DATA DRIVING POLICY AND PLANNING DECISIONS

“POLICY MAKING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: THE USE OF HARD DATA AT EACH STAGE OF THE POLICY/PLANNING PROCESS”

(with A Practice Example)

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“POLICY MAKING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: THE USE OF HARD DATA AT EACH STAGE OF THE POLICY PROCESS”

Introduction

This paper focuses on policy decision making in corrections and explores the use of "data" at various stages of the policy making process. The goal is to clarify the processes by which criminal justice data is used in reaching policy decisions. Policy decisions in criminal justice span many issues e.g. correctional planning, program evaluation, designing interventions to alleviate jail crowding, resource allocation, and so forth. Common to all of these decisions is the need to provide guidance to the policy decision makers through adequate data collection, analysis, and presentation. The decision makers must bridge the gap between various policy considerations and the data is needed at each phase of any policy problem.

The skills of correctional policy makers are constantly challenged as the problems of correctional systems escalate. The essence of this paper is to describe a systematic "pathway" by which major policy decisions or problems can be tackled so that data needs and analyses at several distinct phases of the policy decision making process are correctly identified. This paper also identifies several policy making failures which result in poor policy decision making. Stage models of the policy process are common in several public administration fields (Janis 1989; Janis and Mann 1977). The present model of policy decision making clarifies the use of data and the roles of decision-makers at each phase of the policy decision process in criminal justice systems.

Trends Forcing Greater Use of Statistical Data by Corrections Managers

Several converging trends in criminal justice are creating ever greater reliance on statistical data by correctional managers and policy makers. These are as follows:

1. External Pressures for Justifications, Accountability and Reporting Requirements

The need for statistical data is escalated by the pressure being placed on administrators and policy decision makers by many legal sources both inside and outside the Justice System. This was a major consequence of the increased court interventions during the 1970s (Elias 1982). Courts, legislators, county commissioners and planners and other influential groups, are increasingly requesting hard data for a variety of reasons: to justify budgets, to demonstrate that funds were spent appropriately, to assess whether specific policy goals were achieved, that certain standards were met, and so on. From this standpoint differences between a "constitutional" and "non-constitutional" jail relied on the presence of statistical documentation to demonstrate compliance with standards.

Faced with financial deficits and public concern for accountability, legislative bodies formulated public laws requiring criminal justice agencies to develop, compile, evaluate, and report statistics related to virtually every inmate sub-population and operational process within the facility e.g. costs of each operation, utilization levels, population statistics, demographic trends, etc. Specific reporting content was also designated in the law. Such reporting and accountability for evaluative data are imposing tremendous pressure on correctional agencies to install appropriate monitoring and data gathering systems. Thus, many jails are implementing data bases, and are seeking to design data analyses, monitoring and
evaluation systems to meet the reporting needs of political and regulatory agencies. This set of changes occurred sooner, and has become more widespread in Prisons and State Departments of Corrections than in local jails.

Compliance with the various legal and professional standards not only required a "records system" but also specific data elements, and mandated documentation. Data has become very important for protection against legal liability and as a useful resource in litigation. However, the use of data for policy making, managing, monitoring, and planning was not the initial motivation for many criminal justice administrators. Many have been pushed - willingly or unwillingly - in this new direction of more technical management.

2. Correctional Agencies are Becoming More Complex

Contemporary conditions have been relentlessly increasing the size and complexity of correctional systems. The environment in which correctional systems exist has become more complex and turbulent, with more inmate law suits, citizen demands, federal and state and local pressures, requirements for efficiency and performance, and so on. Increased crowding, pressures for deinstitutionalization, "least restrictive custody", community programming, meeting "correctional standards" (e.g. ACA and state standards), local budget constraints, public safety, and so on, all contribute to this increased complexity. Thus, managing, planning and policy making in this increasingly complex environment has escalated the demand for accurate data.

One example is that the emphasis on de-institutionalization, crowding reduction, more efficient utilization of limited space, and least restrictive services, and the need to maintain a "constitutional" facility, have forced jails and prisons to develop an array of alternative institutional and community services. This requires a wider spectrum of security levels for different inmate housing and program decisions. This in turn requires careful "security level" and classification techniques, which are inherently data based requiring careful utilization of offender criminal histories, and other data. These procedures also require policy guidelines for the eligibility of specific offender populations for determining those appropriate for the less secure settings.

3. Management in Criminal Justice is Becoming More Professional, Rational, Technical and "Information Based"

The days of the "patriarchal" correctional management style (i.e. strong personal charisma, political power, and decisions based primarily based on values, politics and "hunch") are fading. This is being replaced by policy decision making based on rational argument and supported by hard statistical data, forecasting, and policy simulation modeling. This new policy decision making approach substitutes organized information and rational inference for brawn, hunch, charisma or bureaucratic "chain of command" power. Complex analyses are often needed to transform raw data into information, then into policy decisions, and finally into actions. Such analyses are becoming easier, faster and more accessible to correctional policy makers. Correctional managers and policy makers are continually confronted by complex system wide data, statistical analyses, and computer simulations. Although they may not be adept at running these analyses, they are increasingly required to be intelligent consumers of the "information" produced by number crunching techniques.

In the new "Information based" jail and correctional agency it may become mandatory to substitute
information for guesswork, brawn or force. In essence, many traditional sheriffs and Jail administrators are finding that their world is becoming more complex and quantified, and that numerical skills are becoming more critical for policy decisions, routine management tasks and navigating politics. Corrections managers and policy decision makers usually recognize that good management decisions critically depend on good information, which in turn, depends on the validity, salience, and correct analysis of appropriate data. Several features of this new decision making approach are worth noting:

- Valid and pertinent facts (data) are the foundation for problem solving, decision making and policy development.
- Erroneous decisions are more likely if critical data is missing.
- Erroneous decisions are more likely if "invalid" and unverified assumptions are introduced into the decision-making process.
- Wrong facts imply faulty decisions, wrong conclusions and a higher likelihood of inappropriate actions.
- Data can help counteract false assumptions and bias.
- Data is a foundation for policy problem-solving and professional management.

The major problems of the patriarchal style and "gut" problem solving are mainly: bias, false assumptions, inadequate information, and excessive subjectivity. These are illustrated in corrections by the phrase "where we sit determines what we see". When different policy makers consider the same crowded jail, and consider solutions to alleviate crowding, it is clear from the different solutions they endorse that the same event (a crowded jail) is perceived and understood quite differently. Objective data on criminal justice system processes can clarify what is really happening and help reduce subjectivity and false assumptions. Data on trends in admission rates, speed and proportion of detainees making bond or bail, percent of FTA's at different bond levels and for different offenses; data to indicate "delays" in the prosecutors office, courts, or pre-trial release processing, all help clarify the basic reasons for crowding and may help to minimize false assumptions or bias. These provide a base for solutions e.g. new incarceration and processing options, alternatives to jail, etc. Valid statistical information about the processes related to jail population growth provides firmer ground for policy decisions.

4. Data Complexity in the Criminal Justice System is Increasing Rapidly

In jurisdictions throughout the country vast expenditures of time, money and manpower are being devoted to collecting and storing data. The CJS is increasingly "required" to collect data about people, events, organizational processes and decisions; and store this data for up to 5 or more years. Poklemba (1988) points out that local correctional facilities collect, maintain and disseminate massive data on diverse inmate populations across several sequential decisions made by criminal justice officials. For example, law enforcement agencies collect and store data on arrests, complaints, incidents, personal characteristics of arrestees, and so forth. Jails collect and store data on inmate head counts, security risk classifications, disciplinary behaviors, and so on. Even a small to medium sized jail - with 10,000 inmate admission per year - will gather 400,000 pieces of data or more. Poklemba (1988) uses the sequential decision-making metaphor to describe the burgeoning data requirements of the CJS. Data from each sequential decision point provides a historical record which if analyzed appropriately can reveal much about the policies driving each decision point. Hall (1985) provides several examples of the use of this type of decision analysis to reveal policies and procedures that produce bloated inmate populations and crowding.
5. Higher Data Interdependency Between Agencies: Policy Decisions Increasingly Require Data from Different Agencies

Criminal justice agencies are more aware of their dependency on data collected by other agencies in the system. There are continual data transfers and offender movements between CJS agencies (eg, police, local jails, state facilities, courts, etc). Decision making in one agency is often critically dependent on data collected in another agency. For example, inmate security classification depends on arrest and criminal history data collected by law enforcement, as well as on social history and medical data. The criminal justice system is fast becoming a "distributed data system" with interdependency and a need for data sharing across agencies.

Hall (1985) and others have demonstrated that most major policy problems require a "system perspective" which requires this integration of data from different CJS agencies. For example, an approach to developing policy interventions for overcrowding - in both jail and prison contexts - requires the integration of data from courts, police, jails, parole, probation and community corrections programming in both clarifying reasons for crowding and in designing policy changes.

In this integration of data across the system local Jails are increasingly seen as central and as being the "hub" of local corrections. Poklemba (1988) also argues that local jails are crucial in terms of the information needed for overcrowding policy decisions. This stems from the role of the local jail as a "de facto" repository of data from many correctional agencies across the system.

This need for data integration and sharing has escalated demands for standardization and electronic communication procedures to facilitate interagency sharing. The demands for data sharing are often resisted by specific agencies who feel threatened when providing data to other agencies. Turf protection is widespread between criminal justice agencies and may create political barriers to data sharing. Issues relating to confidentiality of data and access to the data may also need to be addressed but need not be an insurmountable obstacle. Standardization problems also abound in the criminal justice system with diverse and often incompatible operational definitions of apparently the same data element being used by different agencies. Thus, both technical and political barriers exist when policy makers attempt to share data across agencies (Poklemba).

6. Traditional Approaches to Data Management and Analysis are Inadequate

Traditional approaches in correctional agencies to data collection, storage, and analysis are being recognized as inadequate and often damaging to the goals of agencies. Many recent studies of MIS and data management efforts in correctional agencies have found several critical deficiencies which can no longer be tolerated in the present politicized, complex, and costly environment (Poklemba 1988; Elias 1982; Ford 1983; Hall 1985). Some basic problems of the traditional approaches include:

- Data input procedures are awkward and burdensome to staff so that numerous errors and omissions occur during input.
- Data storage procedure prevents easy retrieval, which in turn prevents routine statistical analyses.
- Data is collected but not used for management or policy decision making purposes.
• Data collection forms and storage procedures were not designed to support statistical analysis.
• Data collection forms and storage were not designed for easy transfer or sharing between agencies.

In many criminal justice agencies, although vast amounts of data are collected, they are seldom stored or analyzed in ways that help managers and policy decision makers. The enormous effort expended in collecting data is not backed up by appropriate efforts to utilize the data for management purposes. Ford (1983) has commented that:

"Rarely, if ever, is more than 10% of the information collected by jails used to assist management in making decisions or in helping with planning the future activities of the jail"

The situation has changed little since this comment was made. Although great advances in technology and data storage and retrieval systems have occurred in the last decade, the pace of technical innovation for decision support systems has been disappointing. An overriding problem is that in business in general, and in corrections in particular, information technology is just emerging from its infancy and the rate of new techniques and innovation remain high, often accompanied by a loss of sight of the original goals of collecting data.

Thus, although data is collected it is often inadequately used for policy and management purposes. In many jails only the most basic summary statistics are provided to management. Drucker (1989) points out that whenever the data is not organized or analyzed a state of overload exists. Data overload and waste of expensive data remain ubiquitous in criminal justice systems. Data is transformed into "information" only when analyzed, and when coherent patterns are revealed. Disaggregated data is meaningless for most management purposes, and in essence is wasted. This represents enormous waste. Common reasons for the deficiency include: inadequate skills, minimal financial resources for data analysis, lack of political will to implement data analysis systems, problems in storage and retrieval systems, and so on.

7. Correctional Managers are Confronted with Increased Needs for Efficiency and Innovation

Pressures of crowding and budget problems are forcing many criminal justice managers and State and Local decision makers to strive for higher efficiency. The drive for efficiency has been complemented by a rush of innovation in information technology, computer hardware and software during the last decade. Many innovations in information technology are being incorporated by criminal justice agencies into both line level decisions as well as top management policy decisions. Decision making at the line level may become faster and more accurate by exploiting improvements in information processing. Studies of the impact of computer based MIS (Schoech 1984) have documented the following ways in which line staff in various service organizations improve efficiency as a result of improved access to relevant data:

• Inmate or client processing decisions occur more speedily if the required data is quickly available
• Faster decision making for offender processing helps to reduce pre-trial time and may reduce jail crowding.
• Valid and complete data helps minimize classification errors which in turn helps achieve efficient use of jail resources.
• Correct classification helps minimize disciplinary problems and incidents; which are more likely when inmates are misclassified
• Well designed decision support procedures result in easier training of new staff, higher general efficiency, and higher staff morale. Ease of use of computerized data procedures is critical.
• Improved objective inmate classification decisions ensure that more inmates are housed in “least restrictive custody” which helps minimize waste of expensive high security correctional resources.
• Improved objective inmate classification helps ensure that inmates are accurately matched with appropriate services. This minimizes waste created when inmates enter programs they don't need.

8. Impact of Improved Computer Technologies Decision Making is Becoming More Driven by Data and Analysis

Improvements in both computer hardware and software for data storage and retrieval, and improved database management software is transforming managerial decision making in corrections. With advanced information technology becoming more prevalent and diffusing into more levels, the managers of correctional systems will have to engage in much more analysis, interpretation and diagnosis. Correctional managers will be forced to make use of these new analytical capacities since without such statistical techniques they will remain swamped in the data generated by the organization.

The higher availability of data and analysis procedures is also transforming decision making styles from personal opinion and patriarchal power, which as noted earlier, was predominant in correctional agencies - to a style requiring more justification with data and analysis. An important feature of this new style is the development and testing of alternative assumptions. Such “what if” scenarios allow explicit comparison of alternative policy approaches (Drucker 1989; Janis 1989).

This trend is likely to produce much improvement in correctional planning and policy decision making. Frequently in the past, strategic correctional planning decisions, were made without guidance from sound data based procedures but were based on political opportunism, impulse, or hunches with little guidance from hard data. Thus the expectation is that traditional policy decision making will be complemented and improved by data-based tests of alternative strategic assumptions, and "what if" scenarios about correctional problems.

A further impact is that rational "data-guided" decision-making requires managers to explicitly provide clear goals, explicit causal assumptions, and explicit policy interventions to address any policy problem. Analytical decision making - as shown by the current management and policy literature - demands clarity of the goals and assumptions of decision makers and thus forces them to be more precise in their thinking. Such precision may be stressful to politically orientated correctional managers who often keep their goals, assumptions and values close to the chest for political reasons. The data based style of decision making not only forces goals and assumptions to be more precise, spelled out and visible, but also creates a situation where these goals and assumptions will be evaluated and challenged by the data (Drucker 1989; Janis 1989). Such openness and precision produces a vulnerability since the data and analysis may challenge these goals, assumptions and preferred interventions. This "feedback loop' and the challenge to personal assumptions provided by data was rare in the days of subjective opinion and "chain of command" power.

The organization and analysis of data will become easier in the future, as more powerful statistical
techniques are integrated into correctional data base systems. This will enhance the power of managers who are technically sophisticated. Drucker (1989) argues that "data" only becomes useful for policy decision making when structured through appropriate analysis and organization. This "organization" and statistical analysis of data is thus an essential step in transforming data into actionable knowledge. Organized data may enhance the power of the decision maker since it creates more insight into the problem. In this sense knowledge (organized data) enhances the power of the decision maker.

Linking Data to Policy: The Process of “Vigilant” Management:

In this section we examine in detail the specific stages of the policy making process to understand exactly what kinds of data are important, and how data influences decision making in different phases of the policy process Janis (1989) has indicated that policy decision making has several critical phases which must be addressed in order to improve the chances of achieving sound policies. If any phase is omitted or conducted carelessly, the risk of poor decision making escalates. The role of data in each phase is examined below.

Stage 1. Recognition of Policy Problems in Corrections and Criminal Justice

Obtaining Early Warning and Lead Time – “Managing by Exception”

A first critical need for data is to give managers early warning of the emergence of a policy problem and some "lead time" to consider options and select effective actions. Many problems must be tackled early before they get out of hand. Managers and decision-makers in criminal justice cannot afford to be 'blind-sided” by organizational problems. Such blind-siding occurs when managers do not pay attention to, or fail to obtain data which might provide early warning of emerging jail or system problems e.g. an unusual increase in number of pre-trial inmates. The absence of a data collection system to routinely monitor critical inmate profile information or organizational status and performance features is a common deficiency in correctional agencies.

The managers of such systems are often poorly served by their information systems and may be lulled into complacency and ignorance of the impending crises. These managers cannot identify problems at the early stages since they have no access to needed data, or they do not know how to use available data. Consequently action is not taken to prevent small problems from developing into larger and more damaging problems. This produces a tendency to operate in a “crisis-mode” (i.e. constantly putting out fires, making snap decisions without the benefit of critical data; extreme time pressure. Snap judgments, and decisions made in an information vacuum. Lead time evaporates, since the time and effort to gather the needed data are unavailable, yet immediate action is needed. This style of decision making - often called “incremental decision making” or “muddling through” - is not the best way to generate new policy (Janis and Mann 1978).

Data to Challenge Management Complacency and Compel Action:

Managerial complacency and passivity often result in failure to take action until a problem reaches crisis proportions. The absence of data may foster complacency, since without data, managers can deny the scope and implications of an emerging problem. The presentation of critical data will often determine whether a problem is taken seriously, and whether it reaches the policy agenda. Critical data and forecasts
may counteract the tendency of many managers to avoid facing problems until the problem reaches critical proportions. When confronted with hard statistical data managers often have way to avoid dealing with the problem.

**Subjective Versus Objective Monitoring: What is the Best Mix?**

Many correctional managers and administrators prefer subjective direct observation and a "hands-on' approach. This provides an immediate graphic picture and an intuitive “feel” for the manner in which the system is operating. For example, in many jails and prisons the top administrators have line officers who represent their "eyes and ears" in the cell blocks. They complement this with their own personal tours of the organization. Yet, a concern is the balance between such subjective observation versus objective indicators of system performance.

There is support for the usefulness of such subjective monitoring of system performance. However, to rely only on informal subjective data is hazardous because of its limitations. It easily becomes caught up in turf agendas, protection, bias, incompleteness and unreliability. Inevitably, much of this type of information stays on the cell block or at the line level, and there are too many “filters” and censoring barriers to the accurate upward flow of information to policy decision makers. Objective data, collected in an open manner, with each major policy assessed by measurable indicators, will complement the "eyes and ears" approach and ensure that managers are in a position to monitor achievement of all major correctional goals and operations.

Base rates are important for the objective approach to monitoring policy achievement and system performance. Several critical indicators, for example, must be tracked to stay abreast of factors producing jail overcrowding. Many jails do not collect the needed data, or fail to analyze available data to establish such base rates. The managers of these facilities are thus unaware of critical "base-rates" in their own facilities.

Essentially, the base rate for any major policy indicator (e.g. inmate suicide) is a statistical index averaged over a population of inmates for a specific time period (e.g. annually, monthly, weekly, etc.). Base rates provide managers and policy makers with an indication of the current and historical performance levels of the organization. They allow an evaluation of trends, changes, or improvements that may result from a new policy or procedure. Virtually all quality control procedures operate in this manner.

Graphs of the data over time periods are easier to interpret than tables. A time series may alert the manager to emerging changes in policy achievement or of the status of the organization over time (monthly, weekly, seasonally). Before/after graphs help assess the impact of new programs or policies. All of the indices described below are candidates for such graphing. Managers and policy makers are aided by regular status reports which contain graphs and tables to indicate trends or emerging problems in the correctional facility.

Thus, in the stage of problem recognition a manager relies partly on the monitoring system to provide routine data on the policy achievement and operational status of the organization. If an “indicator” starts deviating from the correctional goals of the facility, the manager has early warning of an emerging problem and can locate organizational “trouble spots” and has time to think about what actions to take. The monitoring of goal achievement is thus essentially used by managers to keep the system functioning in accordance current policies.
Data to Assess Size/Trends of Problems: What Data Elements Should be Included?

A first critical task is to select data elements to operationally measure the correctional policies and organizational operations which the manager or policy maker wishes to monitor. The indices below are often included in the MIS of jails and other correctional agencies:

a) Utilization and Demand levels for jail space: Data on utilization levels – both overall and for different services and areas of the facility – are usually maintained. These might include:

- Admissions rates
- Admission rates from different sources
- Average daily population (ADP)
- Average length of stay (LOS) for various offender categories (sentenced unsentenced, minimum security, etc)
- Utilization levels across the whole facility, and for different services, units, and Security classification levels
- Pretrial release rates
- Release reasons and referral patterns out of the jail
- Etc.

Such data allows many queries to be made by criminal justice managers and policy makers. Queries of policy makers form the basis for the type of analyses conducted on the data. The following are typical of the kinds of queries raised by jail managers and policy makers in addressing issues surrounding jail crowding:

- What are the admissions trends by month over the last 5 years?
- What are the referral sources and admission paths into the jail?
- What numbers are entering the jail through each admission pathway?
- What are the trends In entry patterns over time?
- What are the implications of continuation of the current policies of these agencies?
- What is the rate of increase of bookings over particular time periods?
- What is the % capacity use of the jail?
- How has % capacity use changed monthly over the last 5 years?

Data to indicate levels and trends in crowding in the overall jail and in specific housing units are often maintained over time. Utilization rates may be developed for different areas of a jail (e.g. Intake, pre-trial holding, general population, different security classification levels, areas for holds/transfers, etc). These projections and trends should be routinely updated and presented to managers.

b) Population Characteristics: Too often the detainee population of a correctional organization is simply aggregated into one misleading and uninformative statistic. However, various breakdowns and special classifications can be routinely conducted. Policy makers invariably need a deeper understanding and more accurate picture of the diversity of the inmate population. Breakdowns and percentages over time may identify any changes in the structure and characteristics of the inmate population. These
might include:

- Percentage of the offender population by ethnicity, sex, age, social histories, etc
- Demographics
- Sentenced/Unsentenced population proportions
- Further monthly classification breakdowns to indicate “seriousness” of the inmate population (security profiles)
- Percentage falling into security classification levels (max, med, min)
- Percentage falling into custody levels (low, very low, med pre-sentence, close custody, etc.
- Percentage of violent felons in the jail
- Percentage of various offense categories and corresponding crime classes
- Profile of assessed inmate's needs (i.e. substance abuse, mental health, GED, employment)

c) Indices to assess Discipline, Order and Safety: Disciplinary data and incidents are often monitored in jails, and other justice agencies, for the total facility and for separate ‘units'. Common data elements may include:

- Days of good time lost per month/per 100 inmates
- Days in disciplinary segregation/or administrative seg/per 100 inmate
- Monthly or weekly number of "violent incidents' overall and for specific classification segments of the inmate population.
- Assaults and threats on officers per 100 inmates/per month
- # Injuries to staff, inmates, visitors from medical records
- # Sexual assaults per 100 inmates/per month
- # Vandalism acts per 100 inmates/month
- # Compensation claims/100 inmates/month
- # Incidents of contraband /100 inmates/month
- Average inmate 'infractions' /by month, and so on.

d) Jail procedures, operations, and costs: Numerous procedures in a correctional facility can be monitored to examine compliance with formal policies and standards, efficiency, cost of operations, effectiveness, and so on. These might include:

- Inmate use of needed programs
- Ratio of (# inmates needing a program) / (# inmates who receive the program)
- Timing of delivery of various operations and decisions
- Cost and extent of resources used in managing special inmates
- Staff and costs used in transporting prisoners/by month
- and so on.

e) Assess inmate welfare, status, morale: Numerous indices may be developed regarding morale, outcomes, and treatments of the detainees while detained, or while undergoing a program. Some useful indicators include:
• % classified as suicide risks
• % of actual suicide attempts
• % self injuries
• % grievances and complaints /100 inmate days
• % grievances decided in favor of the inmate/100 grievances

f) Indicators of Warehousing: The avoidance of warehousing is often overlooked as a correctional goal - especially in jails. This policy might be assessed by indicators focusing on the provision of specific needed services, preparation for re-entry, ratio of time in activities versus time doing “nothing”; average hours/day in idleness, etc).

g) Monitoring Staff Morale: This may be monitored by several measures e.g. number of sick days, staff turnover, staff tardiness, volunteer rates for training programs, and so forth. Some facilities attempt to assess the quality of staff education and skill level in critical areas, as well as the provision of training programs to staff.

h) Monitoring Job Performance Objectives: Similarly, each department in a facility will have specific performance objectives that may be quantified and assessed over time. Managers can use these data indicators to assess and evaluate staff on several performance indicators. Walton (1989) indicates that the availability of performance monitoring may dramatically change how line workers conduct their work, and that it may also create morale problems if used coercively. Schoech (1982) has pointed out that such monitoring systems can also document and describe management performance. Managers and administrators are, as might be expected, often defensive when faced with such scrutiny and may suppress or sabotage the monitoring systems. They may adopt the political tactic of discrediting and then dismantling the monitoring procedures. Thus, the role of management activities and decision-making can also be evaluated by data which objectively assesses the degree of “goal attainment” in a correctional system.

i) Public Safety: Public safety is a major correctional goal which must be monitored for most correctional facilities and programs. Indices to provide data on the achievement of this important correctional policy may include the following:

• % recidivism of released offenders (and breakdowns by various crime categories, demographics, etc)
• % recidivism of offenders participating in alternative to incarceration programs
• Average time to new arrest (total and selected sub-categories of offenders)
• Rates of new crime for inmates released pretrial
• FTA rates for all categories of pre-trial releases
• and so on.

j) Re-Integration and Social Resources of Inmates: A “resource/rehabilitation index” may be developed for all inmates being released and may be helpful in treatment planning and for decisions regarding early release. This might consist of a weighted average of various personal, social, and other resources available to inmates at release. This index may be developed in conjunction with treatment planning, and could include such items as:
• Education and vocational skills
• Levels of family ties and social support networks,
• Availability of tangible life support resources (job, home, relationships, etc)
• Substance abuse history
• Mental health history
• Development and formulation of workable life plans,
• Predictive scores for recidivism likelihood, and so on.

**Stage 2. Problem Clarification and Information Gathering**

Recognizing the emergence of criminal justice system problems is only the first step in policy formulation. The above monitoring systems while useful for early problem recognition, are generally insufficient to produce the needed data to “flesh out" a problem. In the second stage of policy development managers make requests for additional data needed to clarify and describe the issue at hand. Janis and Mann (1977), Janis (1989) and other authorities on policy decision making consistently warn against premature decisions made before the needed additional information has been gathered. The essence of the warning is that reliance on inadequate data about a policy issue has a high likelihood of leading to wrong conclusions, inappropriate solutions and wrong actions. Several subsidiary tasks occur in this second phase.

Exploring hunches and generating new questions: Starting from the data that initially signaled the emerging problem, policy makers must explore hunches, ask questions, and request additional data and analyses to verify their questions and hunches, and eventually develop an understanding of the issue. A major responsibility of the decision-makers is to generate questions, request data, and explore hunches and intuitions. They should demand a full, accurate and verified data description of the nature of the problem (e.g. overcrowding, rising violence in a jail, staff morale problems, and so on).

Such questions will determine which new data is collected, and guide the selection of offender samples, and also provide guidance to staff to select appropriate statistical analyses of the data. Elias (1982) notes that it is counter productive to start formally collecting new data without such preliminary questions. Without guidance it is unlikely that data analysis staff will select the exact data needed by policy makers. A danger is that the data made available to policy makers will be too limited, too vague, or too unreliable to properly support the decision and analysis process. The goal of the policy maker is to identify any critical factors causing the problem, and thus gain insight into the nature of the problem. Elias suggests that correctional managers often fail at this stage, exhibiting little insight into the causal structure of system problems, failing to ask incisive questions, or demand needed data. Too often they prefer to go along with their initial (unverified) hunches about the problem.

**Turning Policy Maker's Questions into Data and Analyses:**

Once the data processing staff are given defined questions by policy makers they can select the needed data elements and design statistical procedures. However, writing a good “problem statement” can be difficult. Many policy makers express their queries in vague, non-operational terms, which then requires guesswork by data processing staff about what was "really" wanted. A good problem statement will indicate needed data elements, and imply the required statistical procedure.
Hall (1985) has indicated that - at least for the policy issues involved in jail overcrowding - only a few basic statistical procedures are needed to answer the majority of policy makers questions. These include: univariate frequency distributions, two variable cross-tabulations, three way cross-tabulations, and time series graphs. The selection of these methods is preceded by the selection of variables and offender samples. Thus, the essential sequence is to transform the policy makers queries or hunches into specific data elements and statistical analyses designs.

**Is the Needed Data Available in the MIS or Must New Data Collection Procedures be Designed?**

Generally the required data is available somewhere in the Criminal Justice System MIS. A vast range of data elements is available across the CJS agencies. Data processing staff may have to do some digging to locate the needed data elements and assess whether they were collected on an appropriate sample.

Access to the data is the next question. It is important to find out who controls access to the data. The policy makers may have to use some political power to ensure the data is made available to data processing staff. Inter-agency data sharing is a politically sensitive issue between rival criminal justice agencies. These political matters are usually resolvable if the policy makers are sufficiently high in bureaucratic level, or if they form a broad coalition with sufficient power to influence those who control the data.

If the needed data is not being collected then special data collection efforts may be instituted on a temporary basis. The collection of the new data must be costed for time (weeks or days) and manpower requirements. Costs can be minimized by adding the temporary data collection to on-going staff workload at appropriate locations in the system. However, high sensitivity to staff workload is required. Staff must understand the importance of the data. Often extra funds may be allocated so that staff can complete the extra data collection tasks on an overtime basis.

**Ensuring That the Appropriate Range of Data is Collected:**

It is impossible to specify the exact range of data needed for policy problems in criminal justice. The best guides are the questions raised by the managers responsible for making the hard choices and selecting solutions. The responsibility of policy decision-makers to generate insightful questions cannot be over-estimated. Policy makers should obtain perspectives on the past development, present levels, and likely future trends of any problem e.g. population growth. Historical trends (e.g. levels of jail crowding over the past 3-5 years) are useful in clarifying the development of the problem. Forecasts of the projected growth of the inmate population and expected jail utilization levels help in providing "lead time" during which planning and preventative actions may be taken. It is also important to distinguish between causes, correlates and consequences of a problem. This second phase concludes when a sufficiently complete description of the problem is available to the policy maker.

**Stage 3. Developing Dominant Explanations: Obtaining Consensus of an “Understanding” of a Policy Problem**

Competition between policy-makers to achieve acceptance of particular “explanation” of a problem: Intense competition often occurs between different policy makers to establish a factual “understanding” of the nature of the problem. Different political groups are often strongly committed to particular explanations of a particular problem (e.g. the causes and solutions of jail overcrowding). Policy makers are
seldom neutral and usually hold preconceived hunches, intuitive “gut feelings”, personal biases, values and prejudices that tend to support their political positions. Hard data become critical and are often used selectively and politically to support particular explanations. Blaming, finger pointing and passing the buck are commonplace among criminal justice agencies and advocacy groups. Hidden agendas, and political motivations can also motivate many policy makers to ignore the objective data in order to support their political goals and preferred “explanations”.

Criminal justice policy makers only reluctantly abandon or modify their Initial biases and implicit "understandings" even when faced with objective data demonstrating the falsity of these assumptions. Years of work can be done at this stage to clarify complex policy issues and establish an accepted factual understanding and consensus on policy problems.

Checking the validity of a policy maker's “personal explanation” of problems:

As noted above policy makers usually approach new problems holding their own hunches about “explanations” of a problem. Such preconceived notions are sometimes referred to as implicit problem representations (Hayes, 1981). Although these implicit models of policy problems are valuable and may aid appropriate decision making they may - if unverified or false - produce rigid and thoughtless policy decision.

A major purpose of this third stage is to obtain sufficient data to objectively verify and test the biases and implicit models of policy makers and develop valid “explanations” (models) of the problem. When policy makers assumptions, biases and questions, are verified and analyzed the implicit problem representation can be transformed into an explicit problem representation where causal theories are tested against data. Such explicit models give a much safer basis for policy discussions and new interventions.

The Uses of Data-Based Models/Explanations:

An explicit data based model represents a huge jump in the “level of explanation" of policy problems and offers several advantages to a policy maker in criminal justice:

a) Explicit Models allow testing of a policy makers assumptions and inferences. Hidden assumptions about cause/effect linkages, causes of the problem and consequences can be checked against hard data generated from the correctional agencies.

b) Explicit Models deepen and clarify the policy maker's understanding of the problem. They will organize various cause-effect relationships, suggest likely consequences of various interventions, and clarify the factors deemed to be “relevant” and irrelevant by the different policy makers.

c) Empowerment (vs. Immobilization) of Policy Makers: A good model of a policy problem often provides the policy maker with guidance, coherence, a "way of thinking" about the policy problem, and may offer several potential solutions. Hall's (1985) systems model of jail overcrowding is a good example of this in criminal justice systems. Valid models simplify problems and give sufficient clarity to guide the policy maker towards effective decision making. Conversely, policy makers are often immobilized if they cannot “get a handle" on a problem. When policy makers cannot pinpoint what is happening, when there are too many knowledge gaps and when they are overloaded with data, policy makers are often immobilized.
d) Providing guidelines for new policies and solutions: A valid “causal” model of a problem (e.g. jail crowding) is particularly useful when it implies a “course of action”. Models not only clarify major causes, correlates and outcomes of the problem, but often suggest solutions.

e) Models provide “rational justification” for policies and solutions: Valid data-based models can provide rational justification and support for the policy makers decisions. Thus, a decision-maker’s political position is stronger when based on a validated model of the problem. Policy decisions are usually more politically acceptable when they are supported by objective data and rational justification. This becomes important in highly conflicted issues (e.g. whether or not to build a larger jail). Conversely, the advocate of a particular policy option (e.g. to expand rates of pre-trial release to solve jail overcrowding) will be more vulnerable and less persuasive if his position is not based on an explanation or model that is supported by the data.

f) Models are used for “what-if” and simulation studies: Data based models are also used to test predictions of the form “...if we do X, then Y should follow”. This technique is often used by policy decision makers to ask questions about the likely outcomes of policy alternatives (e.g. options A, B, C, etc). When alternative policy alternatives are fed into a computer model the “predicted consequences” gives a pretest of the likely impact of each intervention. Simulation approaches, however, are only as good as the model and data on which they are based. They essentially require well validated cause-effect models of the major variables underlying the particular problem. This phase of the policy process is often dominated by statistical analysis. Few criminal justice administrators are expert in statistical analysis, and rely on data processing, statistics experts or consultants to conduct appropriate analysis and help with correct interpretation (Elias 1984). Policy makers and managers must accurately communicate their queries/hunches to the statistical experts to ensure appropriate analyses, to avoid biased interpretations, and produce needed answers.

**Stage 4. Using Data in Developing Solutions to Policy Problems**

The fourth phase of the policy process consists of developing "solutions" to policy problems. In the case of jail overcrowding for example, solutions might include: expanding the jail, diverting minimum risk offenders to community programs, tether programs, early release procedures, cap procedures, speedier processing of inmates to reduce pre-trial detention periods, and so forth. There are many potential solutions when the overall systems model is adopted. The systematic use of data in searching for solutions can transform the policy maker’s search for effective policy solutions from a “trial and error” approach to a focused evaluative search for effective solutions.

We now consider some common approaches used by policy makers in searching for and developing solutions to correctional system problems.

**Trail and Error – A Common Style for Producing Poor Solutions:**

Many criminal justice policy makers, operating on intuitive hunches and untested biases, use the “trial and error” approach to solving problems. Essentially, they select the first intervention that comes to mind and thoughtlessly adopt it without assessing background data or making any systematic analyses, without a valid model, and without any “look ahead” via simulation studies. This often results in the simplest and most obvious solution to overcrowding i.e. expand the jail. Other solutions are simply ignored in the rush to expand the jail. In the case of Jail overcrowding, the trial and error solution of expanding the jail often
backfires, and is hopelessly inadequate when the jail becomes overcrowded often within period of 18-24 months. Much hand-wringing and consternation has occurred among criminal justice policy makers as a result of such policy making fiascos (Ford 1982; Hall 1984).

The use of Data-Based Models to Develop Policy Solutions:

As noted above generating policy solutions is greatly facilitated by having a validated causal model of the problem under consideration to guide the design and selection of solutions. An example of this is Hall’s (1984) use of a system model of jail overcrowding to generate solutions to overcrowding. Some advantages of data based models are as follows:

- Models may pinpoint several "cause-effect' linkages that may not be obvious to decision makers. Hall's model, for example, indicates many points and processes in the criminal justice system where unexpected delays in offender processing may contribute to overcrowding (e.g. in the District Attorney's office, in the Courts, and so on)

- Models organize and simplify complex data so that policy makers receive clearer guidelines for "action". A model of a complex process (e.g. offender processing across the criminal justice system) may reveal several stages where potential interventions are possible. For example, an analysis of jail detention processes using an objective security classification may uncover “minor offender” populations that do not belong in jail (e.g. public inebriates, homeless indigents, etc). Hall indicates that flawed policy and procedures may be responsible for the continued detention of such persons. Policy makers can then focus on the appropriateness of current release and detention policies and consider policy modifications to divert such detainees to more appropriate settings.

- A complex model of a criminal justice problem may suggest several interventions. For example, Hall's (1985) model of jail overcrowding indicates three broad causal linkages that contribute to jail overcrowding i.e. 1) Inappropriate entry 2) Delays in processing and decision-making, and 3) Inappropriate detention prior to release or transfer. Each broad linkage may suggest several policy or programming changes to alleviate particular causes of overcrowding e.g. programs focusing on delay in case processing by prosecutors, or programs focusing on judicial decision-making, and programs designed to divert appropriate low risk offender populations into other management options.

Data for Planning and Scope of New Programs:

Policy makers often use data in designing the goals for particular policy programs. Accurate correctional data will help policy makers select new correctional goals and policy priorities. Hall (1985) suggests that data is often critical in reaching decisions for new correctional policies and legislative goals. For example, data can be critical in estimating the numbers of offenders who need a new service, in estimating staffing and resource needs for programs, and for defining the characteristics of offenders eligible for new programs. Data is also important in designing new correctional procedures e.g. designing security classification procedures, designing eligibility procedures for new and current programs, and so on. Evaluation data on current programs may be used to design specific changes in system processing, in modifying programs and policies in appropriate ways.
Stage 5. The Use of Data in Choosing and Deciding Between Different Potential Solutions

Following the task of generating solutions to solve a correctional problem, policy-makers confront the equally difficult phase of choosing between policy options all of which may appear feasible for solving the problem. This selection process is often dominated by political actors who advocate for a particular option (e.g. expand the jail space or diverting specific populations of detainees). Often the decision-maker selects the preferred option using very "soft" data, or simply works from impressions and political argument. The major danger of relying on soft data and political values is that more effective solutions may be overlooked, and less effective and more expensive solutions may be implemented. Faulty selection may incur very high costs and impose long term damage to a correctional system. A consensus is that most policy choices involve a mixture of political and technical inputs. The political input to correctional policy decision-making although very important must be complemented by appropriate technical input. The role of technical and data input (e.g. how many beds are freed up by releasing a particular detainee target population?) brings some “reality” to the political discussion. Such data should introduce precision and objectivity to the more political “softer” discussion. The task of the policy decision-maker is to demand appropriate hard data for comparisons between the options.

Data to Compare and Evaluate Different Solutions:

The critical role of technical data input in decision making is to provide policy-makers with valid appraisals and comparisons of available options. Before choosing a particular option the decision-maker should assess hard data on the relative efficiency and cost/benefit ratios of the different policy options. Some common approaches to such appraisals are as follows:

- Impact analysis: This approach often "pilot studies" to assess the likely impact of a new criminal justice policy or program on the total jail population, or on some other correctional goal. Pilot studies can be conducted on a small scale to assess the impact of policy or procedure changes (e.g. a new classification system may assign different numbers of detainees into maximum, medium and minimum security levels, new law enforcement arrest standards may divert certain offenders away from jail into local community agencies, etc). Evaluative data on the degree to which correctional goals may be reached are invaluable to policy makers. Baseline data is also crucial in such appraisals, since “improvement” can only be demonstrated in comparison to current levels and trends.

- Simulation and “what if” studies: In evaluating and appraising policy options managers frequently use “what if” simulation exercises. This approach, as noted earlier, relies on statistical models of correctional processes to answer predictive questions about the likely impact of a new program or policy e.g. what will be the impact on the jail population of new arrest practices? of new pre-trial release criteria? of new diversion programs, or of new release criteria for specified offender types? Logically if we change some condition “X”, we will wish to know the impact on outcome “Y”. Using available data these analyses are able to estimate the impact, say, of three new prosecutors on the speed of case processing in the DA's office, and the ultimate impact on the jail population. “What if” questions may be used to estimate the impact of less restrictive criteria for ROR release practices on the jail population. Data on numbers of current detainees meeting the revised criteria and who would be eligible for release allow a more insightful choice.
Simulation studies are not always possible in corrections. A major problem is that the required data is not available. A second problem is that data is available but is not sufficiently accurate or reliable to allow a valid analysis. A third problem is that the model used is inadequate, incomplete, or overly reductionist. Simulation studies are only as good as the model on which they were based. A model is valid when it has high consistency with actual data and when it has rational theoretical support. In political debates in corrections it is likely that opponents of a particular position will attack either the model, the data, or the validity of the comparisons being used to justify a particular policy decision.

- **Benefit/cost studies:** The benefit/cost ratio is often used by policy decision makers in choosing between options. The method assesses several policy options across a set of costs and benefits and selects the solution with the best ratio of benefits to costs (Brewer and DeLeon 1983). Valid data is critical to this approach. Alternative policy options are rated and cost comparisons produced for several input and outcome variables. For example, the cost of a 24 hour ROR screening program may be compared to the daily bed space cost of detainees who are victims of delayed screening. The cost savings of the "screening program" can be compared to the costs of the ROR program. Policymakers can then decide between these policy options. This approach requires data on average daily jail cost per inmate. In another example, comparison of the costs of new jail construction (and operating costs) versus the costs of new release policies have shown cost advantages for policies based on alternatives to jail (Hall 1984; Ford 1982).

**“Errors of Omission” in Policy Making: The Value of Data:**

Studies of the decision making styles of policy makers in corrections and other public policy arenas (Janis and Mann 1977; Janis 1989) show that decision makers are vulnerable to certain recurrent errors. Errors of omission, for example, in decision making are common and refer to the decision maker's failure to consider appropriate background data or to properly clarify the background, causes, trends, and consequences of various policy options. Several dysfunctional styles have been identified which exemplify errors of omission:

- **Impulsive decision making** is characterized by premature and speedy decisions without the benefit of data or consideration of the merits of alternative policies. Impulsive decision making in criminal justice occurs as a result of several factors e.g. overreaction, emotionality, panic, anger, or “knee-jerk” political positions. Virtually all the requirements of good decision-making are lost as the policy maker rushes into a premature judgment.

- **Complacent “Do-Nothingism”:** This style is opposite to the impulsive decision maker in terms of emotional involvement. These policy makers are disinterested and apathetic regarding the particular problem, do not take it seriously, and remain unaware and complacent regarding long term consequences and costs of the problem. Such managers generally fail to gather appropriate data, fail to consider alternatives, and basically ignore the issue. For example, many correctional policy makers are complacent regarding the conditions and treatment of inmates. It often requires litigation and court orders to ensure any compliance with appropriate standards. Generally, complacency and do-nothingism occur when policy makers face problems which don't directly impinge on their own interests or concerns. The basic task is to present them with data which clearly indicates the long term consequences of ignoring the problem.
**Casual/Complacent Decision Making:** In this style the policy makers are somewhat more concerned than "do-nothingism" managers, but nevertheless remain casual. They often make decisions without gathering any background data, clarifying causal processes, comparing alternatives, or examining the long term consequences of the issue. In corrections jargon this is sometimes known as "seat of the pants" decision making: while in the more formal policy literature it is known as "muddling through" (Brewer and DeLeon 1983). A danger is that the decision maker omits or overlooks some critical perspectives, overlooks good policy alternatives, fails to select the most effective policy, and experiences severe "post decision regret" or embarrassment when the chosen option turns into a fiasco. Janis and Mann (1977) indicate that such casual decision making deviates from "vigilant" policy decision making in the following ways:

- Failing to assess the true trends and scope of the problem
- Failure to gather needed background data to clarify the problem
- Failure to gather data on the long term costs of the problem
- Failure to clarify the underlying factors causing the problem
- Failure to develop a clear explanation (model) of the problem
- Failure to compare and contrast alternatives
- Failure to gather comparative data on alternative solutions

"Errors of Commission": The Value of Corrective Data:

A second type of error producing poor policy decisions is referred to as “errors of commission”. These occur when the policy maker introduces erroneous bias or false assumption into the decision. This may produce erroneous thinking and faulty conclusions. The following are noted:

- **Subjective Bias and False Assumptions:** Correctional policy makers may have strong biases e.g. about offenders, recidivism risks, risks of early release, the danger of high security offenders, and so on. These assumptions may dramatically influence his choices and incline him towards particular options, and perhaps make him closed minded. These assumptions and biases must be checked against empirical data to assess their validity. The decision maker must try to be aware of these assumptions and request data to verify them. Often his political opponents will attempt to attack his position by collecting data which challenges his assumptions and preferred policies.

- **Introducing Irrelevant Data:** Policy makers - particularly in the absence of a clear “model” of the problem under consideration - may introduce irrelevant data and extraneous political considerations. These tend to obfuscate and confuse the issue, and perhaps produce immobilization.

Unrealistic Expectations About Consequences of Options: Another danger is that policy makers may hold unrealistic expectations about the consequences or benefits of particular solutions. Such unrealistic expectations often push the policy maker into erroneous decision making. These expectations must be discussed and subjected to verification with available data. In this situation “what if “simulation studies are useful in providing corrective feedback to policy makers.

**Introducing Erroneous Ideas About "Causes" of Problems:** Policy makers assumptions about “causes” of problems are often erroneous. This may produce dysfunctional decisions. For example, a policy maker confronted with an overcrowded jail may assume that the cause of overcrowding is increased crime in
his/her community. When data comparing arrest levels and jail overcrowding indicate a weak relationship between arrest rates and crowding, the policy maker may gain a deeper understanding that the "system-processing" of offenders may be the key factor producing crowding, and that increased arrest rates may have little to do with the problem. This is critical since if decision makers misconstrue a problem, they will waste time solving the "wrong" problem.

Consequences of Poorly Developed Policy Decisions:

The above failures are characteristic of "rapid fire" crisis mode decision making in which the tough-minded "decisive" manager makes policy decisions in a crisis mode. With insufficient time to systematically work through a policy problem, the danger of "policy making disasters" appears to rise exponentially. Too often in corrections we hear the lament that "the solution became the problem". This underlines the fact that poorly considered policy decisions have high danger of producing unexpected side effects, disastrous long term outcomes, poor commitment by those who must implement the misconceived policy, and challenges to the policy from new data. Premature and thoughtless policies are vulnerable to challenge from new data. Thus, backsliding and policy reversals are a frequent occurrence with poorly developed policies.

Stage 6. Implementation Assessment of New Policy - The Role of Data

The use of data does not end with the selection and formulation of a new policy or program. The next task of policy implementation is critical and if done poorly may completely undermine the success of a new policy. Great vigilance is required to ensure that implementation is successfully conducted. Since the 1970's the "Implementation gap" has been recognized as the chasm that often exists between the intent of a new policy and the manner of implementation. Policy makers must stay involved during the implementation phase, and must have some enforcement authority, even though they take a lesser role than the managers actually in charge of implementation. It is important that failure or inertia at implementation not be allowed to emasculate policies. The policy makers continued involvement helps provide political support to the implementation effort.

The policymakers prime interests are in compliance with the intent of the policy and appropriate effective implementation. They should regularly demand feedback, review meetings and reports on the progress of implementation to ensure that policy is implemented in a manner consistent with the policy maker's intentions. Data feedback to the policy maker is critical in several aspects of this phase. "Implementation Assessment” is an important component of policy work.

Data for Resource Allocations (Budgeting and Staffing):

A first part of implementation is obtaining an appropriate budget for the new program/polices. In Criminal Justice Systems the use of sound data is becoming mandatory to justify and rationalize budget and funding requests. Hall (1985) argues that data is critical for both sound planning and budgeting. For example, the public and legislators need to know the “makeup" of the inmate population in assessing budgets. Ford (1983) notes that highly inflated budgets have often been justified by perpetuating the myth that jails house very high risk inmates for lengthy periods. Inadequate knowledge of the true makeup of the detainee population perpetuates this public misunderstanding and has often allowed correctional administrators to justify inflated budgets, and even expand their jails.
More frequently new correctional policies or programs are starved of required resources partly because policy makers were not fully aware of the resource needs of the program tasks stemming from their new policies. Adequate funds are essential otherwise the staff implementing such programs are faced with a mission impossible. Data to estimate the size of client populations to be served, staffing and training requirements, costs of provision of various services, and other resource needs, are all part of budgetary decision making. Policy makers must be made aware of these resource requirements. Hard data is also required for estimating future resource needs and forecasting system trends.

New programs which involve building new facilities and space planning requires a pre-architectural functional needs analysis, which must include data on numbers of inmates needing various kinds of programs and housing. Classification data is critical in such planning. A good classification unit will usually be able to provide the required population breakdowns to establish numbers of inmates with each programming and housing need. Staffing analysis and staffing patterns are also dependent not just on the size of the overall detainee population but on the diversity and makeup of this population and patterns of demand. For example, staffing an intake unit will partially depend on variations of workload demand across the three shifts, and only the 4 - 12 shift may warrant a full staff roster. Such data will be available from the booking log of the Intake Unit.

**Data to Specify Outputs and Target Goals for New Policies:**

New policy must be linked to actionable and measurable goals and such goals should not be left vague and ambiguous. The specification of goals and outputs is increasingly becoming data based. Past achievement of goals, trends, and forecasting procedures are often used as a foundation for goal setting and target outputs. Current levels and trends provide necessary input to policy discussions of goal setting for new programs. The courts or other legislative bodies may also impose legal standards that will be partly based on the realities of current levels of goal achievements and trends. To assess the success of goal achievement and compliance with these standards, it is also necessary to have precise, valid, and reliable ways to assess goals and outputs. Built-in monitoring and control devices on the operations of new programs will provide the necessary hard data and documentation needed to demonstrate levels of compliance with legal standards and goals.

**Data for Monitoring Implementation:**

Although the policy makers turn most of the work over to the "implementation managers" there are various mechanisms by which they monitor the progress of the implementation phase. The implementation and planning personnel usually develop planning outlines to indicate time lines, task sequencing, scheduling, and staff responsibilities for the overall implementation of a new policy or program. The policy maker can request that this detailed "plan of action" - which lays out the tasks and schedules needed translate the new policy into a workable program - be made available. These plans are useful monitoring tools since they provide a framework for review meetings and offer a control device to assess the sequential operation.

Several other techniques are helpful in providing a “systematic" performance appraisal system by which policy makers can review progress of implementation. Program evaluation and review techniques (PERT), Gantt charts and critical path methods (CPM) are useful management tools for monitoring progress in this stage. Policy makers should ensure that these are selectively used during progress review meetings.
Stage 7. Evaluating Criminal Justice Policies and Programs

The final phase of policy formulation occurs when the new policy is evaluated. Data is required to evaluate the impact of the new policy to ensure that it is consistent with intended goals. Data is also collected to identify and assess any unanticipated effects on other aspects of the criminal justice system. As a result of such evaluation the policy maker will then make several major decisions e.g. should the policy or program be expanded, modified, or terminated.

Process Evaluation: Data to Assess Compliance with New Policies/Procedures

An unfortunate truth is that public agencies frequently fail to translate policies into actionable programs. Bureaucratic inertia and “business as usual” tend to continually reaffirm themselves. Furthermore, non-compliance with new policies or procedures is endemic in most bureaucracies. The originator of any new policy must be aware that resistance or sabotage may occur. This may range from indifference, passive resistance, to outright sabotage at both the line level of criminal justice agencies, and also at the managerial level. It is increasingly recognized that resistance to new policies or procedures at higher administrative levels is usually profoundly more damaging to new policies than line-level resistance. As a result of these bureaucratic realities of new policies or programs are often “degraded” beyond all recognition in order to fit the bureaucratic needs of the agency, and the intentions of the original policy makers are ignored.

Policy makers must seek data to indicate whether such inertia and sabotage, and implementation failures have occurred, and to what extent. Process evaluation is one general approach to answering the question of whether the new policy is being implemented in a way that is consistent with the original policy intent. Process evaluation involves scrutiny of the actual operating procedures of staff (both line and management) to assess compliance with the program as designed. Deviations from the original design and intent are noted by the evaluators and an assessment is made as to the seriousness of these deviations, reasons for their occurrence, and the degree to which they impair the original integrity and goals of the policy.

Monitoring of compliance is often data based, with documentation of actions, behaviors and profiles being collected to assess whether the appropriate procedures and objectives are being followed and met. A major challenge for criminal justice managers is to develop indices of compliance - at both management and line staff levels - that are sufficiently unthreatening and non-intrusive to provide effective documentation. This data may be provided to an "oversight committee" which meets on a regular basis to assess compliance. These oversight committees provide internal management control and review over the procedures that line and implementation staff are actually following.

Given the possibility of bureaucratic inertia or sabotage at managerial levels it may be prudent to involve external evaluators or other external “special interest groups” or advocacy groups who have a strong interest in the new policy and to also serve as “watchdogs” that the new policies are being properly followed. This would demand cooperation by implementing agency managers and provision of “undoctored” data to the external evaluative groups.

Finally, if valid documentation of levels of compliance and non-compliance can be developed by agency or system managers, this data can be used in accordance with a sanctioning system. This sanctioning system would impose costs for non-compliance and rewards to reinforce compliance on the program staff who are critically involved in the policy implementation. The use of sanctioning systems requires highly reliable and
valid data since there may be concerns over unfairness, managerial coercion, and so on. Furthermore, sanctioning systems only work if the top agency administrators have control over all staff involved in implementing the program. If their span of control covers only some of the critical staff there will be gaps in the sanctioning system.

Impact Evaluation and Data to Monitor Policy Goal Achievement:

A second goal of evaluation is to assess whether the program's target goals have been achieved. Goal achievement is often routinely assessed continually as part of the on-going program operations. This requires objective measurement of policy and performance indicators which reflect different aspects of goals achievement. Variables such as recidivism rates, treatment program participation, disciplinary infraction rates of jail inmates, probation violation rates, and so on, are all routinely collected by criminal justice agencies. These may be used as indicators of policy achievement if they are reliably collected, reliably stored in agency MIS, and if the appropriate statistical analysis is used. If such measures are not routinely collected, or if they remain unanalyzed (which is common) the policy maker can only guess at the degree to which the desired policy goals are being achieved.

There has been a gradual improvement of the data collection, storage, and retrieval procedures, and the overall management information systems of most criminal justice agencies. Data base software, data dictionaries, graphing and statistical analysis procedures, have all improved in recent years due to innovations in computer hardware and software. Thus, there are fewer excuses for allowing these valuable data resources to remain under used, and left in a disaggregated form.

Nevertheless, missing data, unreliable data, ambiguous definitions of data elements, and inefficient data entry and retrieval systems will all weaken the attempt to monitor levels of goal achievement. Ambiguity and vague data element definitions, lack of operationally defined measures, and inadequate quantitative evaluation will undermine usefulness of an MIS. Unfortunately, inadequate MIS and control systems remain common in jails and criminal justice systems. What is more common is that the data is routinely collected but remains buried in the MIS and is only used minimally to guide the evaluation and monitoring efforts of jail and corrections administrators. The public concern over the efficiency of criminal justice agencies, the increasing legislative demands for data maintenance, and the emerging concern for "outcome" data; coupled with the rapid improvements in information technology and data analysis, should progressively lead to rapid improvements in the use of the vast amounts of information which are collected and stored by the criminal justice community.
A Practice Example of Data Driving Policy

This section is intended to provide a partial example of how Northpointe worked with a relatively small county to assist them in understanding and developing strategies to address their jail overcrowding problem. We have applied similar models to mid and large sized county criminal justice systems as well.

A policy work group and a Community Corrections Advisory Board were established consisting of representatives of the sheriffs, district and circuit judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, law enforcement and county commissioners, among others. This group developed policy objectives which, in part, included the development of a comprehensive community corrections plan:

“...to encourage and enhance the appropriate utilization of the jail without increasing the risk to public safety and within the context of effective, community-based programming for non-violent offenders. To this end, alternative sanctions in lieu of incarceration shall be developed, which may include pre-trial services, community service work, work release, increased supervision, electronic monitoring, house arrest, substance abuse programs, or other similar programs. The Board shall strive to develop policies and procedures which effectively support the development of these programs and services and which respond directly to the assessed needs of the county. Such services shall also respond to the assessed risks and needs of the inmates and offenders.”

To this end a planning model was adopted that coordinated and lined up the following processes:

Northpointe Institute
Local Corrections Planning Model

Stakeholder Team Formation & Orientation

Problem, Goals, Objectives Consensus, Collect & Analyze CJ Data

Present Data & Analysis to Team

Develop Solutions to Address Problem(s)

Comprehensive Plan Development

Outcomes Tracking – Impact Analysis

On-going Evaluation, Review, Refinement

Impact Analysis

Implementation of Plan
County Z Background

The County Z Jail has been experiencing jail crowding since 1995 (see Figure 1). Jail crowding is defined as the point at which a jail’s average daily population exceeds its “functional capacity” of 90% of its rated capacity (the total number of beds excluding the holding area of the jail).

County Z’s rated capacity is 122 beds with the functional capacity able to accommodate 110 inmates. The reason that functional capacity is the true indicator of jail capacity is that inmates must be grouped and separated (housed) according to discrete security/risk levels (classification). In general this includes maximum, medium and minimum. The National Institute of Corrections, the courts and correctional professional organizations such as the American Jail Association and the American Correctional Association demand that inmates be validly separated into discrete groups (separating sheep from wolves) which maximize staff, inmate and public safety and minimize agency liability. In order to maintain the capability of adequately separating a fluctuating inmate population, a 10% buffer between the total number of beds available and the actual inmate population is needed to maintain separation of these discrete groups.

Figure 1 illustrates this and also shows a 10-year trend in an increasing jail population. Since 1996 the population has stabilized due to an artificial cap on growth triggered by the rated capacity of the jail. If the jail’s capacity were larger it is reasonable to assume that the jail population would have continued on this trend. Preliminary jail projections indicate that the jail’s population would likely have exceeded 130 inmates in the year 2000 had beds been available.
Factors Which Impact the Population of a Jail

As previously mentioned in this paper, jail populations are affected by many factors e.g. arrest rates, bond policies of the court, sentencing policies of the courts, case prosecution policies, probation/parole violation policies, use of discretionary good time, alternative to incarceration policies, mandatory sentencing, etc. All of these translate into the number of inmates entering the jail and their length of stay. To assist in understanding what may be causing jail crowding various jail population data can be studied to better understand what factors may be contributing to the crowding and what the inmate population is comprised of.

First we look at trends in the number of admissions. Figure 2 below shows the number of new admissions from 1995 to 2000 (the same period the jail has experienced overcrowding). Notice that the number of jail admissions actually decreased for each of the years 1996 through 1999 with a spike in admissions appearing in 2000.

This generally corresponds to a similar decrease in the number of new criminal case filings over the same period (Figure 3). However, as was seen in Figure 1, the jail’s average daily population continued to increase over the same period. This leads to the conclusion that it has not been an increase in new admissions that have been the principal contributor to an increase in population but an increase in the average length of stay over this period.
In looking more specifically at the jail’s inmate population characteristics, using calendar year 2000 data, we find that 75.5% of the inmate population were misdemeanants, 17.5% felons and 7% incarcerated for civil offenses. In addition, 85% were male and 88.5% white. Also of particular interest was the fact that 40% or more of the population was incarcerated for probation or other court technical violations e.g. failure to appear, failure to pay, contempt of court (see Figure 4).
Looking more closely at length of stay we find that after removing those inmates booked, processed in the holding area and released in the first 72 hours of incarceration the average length of stay of all inmates was 32 days. Of particular interest is the fact that the data showed that misdemeanants accounted for a total of 67% of all the days served and civil offenders 4% of the total. This equates to an average of 82 misdemeanor and 5 civil inmates in the jail’s general population on any given day. As is shown in Figure 5 below, while 38% of all inmates were incarcerated from 3 to 10 days they accounted for only 7% of all bed days. By comparison, only 8% of the inmate population was incarcerated for more than 90 days but chewed up 40.5% of all bed resources. These data are a good example of showing how length of stay is a major contributor to a jail’s population.

As previously mentioned, some of the most critical data in understanding jail inmate characteristics is looking at the population’s security profile. Using Northpointe’s validated and objective Decision Tree Inmate Classification instruments – County Z classifies their inmate population to determine their appropriate security and custody level. Inmates are classified prior to being placed in general population. Good classification practice also necessitates the recategorization of the inmate over time due to aggravating (e.g. disciplinary infractions, new charges, etc.) and/or mitigating circumstances (unsentenced to sentenced, good behavior, program participation, etc.) to keep the inmate’s classification current. During the study period the Jail did not routinely recategorize inmates other than for disciplinary reasons. Therefore we can assume that the security profile of the jail would actually include a slightly higher percentage of minimum security inmates (moving downward over time).
The security profile of the CY 2000 jail is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 shows that 53.5% of the general inmate population was minimum security. Minimum security characteristics in general include: inmate is non-violent, has no serious criminal history, no escapes, no detainers or warrants, no recent institutional behavior problems and is sentenced. This population, by definition, describes the least serious offender population in the jail.
Looking at the minimum security population more closely we find that 80% are misdemeanants, 12% civil and that 49% were incarcerated for technical probation and court violations see Figure 7).

Having established the number of inmates classified minimum security in the period it is then important to look at the length of time served by this population while on minimum security status. Figure 8 below shows that the overall average length of stay of all minimum security inmates was 24 days with misdemeanants serving an average of 23 days, felons 58 days and civil offenders 15 days. On any given day in the study period 41 inmates in the jail (34% of the total general population) were minimum security with 31 being misdemeanants, 7 felons and 3 civil.

![Total Length of Stay on Minimum Security Status by Percent of Total Minimum Bed Days](image)

Jail Crowding Management Strategies and Recommendations Presented to the Advisory Board

The County Z Jail, as with most jails across the country facing similar crowding problems, fundamentally has three options. These include:

1. Continue with the statues que and hope to not be sued because of crowding conditions;
2. Add additional jail beds to the system; and/or
3. Make modifications in how the jail’s limited beds are utilized by the various criminal justice agency decision-makers.

Ignoring the problem may likely result in litigation. Adding jail beds may very well be a part of the county’s jail crowding solution. However, adding beds without modifying the correctional policies driving jail population will be a short-term solution at best. On average crowded jails adding new beds are again over functional capacity within 18 months without also implementing policy modifications to jail utilization.
Jail crowding around the country is forcing local criminal justice systems to reevaluate how they use their limited jail beds. With a finite number of beds criminal justice decision-makers must put priorities on who will be incarcerated and for how long. This must also be balanced with appropriate punishment for the crime (just deserts) and public safety. Key decision-makers must understand how the jail’s resources are being used and reach compromise on potential policy shifts. As noted earlier, most of the factors, which contribute to jail crowding, are policy driven. This means that, for the most part, there is a certain amount of discretion i.e. changes in policy in how the jail’s beds are utilized which may be explored and implemented.

The jail population study found that County Z’s jail inmate population is primarily comprised of misdemeanants (75.5%) and perhaps most importantly that over 53% are minimum security inmates e.g. non-violent, minimal criminal histories, no detainers/warrants, etc. There is significant potential in these populations for expanded early release and jail diversion initiatives that may not significantly jeopardize public safety. It is important to note here that through the county’s current community corrections initiative, which prioritizes the efficient utilization of jail beds as a program funding priority, only approximately 12 inmates were actually released early from their imposed jail term in FY 2000.

The further targeting of the jail’s minimum security population for either all or partial jail diversion holds the potential of realistically freeing up an additional 20 jail beds or more per day (an average savings of 12 beds per day is needed to bring the jail within the current functional capacity of 110 inmates).

Policy Shift Scenarios

As previously mentioned, two dynamics drive jail populations – the number of admissions and their length of stay. Introducing policy shifts which impact positively on either admissions or length of stay will reduce jail population. Most local criminal justice systems faced with similar crowding problems implement a strategy that includes both. County Z has already implemented this initiative to a certain degree. These community based alternative to jail initiatives already developed through the district and circuit probation departments and community corrections agencies provide a good base for further development. These initiatives simply need to reach further into selected jail bound or incarcerated offender populations.

For example, if the key decision-makers set as a goal the diversion of 25% of the total days served by inmates while on minimum security status only (excludes any time served on any higher security or unsentenced status) it would save approximately 10 beds per day and reduce the jail’s current average daily inmate population from 122 to 112.

If the diversion goal, through increased targeting of incarcerated or jail bound non-violent minimum security inmates, was increased to a 50% reduction in the amount of total days served by minimum security inmates, 20 beds per day could be freed up reducing the average daily population to approximately 102 inmates. See Figure 9.
If these jail population management strategies are to be successful (embraced and utilized by the courts - both judges and probation staff) they must be carefully designed to:

- maximize alternative sanction and treatment choices;
- provide accountability for both community corrections staff and the offender; and
- assure integrity of the process.

This will be particularly critical in County Z's case in that a significant portion of the targeted minimum security population are technical probation or court violations. Further development and enhancement of a “continuum of sanctions” will need to be developed in conjunction with all stakeholders which will provide viable alternatives to all or partial jail diversion.

Risk/Needs assessment and the jail’s inmate classification system will be critical to this process. The jail’s classification system must be well implemented including timely reclassifications to identify the minimum security target population for further eligibility screening. Risk and needs assessment may be used to assess the targeted population for the “risk” (e.g. violence, recidivism, failure to appear, community non-compliance) of placing the offender in the community. Not all minimum security inmates, though in the targeted population, will be appropriate risks for early release. This “risk management” if properly implemented will assist the decision-makers in making diversion decisions while maximizing public safety. Thus inmates would be classified as they enter the jail and those identified as minimum security would be further screened for early release to community sanctions and treatment after they have served a portion of their jail sentence. Based on the candidate’s community risk they would either be denied or granted early release. A proposed early release sanctions, treatment and supervision plan would be matched accordingly with the assessed risk and needs.
Figure 10 simply illustrates this screening process within the jail with classification driving the process.

Figure 11 shows the overall flow from the jail, through classification and risk and needs assessment to matching the early release candidate to appropriate sanctions and treatment.

Note in Figure 11 that it also shows a similar process flow for screening and diversion directly from the bench (bypassing the jail). It was previously noted that a two pronged diversion strategy should be considered. Back-end diversion e.g. screening the inmate after they have served a portion of their sentence, has been described above. It is also appropriate to consider implementing procedures which may identify targeted jail bound offenders for diversion from the bench at sentencing. This is already being done by the courts in the county and could simply be expanded to reach further into the jail bound offender population.

This has proven to be particularly appropriate for offenders receiving short jail terms of 20 days or less. These inmates could be identified by probation or the community corrections coordinator and flagged for the judge’s consideration at sentencing. In some jurisdictions it is more practical to develop a procedure which encourages the judge to sentence the inmate to jail with the stipulation that they may be screened and released to community corrections at anytime (rather than serving a specified portion of their sentence e.g. 50%) if determined appropriate. Fully 48% of all minimum security inmates served 10 days or less. Diverting these inmates directly from the bench or shortly after incarceration could free up 5 to 8 jail beds.
In addition to the above, consideration should be given to awarding extra credit days, in addition to normal good time, for inmates successfully participating in in-house jail programs e.g. anger management, cognitive therapy, job skills, life skills, substance abuse treatment GED, etc. This earned extra credit days option offers incentives to most ALL inmates in the jail to address criminogenic needs factors while incarcerated and positively impacts the overall average length of stay.

Post Implementation

Once policy changes have been implemented it is important to establish a system to monitor the jail's population on an on-going basis. Such a monitoring system can help jail administrators track the impact of new policies on jail populations. Monitoring should focus on: 1) changes in admissions; 2) changes in average length of stay of the target populations; and 3) changes in overall population characteristics. Monitoring should assess any changes in the target population compared to the CY 2000 base year. This allows a partial assessment of the impact of the new policy(s).

In addition, the on-going monitoring of the jail’s population is needed to identify changes in non-targeted populations. A county implementing new policy shifts targeting a specific population (e.g. minimum security) may find that several months later the jail's overall daily population rate has not changed. It might then be assumed that the new program is failing and should be discontinued. In reality, a sound monitoring system might indicate that the target population has been significantly reduced, but the "void" created by saving jail beds from the targeted group has been filled by a different inmate population because of an unexpected system adjustment. Examples of this could be an increase in admissions of formally non-incarcerated offenders or an
increase in sentence lengths or average length of stay. Therefore, it can be justifiably argued that the program should not be discontinued. At the same time, the monitoring system alerts the jurisdiction to any system adjustments or net-widening that might emerge unexpectedly. This may in turn warrant a review of the policies driving these new populations.

Monitoring a jail's population is a dynamic process that evolves over time. The information produced may trigger modifications of existing policies because the criminal justice process and offender characteristics also change over time. Management information systems to collect the appropriate data elements, coupled with user defined statistical outputs, are essential components of this ongoing monitoring system.

**Conclusion**

Jail beds should be viewed as a costly and scarce resource reserved for the most serious and dangerous offenders. To successfully implement such data-driven jail management decision processes, criminal justice practitioners, treatment providers, county commissioners, planners and other key players must work together. This coordination has several potential benefits, including synthesizing policy across agencies, "back flushing" targeted offenders from jail into community corrections, reinforcing a coordinated system of behavior incentives for offenders, and diverting prison-bound offenders when appropriate.

For the proposed jail population management strategies to work community corrections, courts, and jail officials must coordinate their activities. Such coordination supports the development of an integrated system of intermediate sanctions and community corrections to match the various sub populations of incarcerated and jail bound offenders. This will not only promote more efficient use of the jail's limited beds but also benefit those who work in the criminal justice system, the offender and the community.
The following are examples of additional support data used in the course of working with County Z’s Advisory Board in understanding trends in the local criminal justice system and implications for the jail.

### Circuit Court New Criminal Case Filings by Year with Trend Line

![Circuit Court New Criminal Case Filings by Year with Trend Line](image)

### District Court New Criminal Case Filings by Type and Year with Total Case Filings Trend Line

![District Court New Criminal Case Filings by Type and Year with Total Case Filings Trend Line](image)
* Projections used 1990 census data and last five years of jail admission trends. New projections may be done using 2000 census and 1991 thru 1994 jail trends data.
County Z Jail Inmate Age Breakdown 2000

Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 21</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 50</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 +</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29.6 Average Age

County Z Jail Inmate Release Reason 2000

Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release Reason</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Served</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonded</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turned Over</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Order</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>
County Z Community Corrections New Enrollments by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Felon</th>
<th>Misdemeanant</th>
<th>Null</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48% Misdemeanants
46% Felons
6% Null
98% Non-incarcerated
48% Unemployed

Offense Category
- Assault
- Property
- Fraud
- Alcohol
- Traffic
- PV
- Drug
- Court Violations
- Null

N = 64

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Year 2000 Community Corrections Referral Sources

- Circuit Court: 47.5%
- District Court: 38.5%
- Jail: 3%
- Other: 4.5%
- Null: 6%

98% Sentenced
42% on Probation

Year 2000 Community Corrections Jail Days Saved

- 2,312 Total Jail Days Saved
- 6 Beds Per Day Average
- 18.6 Average Jail Days Saved Per Participant
REFERENCES


Hall (1985), Alleviating Jail Overcrowding; A Systems Perspective, National Institute of Justice, Washington, D.C.


About the Authors

Tim Brennan, Ph.D.
Vice President and Chief Scientist

Dr. Brennan’s work in criminology and classification dates back to 1973. He has chaired panels at several major national conferences on these topics. He has published books, monographs and many journal articles and has reviewed for journals including: British Journal of Educational Psychology, Psychological Bulletin, Journal of Applied Social Psychology, Psychometrika, Journal of Quantitative Criminology and Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Dr. Brennan has been a regular trainer at the National Institute of Corrections since 1980; and has been a consultant to jails and probation agencies throughout the country. He has taught graduate level statistics and policy analysis at the University of Colorado. Dr. Brennan was the leading developer of both the Adult COMPAS Risk and Needs Assessment system and the Youth COMPAS. He earned a BS in Physics/Mathematics at Natal University, South Africa: a BA in Philosophy/Psychology (London Univ.) and a Ph.D. in Educational Research (Lancaster Univ., England.)

Dave Wells
President and CEO

In over 30 years of professional experience in various criminal justice and community corrections capacities, Mr. Wells has managed prison work release programs, conducted case supervision, and managed a multi-county community corrections agency. In addition, he has conducted county jail population profile studies, criminal justice system analyses and community corrections master plans for numerous agencies. He has provided inmate classification training to over 350 jails nationwide and risk and needs assessment training to over 125 probation, parole and community corrections agencies. Mr. Wells is the key developer and designer of the nationally recognized JICS Decision Tree objective inmate classification system, taught at the National Institute of Corrections, Jails Division. He is also a co-developer of Northpointe’s COMPAS Risk and Needs Assessment system. He has been a consultant and presenter for numerous conferences and workshops on implementation, policy and procedure development, and data applications for jails, community corrections programs, data collection systems and analysis, and system evaluation. Mr. Wells is also co-author of several published articles and documents on community corrections, inmate classification, automated MIS systems design, and data driving policy in corrections.

Selected Publications:

● 1998 Brennan T. “Institutional Classification of Female Offenders: Key issues and Proposals for Reform” Chapter in Female Crime and Delinquency: Critical Perspectives and Effective Interventions, Ruth Zaplin (Ed), Aspen Press


About Northpointe

In an era of limited resources coupled with a growing offender population, a new awareness is dawning for policy makers everywhere: we simply cannot build our way out of the overcrowding crisis. We can no longer afford to make multi-million dollar jail construction decisions without accurate and sufficient information needed to understand what is actually happening in our local corrections systems and what our options are.

Northpointe was formed for the purpose of providing technical assistance and training to state and local governments throughout the state of Michigan and nationwide. Our special expertise is in the promising and rapidly growing field of community-based corrections. Our philosophy is action-oriented, client centered and directly responsive to the needs of the agencies we assist. We utilize a hands-on, systems approach, helping to reach consensus in defining their own effective and practical options for confronting the “real world” needs of client’s local corrections system and community.

Northpointe is perhaps best known for its state-of-the-art Jail inmate Classification system (JICS) and it’s COMPAS Risk and Needs Assessment System. These systems were designed to facilitate efficient and effective management of jail inmates and to provide comprehensive data to jail managers and policy makers in support of “informed” policy, planning and management decisions.