and a half years, and we published our new rules (approximately within the last year), we set forth the criteria for decision making as a policy statement. And we listed ten items. Nine of them you would be very familiar with. They're probably the same nine that most states would have. But one of them we call, and I think this demands a word of explanation, scientific data. The United States Board of Parole is

searching for that information that can provide us something additional. Now, what do we see as scientific data. We're using this term very loosely, but we're using it within the framework of medical and psychiatric data. We're using it within the framework of psychological data that can be documented.

The Board came to the conclusion that we needed to beef up item number ten. And I might say that that was the beginning of the research project that I want to chat with you about today.

I like to relate this to a little book that to me gets right to the heart of the decision making process in parole. It wasn't written with parole in mind, in fact parole is not even in the book. But a professor and friend of mine, at the University of Minnesota, by the name of Paul Meehl wrote a little book entitled Clinical Versus Statistical Prediction.² In it is the age-old question: which came first, the chicken or the egg? Which is most valid: the clinical judgment, the clinical intuition, or the actuarial process? As a good research man, as an outstanding statistician, as a superb psychologist, and as a good fence straddler, Paul came to the conclusion that they both are needed in the process.

That is exactly what my position is. Parole decision

²Meehl, P., Clinical vs. Statistical Prediction, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954.

making is a clinical process but you need all of the actuarial data to supplement the social data, the social interest information, the human information, the sensitivity, the insight, that one can bring together in reaching a decision concerning a human being.

This research project is not a cure-all. It is not going to be appropriate to many decisions. But it is going to be a "tremendous help, in my judgement, for some.

I think I would like to trace briefly the history of how this project developed. We expressed our interest on the Board that such a project be developed and it seemed logical to build upon the experience we had gained in this country. So much research has been done in this field, so much research in the behavioral sciences--but when we get ready to start something, instead of building on the information we have, on what we know, we leap over and take off again. The Uniform Parole Statistics and the expertise of their staff, their interest in the parole decision making process have been established for years. Without question they probably have more expertise in this particular area than any other unit or organization to my knowledge. So it seemed to be logical for this group to do the research and to develop a project. After a number of discussions the NCCD Research Center at Davis developed a proposal. It was

funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration for approximately 1/2 million dollars for a three year project. Don Gottfredson and Leslie Wilkins were established as the co-directors, the outline was approved and the activity began.

There is a point I want to make here and it is very important. At least as far as I am aware this was the first time that a project of this nature had opportunities in several areas. One, to sit down with a decision making board and have them involved in the process of development, feedback, and to search and determine what their individual needs were in the decision making process. Two, it was the first time that there had been a data bank that had something to build on to the extent that Uniform Parole Reports statistics will allow. And I think, three, it is the first time that we have an active, on-going feedback process that will multiply during the three year period. Now, I think these points are important to keep in mind as we go along.

I'd like to tell you just a little about what I see as the structure. As I mentioned, we're going to utilize as a base the Uniform Parole Reports statistics. In addition to that, a significant number of U.S. Parole Board decisions will be coded and will be fed into the computer bank at Palo Alto. Materials coded to date include 10 percent of the parole

grants in fiscal 1968, 10% of the parole grants in fiscal 1966 and 50% of all decisions except revocations since September, 1970. This would average out to about 800 or 900 cases coded per month. On the UPR statistics, that all 50 states participate in, approximately 10-12 items of information are furnished on the inmate. We have developed a coding sheet for our project for federal cases. There has been a unit of six young ladies who have been trained in coding, established in Washington, and they code our cases for approximately 70 items, and these in turn are fed into the computer bank.

Now, what is hopefully the end result here? A computer terminal has been established in the offices of the U.S. Board of Parole. It is hoped, and this will occur and is occurring to some degree already, on a particular case certain items of information can be determined and can be fed into the terminal. Then in turn we can get a print-out that will show us the probability of success on parole, as dictated by the experience tables, of this particular case with these particular items by comparison with other cases of a similar nature.

That is not the whole story. This allows us also to find and to look at our own decision making process. It gives us an idea, and gives us an opportunity to look at the

trends we're following. This is a problem that has faced parole boards for years. We go off on a particular trend and we don't know this until the yearly statistics come out or maybe you have bi-yearly, or perhaps in some cases there may be no yearly or annual report that will show you some particular subtle influence that's guiding you. This project on a moment's notice can show us particular trends our decision making is following.

How does this dictate success on parole? We're going to have material that will show us the importance, the relationship, the correlation between, for example, success and employment. It's going to show us the correlation between a great number of items and success, items that perhaps we had relied on almost completely from a gut level-clinical viewpoint in the past.

This is a rather superficial comment that I have made, but I think what we're trying to say here is that this is not just a B.E., as I have heard some people say. We might even say that this is not even a very sophisticated base expectancy. To be quite frank, I don't particularly like the term at all. I like the term experience tables much better. But I like to see experience tables that have many additional items. Yes, we can probably reach the point of saying these five, six, eight or nine items are crucial.

These are the critical ones. These are the ones that correlate highly with success. But when you're dealing in the profession that we're dealing in we can't worry any less about the sixteen percent at each end of the scale than we can about the 66 2/3 in the middle. When you deal with the lives of human beings you don't say this will guide us hopefully in 60% of the cases. In 60% of the cases it's really easy to make a decision. Where you need techniques like these is in the 25% of the cases that are really gut level cases and so difficult to reach a decision on. And this is a point of great interest to me that will come from this study. This is an expensive study, it is a time-consuming study, it's a sophisticated study. It will be a sophisticated operation, so a decision will have to be made--on what particular type of case do we want this data? On what particular type of case do we want this print-out? Do we want it on every Mexican citizen who comes across the river to seek employment in El Paso? Doubtful. Decisions will have to be made and this is something that is going to give us great insight into the behavior modification-rehabilitation process, and in parole decision making. What particular types of cases are critical that need this particular information, as well as the correlation between all the others?

As mentioned earlier, LEAA is concerned not only because it is their concern to staff the project, but also by law. And you're always more concerned when it's in the law that you have to be. And one of their concerns is that they spend money for research that's not aimed at improving only one guy's operation without that information being channeled throughout the country. So that brings me to a point that I want to make that is important to this total project. LEAA saw this project as having merit but one of the reasons it has merit is that it can be utilized hopefully to provide information to the field. Two national meetings were planned for this project. This is one of the techniques of dissemination. We had one conference in June, and 40 representatives of state parole boards attended. From this meeting a number of very worthwhile suggestions emerged. A point we want to stress is that this is a group effort between the Department of Justice, NCCD, the U.S. Board of Parole, and a significant number of state parole boards. All of us are participating, all of us are involved, and all have input into the direction we're going. There will be a second conference next year with additional input and between now and that time a number of states will tie in as participants. Now, I mentioned several worthwhile suggestions came about. We're meeting in San Francisco next

month and these suggestions will be pumped in. An important element, and I think it is one that has great merit, is the scientific advisory committee for this particular project. To me, having been around the federal government some years and seeing many advisory committees come and go, I will say this is one of quality that far moves ahead of most of the ones that I have had experience with. It is composed of people like Herbert Solomon of Stanford, Stanton Wheeler of Yale, Herb Klein of California, Charlie Newman of Penn State, Ray Jeffery of Florida State and Conway Esselstyn of San Jose. It's a small advisory committee. It combines people that have expertise in the field. It combines people of great research capability. It combines people with expertise in sociological theories. This committee will take the suggestions and with Don's and Leslie's and our participation we will move forward. On the Board we have a two-man committee who are very actively involved. I think an interesting ingredient of the project is that all of the members of the Board actively participate with this research committee that was appointed by the Board to be involved in the day to day process.

There is one additional very important plus that I do want to point out. You know in the past we've talked about parole success and there have always been two difficulties

here. This project, in my estimation, has a good grip on resolving them. One, we were unsure, or there was controversy or differing viewpoints, philosophical or otherwise, as to the definition of success. A part of this project is coming out with certain decisions in relationship to what terms mean. And I think this is something that has needed clarification for some time. I think another point is, after a man has been on parole, how do we know whether he's a success or not? And we have not had for any previous research project of this type the one comprehensive reporting system--FBI statistics--for our use. We will be able to feed in five thousand names to the FBI and get out of their computer information on a given subject's contact with law enforcement officers. Director Hoover, at Chairman Reed's request, approved this and we can now send the cases that are involved in our study to the FBI. They will be processed for follow up after given periods of time.

This project is not an attempt to take the decision making process or the granting of parole away from the individual member. Parole is a matter of grace. Grace may mean several different things to each of you. It means that an individual, to me, a peer is sitting there making a decision concerning an individual in front of him or from his record. And this will give you additional information

that will reinforce, that will supplement, that will correct. It does not take the place of compassion. It does not take the place of clinical judgement. It does not take the place of public interest. It does not take the place of concern for that individual. It tells you what we have experienced in the past from people very similar to him, with similar identities and characteristics. And that's a lot. And I hope that we see this as something that can be tempered with compassion, and can be tempered with judgement, because in my opinion attempting to legislate the uniqueness of human beings is the first step in the wrong direction. If you really believe in human behavior and if you really believe that people are different, and if you really believe that human beings respond to different stimuli in different situations and different experiences, then you have to have different decisions for different people, not only for the welfare of society but for the welfare of the individual.

APPENDIX B

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS¹

John P. Conrad

For the last several years, I have occupied some of my moonlight hours in the teaching of criminology. This has incidentally resulted in my becoming a sort of connoisseur of criminology text books, a mixed bag, if there ever was one. The trouble is that criminologists seem to be unable to arrive at a consensus on what beginning students in their discipline should be taught. Still, some of them are surprisingly good, but I think the best is one which is mostly going out of use because of obsolescence. This is Barnes' and Teeters' New Horizons in Criminology, a cantankerous, skeptical, and abrasive text which used to raise my hackles when I was younger and life seemed simpler. I want to use as a text for our discussion today, an excerpt from Barnes and Teeters which will lead into a discussion of standards for parole decision-making. Bear with me while I run through a dialogue which, I hope, will not seem familiar to you. This is a board interview, reported verbatim in its entirety, from some unknown jurisdiction.

¹Address presented at the American Congress of Correction, Miami Beach, Florida, August, 1971.

(Prisoner enters and the first board member shakes hands with him)

First Board Member: Where do you live?

Prisoner: In Blankville

First Member: Where were you in the State when you were accused of burglary?

Prisoner: I was in Blankton

First Member: What did you try to steal?

Prisoner: An adding machine

Second Member: You were sentenced by Judge Blank?

Prisoner: Yes

Second Member: You didn't get anything out of the adding machine?

Prisoner: No

(letter from Judge Blank read)

First Member: This is a nice looking boy

Third Member: I wish I had his physique. With my combative mind and his physique, I would go into prize fighting.

Second Member: Your trouble in Blank City was checks?

Prisoner: I ran out of funds at the bank one time. That was all taken care of. My brother wants me to come to Blankville; he has a place for me. My brother runs a little farm there.

First Member: All right. We will vote. I vote yes

Second Member: Yes, when he has served his minimum

Third Member: I will pass him. He has a beautiful body.

First Member: All right--the next one.

As aimless and inane as this hearing may seem, I must call attention to the attempt to put the prisoner at his ease by shaking hands with him. The nature of his crime and the extenuating circumstances were brought out, and we even receive a hint of his attitude toward it. His future plans are ascertained, and it is noteworthy that one board member dwelt on the prisoner's positive assets.

I doubt that a hearing of this level of fumbling could occur in 1971. The correctional community over the years has learned to think together about means and ends; from my observations around the country and from what I hear at meetings like this, I conclude that there is an increasing consensus about the proper objectives of the parole hearing and the acceptable means of achieving them. We all know that the making of decisions, that process which seems so simple to the uninitiated, is a complex undertaking. Its complexities consist of the ability to evaluate information in terms of its significance for the outcome of the decision to be made, the capacity to review past decisions to determine the consistency of outcome with objectives, and the power to relate all this to a body of assimilated experience and understanding which we call intuition. It's never an easy process for the conscientious. Some of the burdens can never be eased; the tensions which must exist when the

protection of the community must be balanced against the continued suffering of the offender caused anxieties for the nonreticent parole board member which he cannot shift for so long as he is still in office.

There are, however, some burdens which can be eased. Ever since I first came into contact with parole boards I've been aware that the work load in reading, digesting, and using the huge quantification of information needed in unreasonable. Page after page of single-spaced dittoed reports read day after day can bring the most patient of board members to a state of generalized exasperation. One can certainly understand a member deciding that maybe he'll do best relying on information gained orally at the hearing and his own God-given intuition.

This is a problem with which, I think, we are making some headway. In the remainder of my remarks this morning, I want to discuss the Parole Decision Making Project in which our Institute is collaborating with the United States Board of Parole and the Research Center of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. It is a project in which all three agencies concerned have had overlapping objectives. I want to proceed now to a discussion of our concerns.

Our Objectives: One of the increasing concerns of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration is the establish-

ment of goals and standards in the administration of criminal justice. A considerable effort in this direction is under way in almost every section of LEAA. There is surely no need for me to enlarge here on the need for this effort. The methods by which standards are formulated is not a topic on which I can safely generalize; I don't think anyone has completely solved that problem. But I think we can say that when we are thinking about standards for parole board practice, we should begin by finding out what a board member needs to know in order to make decisions which will protect the public and at the same time, preserve the fairness of the correctional system. This is a topic which has interested me for a number of years; I was delighted to discover when I became involved in the program of the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, that it was a topic which interested the United States Board of Parole. Our interests coincide because important benefits would ensue if we could find out what kinds of information in what amounts make a significant difference in the decisions of a parole board. To be specific about these benefits, there would be considerable economics to be achieved in collecting and recording information collected. Most important of all, a standard could be established which would assure the collection of those information

items which make a difference. Decisions would presumably not be made in the absence of required information, which would be obtained when missing.

What kinds of information are we talking about? I think we have operationally defined the information we want as those items which can be statistically related to the chances of success or failure after release. This has been a topic on which a good deal of work has been done. In England, in California, in Illinois a lot of statistical effort has gone into finding out what kinds of personal information about offenders seems to be related to recidivism. Don Gottfredson of the NCCD Research Center has carried the work farther through the Uniform Parole Reports which his agency has been publishing for some time now. These reports are computer-processed and make it possible to establish all sorts of information combinations to summarize experience and use it for the purpose of predicting risks.

All of this work has been carried out for long enough to establish its reliability. Researchers have been using it for years in the measurement of project results. So far no experience has been accumulated to tell us how parole boards can or should use predictive information. By studying the experience of the Board of Parole with this project,

we should be able to determine whether information processed in this way can be administratively useful. If the answer is favorable, we should be able to work out the standards for the best use of predictive technology.

We hope also to increase the range of information items which have predictive value. So far we have not discovered a way to assign predictive values to program success or failure. This may be due to the ineffectiveness of correctional programs or it may be due to the researcher's inability to discover sufficiently sensitive techniques to discriminate the value of program success. We are not encouraged by the prospects, but we intend to continue the study.

How much information is enough? Professor Wilkins has conducted studies which tend to show that decisions tend not to be changed after an input of more than five items. If this is so, which items should they be, and in what format should they be presented?

I think I have said enough to give you at least a sketchy perspective on our concern about the information requirements of a parole decision model. But a model which doesn't provide for change could be worse than no model at all. We think that decisions have to be kept under a sort of continuous review. This is usually easy to do in one's

personal life. Balancing a check-book, reviewing a family budget are often depressing activities, but we have to admit that they are not difficult to accomplish. The consequences of decision-making in a large system which calls for thousands of decisions are difficult to trace, so difficult that it can be fairly said that the task was impossible until the advent of the computer. Now that we have the capability of making this review, the model should provide for the systematic supply of feedback information. We may not be able to determine from the print-outs why a pattern of decisions produced an unexpected result, but such information should be the beginning of an inquiry into the nature of the changes which caused our surprise.

Concern about the dehumanizing impact of the computer is still pretty general. No one would care to see life-and-death decisions turned out by bits and characters on a disc-pack. If a parole board could be induced to follow slavishly a computer's estimate of risks, it would be better that the model we are thinking of should never have been conceived. We all should know by now that computers do not think. They do exactly as they are told; they organize information in the way that they are instructed. The act of turning decision-making over to the computer is logically impossible. What would be done, if any parole board were so

foolish as to do such a thing, is that the decisions would be made in effect by the statistician who created the model in the first place. Knowing something about statisticians, I can say with complete confidence that none of us have that kind of faith in our handiwork. All we can offer is a way of organizing that information which can be organized. It is up to the Board to make the policies, consider the real, but imponderable, factors which must enter into any decision, to decide where mercy is to be shown and where firmness will be exercised. Let me illustrate: A homicide case appears before the board with a high prediction of success--let's say a prediction based on experience that shows that 85 percent of the people appearing before you with such characteristics will succeed on parole. He hasn't done much time, the offense was rough, and there is no convincing plan for his employment or residence after release. I am sure that you deny him, despite the favorable prediction; the fifteen percent likelihood of failure is too much to accept. But you might well accept that fifteen percent if you were considering the case of a chronic petty thief who had always limited himself to thievery. Indeed, you probably would accept an even higher likelihood of failure. In effect, you would be taking into account the significance of information items which the computer could not and, I think, never will

be able to allow for.

The Structure of the Project: I think the Parole Board's interest in this project originates in the notion that it might help in increasing the effectiveness of the Board's decision, but I will let Mr. Reed and Mr. Amos speak for themselves as to that. Our interest in LEAA is the creation of a model for decision-making which can be adapted to the needs of the states. To that end we have invited states to send observers to the progress meetings of the project staff with the Board of Parole. I had been pessimistic about the interest when we broached this idea; I thought we'd be lucky to inveigle ten states into sending representatives to meetings which were bound not to be especially enthralling. Instead, we got forty acceptances, and a surprisingly animated participation in our first meeting of observers last June. I think there is real hope that several states will start adapting before we have completed the study, a development which I would welcome, and, I think, so would the staff.

The actual structure of the project has two major aspects. First, through a computer terminal in Washington, the Board is able to query a data bank in California concerning experience as to any major class of offender under consideration, using numerous cross tabulations, to include

such classes as 23 year old burglars serving their third prison term. This terminal is now available for use, and I hope that some of you, if in Washington, will find time to take a look at it.

The second phase of the project will take a little longer. This involved the coding of large samples of federal prisoners for inclusion in a data bank. The coding provides for the recording of numerous characteristics so that various predictive strategies can be tried. It also provides for access to the Careers-in-Crime data bank maintained by the FBI. This arrangement, of course, makes possible the correlation of personal characteristics with recidivism, the process by which prediction takes place. It will be at least another year before this system is ready for active implementation. In the meantime, there are several questions which will need our attention. I should like to state some of these questions here because we will need your help with some of them.

Questions for Exploration: First, we need to ascertain whether the use of predictive data does, indeed, improve decision-making. If so, in what respects and to what extent? This is an obvious question, but the methodology for answering it may be difficult and certainly will take time.

Second, how can we improve the model we produce? We do

know that until correctional systems can produce records which deal with experience more accurately than is now the case, the more sophisticated statistical methods which are available will be of no use in improving predictions or feedback.

Third, how can a parole board organize itself to make good use of feedback? It is one thing to pronounce the desirability of modifying policy in terms of experience, but quite another to develop procedures for doing so. We may discover, for example, that average time for some class of offender should be reduced, but what are the procedures for achieving this new average on a case by case basis as hearings go on?

Certainly this project is no panacea for what ails corrections. If it succeeds as we hope and have reason to expect, it will be a significant step ahead. It will make the tasks of a parole board member less burdensome and, I think, more challenging. But what seems more important to me, it will help to maintain the focus of correctional workers where it should be on the objective of protecting the community by safely restoring as many offenders as possible in as short a time as possible.

END