

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A STUDY OF TASK DISCREPANCY AND JOB SATISFACTION:

THE CASE OF THE WINNIPEG JUVENILE

PROBATION OFFICER

by

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ABSTRACT

This study considered the multi-task function of the Winnipeg Juvenile Probation Officer together with its particular impact on the level of job satisfaction of probation line staff in the field.

It was found that the more discrepant probation officers become in the carrying out of work related tasks, in terms of what they believe they should be doing in their job as opposed to what they actually find themselves doing, the more likely they will experience lower levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, task discrepancy accounted for the major proportion of the explained variation in job satisfaction.

This study raises fundamental questions concerning the very nature of the probation function in contemporary juvenile corrections.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Sir Winston Churchill once said that the mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country.¹ At this point in the history of Canadian corrections it would appear that this country is being subjected to such a test. Over the past thirty months, Canadians from coast to coast have witnessed through the media the forcible seizure of federal penitentiaries and provincial gaols by the inmate populations housed therein and the subsequent confinement of prison personnel. Public reactions to such incidents are predictable and not surprising. The scanning of local news reports reveal a fairly consistent and diverse range of opinion taken from the general populace in terms of what action should or should not be taken in the curtailment and prevention of crime and delinquency.² From the traditional study of penology to our more "progressive" notions of correctional practice, a voluminous amount of material has been published on the subject of processing criminal and delinquent offenders. However, despite the amount of literature published,

¹ Crime and its Treatment in Canada. Foreword.
ed. by W. T. McGrath. Macmillan of Canada 1965. Toronto

² "Fox Wants Abductors Charged" Friday, October 29, 1976 pp 1
"Prisoners Take Second Hostage" Thursday, October 28, 1976
"Guards Freed After Convicts Win Demands" Saturday, November 6, 1976
"Prison System a Failure Fox Says" Monday, November 8, 1976
"Cut Court Power Over Juveniles: Lawyer" Thursday, October 28, 1976 pp 3
(taken from The Winnipeg Free Press).

studies conducted, university courses offered, reality in the field of corrections dictates that society is not much further ahead in effectively dealing with "acting out" delinquents and "old lags" than it was at the beginning of this century. Raymond states that it would be accurate to suggest that society's response to offenders has become more humane over the years¹ however further qualifies this by stating that it cannot be assumed that because man's response to criminals has become more humane, he is punishing them less and treating them more.² Numerous writers have pointed out that society expects the correctional process to achieve two goals: punishment and treatment.³ The question is, can these two goals be attained by the same process or by an individual representing this process? The failure of most correctional systems is manifested quite clearly at the incarceration end of the criminal justice system. It becomes less clear in terms of either failure or success when one views the systems designed to screen out offenders from entering the prison scene. How often have we listened to the continuum of condemnation that our correctional process is a dismal failure, that prisons should be abolished, that more prisons should be built or what we need are more half-way houses, more probation officers, more programs and the list goes on and on. There is an old saying that could quite aptly be applied to

¹ Raymond, Frank B. "To Punish or to Treat". Social Work Volume 19, May 1974 pp 311

² Ibid.

³ Seliger, Stephen G. "Toward a Realistic Reorganization of the Penitentiaries" Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science. Volume 60 March 1969

corrections today, in that we cannot see the trees for the forest. In operant terms one would caustically state something to the effect that all workers, be they prison officer or social worker, appear to desperately need a time out in order to re-align their aims and to re-define the specific function of their job. Essentially, this is the issue that this study will attempt to address; to re-define and clarify one of those trees struggling in a maze of correctional ideology by examining the actual job content of one particular area in corrections, the probation process. The focal area of study will center exclusively around the probation service in Winnipeg, Manitoba; an average sized, mid-western Canadian city, with specific reference to the multi-task function of the juvenile probation officer working within the Juvenile Justice System of this city.

Field practice and observation over a period of two years led this writer to postulate that probation officers involved in juvenile corrections in the city of Winnipeg have evolved into a professional role that defies definition or description. An historical review of the literature clearly points out that the function of the probation officer has been traditionally linked with the juvenile and criminal court system however has grown from a reasonably clearly defined court function to that of a rather complex all encompassing socio-legal service. In the field of juvenile corrections, this assertion is particularly evident when one examines the varying number of tasks the probation officer carries out in his day to day work. A task in this sense is simply defined as those work related activities carried out by an official of the juvenile court (probation officer) with regard to the assessment and supervision of those juveniles brought before

the court. This is not to infer that the juvenile probation officer in Winnipeg is no longer inextricably tied to the juvenile court but may be as equally tied to a number of other work settings in his or her general work situation. It is within these settings that a multitude of tasks arise that may not particularly reflect the traditional function of the probation officer.

It was further postulated that probation officers in Winnipeg do not appear to demonstrate a great deal of satisfaction when dealing with the system designed to process juvenile offenders. Over the past four to five years it has been quite evident that probation officers have witnessed a relatively large number of their colleagues with varying years of experience and levels of education leaving the service in order to secure employment in allied or other areas of the civil service. If probation officers are not deriving a sufficient degree of job satisfaction from within their general work situation, resignation is certainly one method in which to deal with an unsatisfactory situation.

If this is in fact the case, what factors are involved in the work situation of the probation officer that contributes to low job satisfaction? It should be noted at this point that the writer has purposely avoided using the terms low job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction as interchangeable phenomena. The reason for this is that there are two schools of thought in the study of industrial psychology that address this issue quite differently. The traditional

point of view assumes that the same dimensions in a job such as wages, recognition, promotion, etc. are capable of producing either satisfaction or dissatisfaction: a high amount of the dimension produces satisfaction whereas a low amount of the dimension produces dissatisfaction. The Herzberg theory challenged the traditional point of view by arguing that certain dimensions in the work situation (termed satisfiers) are capable of producing satisfaction but play an extremely small part in producing dissatisfaction while on the other hand other dimensions in the work situation (termed dissatisfiers) are capable of producing dissatisfaction but do not generally lead to satisfaction. In other words, according to Herzberg the same dimensions cannot be used to measure both satisfaction and dissatisfaction as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Herzberg's theory has not held up very well under subsequent independent research¹ but nevertheless is given credit for its contribution by highlighting the multi-dimensionality of satisfaction. The Herzberg two factor theory in the measurement of job satisfaction will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter. For the purposes of this study, job satisfaction will be viewed from the point of high satisfaction to low satisfaction and will acknowledge a separation from the term dissatisfaction as posited by Herzberg.

¹ Burke, Ronald J. "Are Herzberg's Motivators and Hygienes Unidimensional" Journal of Applied Psychology Volume 50. August 1966 pp 317-321

As earlier indicated, probation officers in Winnipeg do not appear on the surface to demonstrate very high levels of job satisfaction when dealing with the system designed to process juvenile offenders. Within this system, a myriad of tasks have evolved as a result of the probation officer moving from his traditional primary setting, the courtroom to other probation settings such as the department in which he is employed and the community in which he is deployed. Are the tasks that emanate from these various settings incompatible to the very nature of the probation function and thereby confuse primary responsibilities and undermine long-term objectives? More specifically, do the multitude of tasks probation officers carry out from one setting to another serve to confuse their primary function and consequently result in lower levels of job satisfaction? It was the feeling of the writer mostly through observation and experience that probation officers in Winnipeg often find themselves carrying out tasks inconsistent with what they believe their job should entail and conversely not carrying out those tasks consistent with what they believe is a part of their responsibility as a probation officer. From either perspective, a gap or discrepancy may be evident in terms of what probation officers believe they should or should not be doing in contrast to what they are actually doing. As chapter two will more clearly illustrate, probation officers are not only legal officials of the juvenile court system but engage equally in a host of social work related tasks quite independent from the legal sphere. Are there tasks in either sphere

inconsistent or incongruous to the responsibility of the probation officer? And further, does this incongruity or discrepancy have any relationship to job satisfaction? Task congruency simply refers to the extent to which probation officers indicate that the tasks they are actually carrying out in the assessment and supervision of juveniles brought before the court correspond to what they believe those tasks should be. In other words, the higher the degree of correspondence or congruency between the ideal perceptions of task relevancy in relation to their real perception of actual task performance, the higher probation officers will score on an independent measure of job satisfaction. Conversely, the larger the discrepancy or gap between what probation officers feel they should be doing as opposed to what they are actually doing, the more likely they will score lower in job satisfaction.

The original idea behind this study was conceived under the general theme of what happens to probation officers in the field. It appeared to the writer that the amount of dissatisfaction evident among line workers in probation not only reflected the commonly discussed issues of salary and organizational policy, but went much further into the very nature of the probation function. The suspected incongruity of expectation in terms of what the Juvenile Court and Department of Corrections believe probation officers should be doing in contrast to what probation officers believe they should be doing would most certainly constitute a separate study in itself. Therefore, as a

starting point it was felt for the purposes of an exploratory study it would be most appropriate to begin by studying how probation officers see themselves carrying out the probation function.

The basic rationale behind a study of this nature is the fact that there appears to be a consistent and substantial rate of staff turn-over within the service. If probation officers are not deriving a sufficient degree of job satisfaction from their work, is this a function of task incongruity? Secondly, if these assertions are proven to be significant, the results of this study may prove useful in helping probation officers on the line perceive more clearly some of the dynamics and dimensions of their work situation.

Unfortunately, there has been a minimal amount of research directed toward the problem area alluded to in this study. What research evidence is available, relates at best quite indirectly to the central hypothesis. Nevertheless, there is an abundance of available literature that addresses not only the probation process in terms of its historical development and function within the criminal and juvenile justice system but also a wealth of information on the concept and measurement of job satisfaction. As such, much of this information will be used throughout this thesis as it relates to the questions that continue to arise in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature (Part I)

A. Theoretical Framework

A great deal of the available literature directed toward the discussion of various probation issues tends to examine the probation process from an eclectic perspective. Studies that have been carried out in the past concerning either the role perceptions of probation officers or their loyalty toward certain components of the probation process usually begin by placing role orientations along a continuum ranging from law enforcement to social casework.

One article suggests that probation is a clearly defined court service with legal implications.¹ Another source suggests that probation is a social service with a heavier emphasis being placed on its social rather than its legal orientation.² The more recent studies tend to suggest that it is quite common for probation officers to synthesize these orientations by addressing themselves equally to the legal and social work function of their work role.³ It is within this typology that task incongruity may be most prevalent among probation officers today.

¹ Blake, Marilyn "Probation is Not Casework" Federal Probation Volume 12, June 1948 pp 54

² Meeker, Ben "Probation is Casework" Federal Probation Volume 12, June 1948 pp 51

³ Klockars, Carl "A Theory of Probation Supervision" Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science Volume 63, December 1972 pp 552

Brennan and Khinduka conducted a study that attempted to link tasks with role perceptions and in turn correlate these results with professional role socialization.¹ These authors hypothesized that each incumbent of a position in a bureaucracy has to perform a number of tasks that are incongruous with his conception of what constitutes the "role bundle" for that position.² Their most striking finding was the marked gap between what probation officers were actually doing as opposed to what they thought they should be doing.

In this study, tasks were categorized into three phases: pre-adjudication, adjudication and post-adjudication. In all three phases the discrepancy between what probation officers thought they should be doing as opposed to what they were actually doing was quite evident. An interesting finding in the post-adjudication phase revealed that probation officers were actually assuming more role responsibilities than they deemed appropriate. This finding lends support to the underlying assumption in this study that probation officers' responsibilities may be straying into areas that are not relevant to their function. It is interesting to note that these authors focused solely on the juvenile probation officer in a mid-western state in America, a denominator consistent with this study.

¹ Brennan, William C. and Khinduka, Shante K. "Role Discrepancies and Professional Socialization: The Case of the Juvenile Probation Officer" Social Work Volume 15. April 1970 pp 87

² Ibid.

The second half of Brennan and Khinduka's study dealt primarily with the professional role socialization of probation officers in terms of their education. According to their results, M.S.W. probation officers tended to be much clearer about their appropriate role definitions and rejected most of the activities they felt were primarily legal. They further concluded that non-M.S.W. juvenile probation officers lacking graduate social work education do not place as high a value on therapeutically oriented tasks as they do on tasks of a legal nature. These authors suggest that identification with a professional subculture defines for its members their main tasks, responsibilities and what is clearly outside their jurisdiction. They further state that the fact that non-M.S.W. probation officers tend to believe that legal responsibilities are more a part of their role could suggest that they, more than M.S.W. probation officers consider lawyers to be possible role models.

Another author suggests that the adoption of the authoritarian-legal role could be construed as a means in which to cover up the officer's fear of the inter-personal counselling experience.¹ One wonders however whether this fear is in fact a reflection of the lack of therapeutic skills as implied by Arcaya or rather, the eventual recognition and acceptance by many officers that the inter-personal counselling experience is simply not a terribly meaningful component in the probation process. In social work practice, with

¹ Arcaya, Jose "The Multiple Realities Inherent in Probation Counselling" Federal Probation Volume 35, December 1973 pp 59

particular reference to the field of corrections, there is no conflict that appears more frequently than the conflict surrounding authority. Hardman states that authority conflict lies at the root of more delinquency than any other inter or intrapersonal conflict.¹ This author states that the degree to which the probation officer can be helpful to a client with authority conflict is a function of the degree to which the officer understands and accepts his own feelings around authority and the skill with which he uses his delegated authority.² Quite often probation officers feel that the authority delegated to them by the court is inconsistent with their efforts at trying to establish a therapeutic casework relationship. This is a common feeling expressed by many probation officers especially those new to the field of corrections and is certainly acknowledged in much of the probation and early casework literature.³

A recent study (1971) indirectly addressed this issue among a population of some one hundred probation officers in Louisiana.⁴ In this study, Raymond operationalized the concepts of treatment

¹ Hardman, Dale "The Function of the Probation Officer"
Federal Probation Volume 24, September 1960 pp 10

² Ibid. pp 10

³ Authority in Social Work: Concept and Use
ed. by Yelaja, S. H. 1971 University of Toronto Press
pp 103 from Hardman, Dale "Authority in Casework - a bread
and butter theory."
National Probation and Parole Journal. Volume V July 1959

⁴ Raymond, Frank "To Punish or to Treat"
Social Work Volume 19 May 1974 pp 305 - 312

and punishment. In the probation process, authority and punishment could be viewed as interrelated concepts in that the authority of the probation officer at least at face value could mean the imposition of punishment should he feel compelled to execute that authority delegated to him by the court.

Punishment was defined as

- - - - - the infliction of pain, loss or other unpleasant consequence on an offender; it is intentionally administered by authority in response to a crime and is presumed to serve some purpose.¹

Treatment was defined as

- - - - - any process carried out by a correctional worker that involves the offender and is for the purpose of achieving the ultimate goal of law-abiding behaviour on the part of the offender.²

A great deal of the available literature on criminology and corrections tend to place the concepts of punishment and treatment at the opposite ends of the same continuum. Raymond hypothesized that if the traditional viewpoint was correct, probation officers would show a high negative correlation in their attitude toward punishment and treatment. In contrast to the traditional viewpoint, Raymond proposed that the data obtained measuring the attitudes of probation

¹ Ibid. pp 307

² Ibid.

officers would reveal little or no correlation. The strength of association between these two concepts was measured by a Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation which in this case revealed a slight inverse relationship of -0.23 significant beyond the $.05$ level. This statistic gave little support to the traditional viewpoint however substantiated the proposed one by demonstrating empirically that a probation officer's attitude toward treatment cannot be reliably predicted with any degree of certainty his attitude toward punishment. In short, punishment and treatment according to this study are not polarized concepts existing at the extremities of the correctional continuum, but are in fact separate, independent phenomena that co-exist side by side. This conclusion was reached as a result of the latter part of the study which demonstrated that experienced probation officers view punishment and treatment as having almost equal value and as possibly existing simultaneously. The findings further indicated that as the inexperienced probation officer continues on the job, his attitudes toward punishment and treatment change to the point where he places almost equal value on these concepts in a manner similar to his more experienced colleagues. In contrast to Brennan and Khinduka's study of eighty mid-western probation officers, Raymond concluded that the amount of education an officer has makes no difference in his attitudes toward punishment and treatment. Raymond's research further concluded that not only was education an insignificant variable, but also the type of education as well.

Carl Klockars in an article entitled "A Theory of Probation Supervision" states that the first and broadest component of the theory of probation supervision is the working philosophy of the officer — the way he sees his job and duties and secondly, the organizational context in which the officer finds himself.¹

Klockars states that most observations suggest that probation officers fall within the typology yielding the thesis that probation is casework² to its antithesis that probation is not casework.³ At the probation is not casework pole, officers are found to place heavy emphasis on the legal authority and enforcement aspects of their role. Hardman states that the primary function of any probation officer is to ensure that the offender comply with the order of the court and to execute that authority delegated by the court as consistently and fairly as possible.⁴

Along this continuum, Klockars suggests that there are those probation officers who could be classified as time servers. He states that their conduct is departmentally oriented where policy rules and regulations are upheld without question and methodically carried out.

¹ Klockars Op. Cit. pp 550

² Meeker Op. Cit. pp 51

³ Blake Op. Cit. pp 54

⁴ Hardman Op. Cit. pp 4

These individuals, Klockars suggests would probably find the greatest comfort and satisfaction in the setting or department in which they are employed.

At the other end of the continuum is the probation officer who sees his job primarily as a therapeutic change-agent and therefore acts accordingly to the values and principles of his profession. It is within this framework that the probation officer places the greatest emphasis on "social work" intervention and the tasks and responsibilities that accompany this perspective.

Klockars then states that the final officer type in this classification is distinguished by his recognition of both the treatment and law enforcement components of his role. This synthesis however often gives rise to the classical dilemma of corrections; the attempt to address two apparently incompatible roles.¹ The treatment-control dilemma is clearly a fundamental issue arising from the experiences of most probation officers who do address themselves equally to the legal and treatment aspects of probation work. However does this fusion or synthesis of roles resolve the dilemma of the probation officer as a treatment-control agent of society such as what Raymond concluded from this study of Louisiana probation officers or

¹ Authority in Social Work: Concept and Use ed. by Yelaja, S. H. 1971 University of Toronto Press pp 210 from Ohlin, Lloyd E. et al. "Major Dilemmas of the Social Worker in Probation and Parole" National Probation and Parole Journal, July 1956

does it in fact confuse job responsibilities and facilitate ambivalence toward the whole working concept of probation? It is this particular issue that gives rise to the problem area posed in this study.

In Winnipeg, it is self-evident that probation officers working within juvenile corrections perform a host of multi-functional, inter-dependent tasks in the assessment and supervision of those juveniles brought to the attention of the court. In order to resolve the classical correctional dilemma, it has been suggested by one author that the synthetic model has been adopted to equally address the treatment and law enforcement or legal functions of probation work. Have certain tasks evolved in response to the development of this model and do these tasks fall within the boundaries of sound probation practice? If this model is leading probation officers astray as suggested in the opening comments of chapter one, what effect if any does this have on the level of job satisfaction as expressed by probation officers working within the Juvenile Justice System?