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Management of conflict in correctional institutions

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Officers in correctional institutions and their clients can both be effective forces in developing programmes for managing conflict, as Dr Gray¹ and others here have already intimated. This specific statement arises from the general principle that the products of a social problem can be used in coping with that problem. That is, Maxwell Jones' method of getting the people who are involved in problem situations in the living-learning process of a therapeutic community^{2, 3} to study those problems can be expanded to using such self-study to lead to social action and research approaches to particular problems. I shall describe here a series of examples that support this principle and offer leads for implementing it.

OFFENDERS

The forerunner of these programmes, as reported elsewhere,^{4, 5, 6} was a new careers programme which helped to train eighteen offenders as agents of social change. In the six or seven years since they participated in the scheme, these men have developed numerous programmes of social change for cities, counties and states. They played a major role in creating and now staffing a New Careers Branch within the National Institute of Mental Health. They are credited with major contributions to the design of the State of Massachusetts Youth Program, which is dedicated to creating alternatives to incarceration by the State. Although at the start of the programme no one had completed even a year of college, one man now has a doctor's degree, one is a doctoral candidate, and one has a master's degree.

Several of these men have materially contributed to studies of prison violence.⁷ With technical assistance from Hans Toch and myself, they developed

an interview schedule and an analysis procedure for small groups which could be used in the systematic self-study of their own and other confinees' experiences with violence in institutions. This led to a classification of violent incidents by sequences of interpersonal moves and countermoves.

Two studies resulted directly from this investigation: a study, now in its third year, of police-citizen conflicts and an investigation, begun in 1972, of self-inflicted violence by confined offenders. The latter study, which is being conducted in New York State prisons by Hans Toch, documents a strong tendency for both staff and confinees to deny suicidal efforts. Within a confinement institution the forces supporting the myth that confinees can cope with any situation are overwhelming. Suicidal actions are passed off as 'manipulations.' This frame of reference masks large numbers of actual incidents of self-inflicted violence. These could serve as a quality control index of an institution's mental health. Although direct violence among confined men does not necessarily differ from their behaviour when they are not confined, these suicidal incidents are markedly more prevalent when they are confined than when they are not confined. Confinees who have experienced self-inflicted violence are working on this study, again with technical assistance from a social scientist and his students.

POLICE OFFICERS

Another outgrowth of the projects concerning offender violence and new careers is being conducted in the Police Department of Oakland, California.⁸ Seven officers with extensive records of conflicts with citizens became students of citizen-officer conflicts. The officers suggested and then developed a critical incident questionnaire from the 'war stories' they related of their conflicts with citizens. These accounts describe what the incident was, the time of day, the physical location, and the numbers and kinds of people present. Respondents are asked to indicate whether or not they would make an arrest and, if not, what further action they would take. The questionnaire was seen by the officers as a way of testing whether all officers behave alike. The first draft was administered to about forty officers, their Chief, and two of his deputies. All were surprised at how much the responses varied. The Chief was particularly surprised to find how much everyone differed from his own statements about what should occur. Over his signature, a revised form of the questionnaire was then administered to every member of the Department (some 400 men). There was still significant variation amongst the officers. Over eight per cent stated that in handling one or more of the situations they would take actions that violate the

law. The findings greatly increased the Chief's interest in this self-study of his Department. The original seven officers spoke of their new 'officer power,' and their main motive for taking part in the study became the opportunity it gave them to demonstrate that officers could effectively influence the way their own Department worked.

This first group of seven officers went on to tape-record actual street incidents and then to analyse them with their peers. From this intensive review, they produced scripts for a second voice to be superimposed upon the original recordings. The officer taking part in the incident would briefly describe the initial situation. As events progressed he would comment on what he thought were the alternatives available to him. At the end of the incident, he and the other officers would discuss why he did what he did and what the implications of this behaviour were for officer development. A series of such tapes were produced and are currently being used in the training of police recruits.

Besides the critical incident questionnaire and the training tapes, the officers put forward specific proposals for improving the operation of the Department. These proposals included evaluations of the impact of the proposed interventions on officer performance. The projects included modifications in radio dispatching, recruit orientation and field training.

After three months of self-study for two days a week, the original seven officers worked for another three-month period with twenty-four officers selected at random from those with the highest number of recorded citizen-officer conflicts over the previous year. We were interested in the 'contagion effect' of having the original officers rather than social scientists working with the new group. The second group of officers, under the leadership of the seven, continued to develop new types of intervention aiming at reducing incidents of violence between citizens and officers. Demonstration programmes, again complete with evaluation designs, were produced for a family crisis unit, a landlord-tenant unit, and an officer review panel.

The development of the officer review panel epitomizes self-study: staff and programme development through officer participation. One of the second group of officers, now the sergeant in charge of the Department's permanent conflict-management unit, asked why other officers who were having difficulties on the street could not be offered an opportunity to go over their reports with a group of their peers in the way we had been doing for this programme. Beautiful!

This insight led to all reports of officers being reviewed by their peers. A code was built and used in a data system, developed by officers for quality control, which keeps track by month and by officer of citizen-officer conflicts. When an officer reaches a critical point (originally twelve incidents, now down to eight a year), he is contacted by his fellow officers and encouraged to review

his performance with a panel of his peers. This review is completely separate from the official records of the Office of Internal Affairs. Over 150 officers have now participated either as subjects or panel members. In the two and a half years the review panel has been operating, citizen-officer street incidents have been reduced by half. The formal complaints by citizens to the Office of Internal Affairs have also been reduced by half, as have the numbers of officers charged with disciplinary actions as a result of conflicts with citizens.

Further, officers participating in the panels either as subjects or panel members reduced their street incidents significantly more than the reduction occurring for the Department as a whole. This officer review panel as an expression of the police subculture is a complete turn-around from the original statements by the first seven officers that officers do not discuss their performance with each other. Normally it is part of the code of the officer, just as it is of the inmate of a correctional institution, for each man to do his own time, that is to work out his development on his own. Now officers have formalized a procedure, conducted by the peer group itself, for sharing in each other's development. The rallying motives have been officer power and the ability to save officers from getting into trouble, including getting hurt. One hundred and fifty of the Department's 700 officers are having a significant impact on their own culture. The locker room no longer tolerates the mimicking of black people and derogatory remarks about citizenry in general. Although this programme did not operate in isolation from other forces for change, we have hard evidence that it affects problem behaviour, and the case for the self-study process having an impact on the value system of an identifiable subculture is a plausible one.

STUDENTS

In the Palo Alto, California, secondary school system, students who had engaged in militant behaviour formed a study group, which paralleled a staff study group, concerned with conflict-management problems resulting from student militancy. This led to an expanding accredited study, by students, of the school's operation, including the development of an alternative school.

At McClymonds High School in Oakland, an all-black high school has been applying self-study by its drop-out and potential drop-out students to the problems of school 'drop-outism.' This project has been in operation now for ten months. A solid nucleus of students are receiving high school credits for studying and developing, with many of their parents, interventions aimed at reducing dropping out. So far the attendance of the participants has improved.

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS

For the past seven months a group of five non-professional mental health workers, which recently increased to ten, has formed the nucleus of a self-study education programme for mental health workers who are not college graduates, in the Santa Clara County Department of Mental Health, California. Here we not only merge staff development with programme development, but the development is accredited—officially recognized by the education agency—through individual learning contracts. These contracts state the student's learning objectives, the content to be introduced by an instructor-of-record who represents the institution of higher learning and an education committee, plus additional resources for which the student has funds provided. The student acquires knowledge primarily through carrying out agency-based self-study projects. Plans for this programme call for development of the model for five years. By that time fifty-four students will be using the model in several local community, four-year, and graduate schools.

This education model is important because it merges living-learning from actual experiences with accredited learning through the use of knowledge. At this point we have a reasonably worked-through model for merging client treatment, staff development, and problem studies for a given agency, such as mental health, with accredited education.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

We are now ready to use the problems of institutionalization as a base for the development of the accredited correctional officer and his client. It is plausible that the forces of the line staff and the clients themselves can be converted from a source of resistance to a positive resource, both in thinking out programmes and in operating them.

Paul Katsampes has conducted, under Hans Toch's tutelage, a demonstration of the development of correctional officers through self-study. In New York State's correctional system a group of officers built a set of critical incidents comparable to those developed by the Oakland police and developed their own system for scoring responses to these incidents. Then officers from four separate institutions studied, with their peers, possible alternatives in coping with these incidents. After two sessions of two hours each it was possible to show a shift in responses to these incidents by the officers participating in the programme, the responses made before the discussions being scored as much more likely to lead to inmate-officer conflict than those made after the shared

discussions. Many comments were made by the correctional officers, paralleling those of the police, to the effect that though correctional officers may work together for many years they spend a minimum amount of time actually discussing inmate-officer situations and possible alternatives in handling them. Offenders, police officers and correctional officers have a subculture code for 'doing their own time.'

CALIFORNIA CORRECTIONS

The California Department of Corrections has just received a grant to start a self-study group of officers based on the experiences described above. They will begin with seven selected officers in a small institution at Tehachapi. The strategy calls for accrediting the learning experience and the input of knowledge as it assists the officers in their programme development and systematic study. When the officers make the request, a parallel nucleus of inmates will be formed. The aim will be to see how far the nuclear groups can spread, through a contagion effect, to other officers and inmates, bringing changes in both cultures as well as in the formal design of the programme. The ultimate outcome desired is a reduction in violence in the institution, whether inmate-inmate, inmate-self or inmate-officer.

A FINAL NOTE OF CAUTION

It now seems possible that the subcultures of both inmates and correctional officers can be developed to be supportive forces in handling their shared problems of coexistence. It also seems certain that, even though possible, this will be difficult. We do not know enough yet about the role of the agency administrator and middle management in this change process, but it does seem that at least the role of the agency administrator is crucial. He probably does not have to be completely committed, but he must be willing to provide administrative support. This includes some direct participation and the ability to give a fair hearing to the ideas and proposals developed by the study groups. He must be prepared to use his office to ensure that self-study proposals made by other forces within his agency are seriously considered.

A second major concern is getting a well-motivated nucleus of strong peer members of the subculture. This requires a fantastic commitment by those working with the original participants. They must work long hours. They must have infinite patience. They must thoroughly believe that ultimately the coping

competence will emerge. They must be willing to work through the many expressions of lack of trust in themselves and in the programme which arise as the participants' coping competence is challenged. Here is where the living-learning concepts of Maxwell Jones^{2, 3} are invaluable.

The third major concern is the current state of the subcultures. In the United States, offenders appear to be more militant and the custodial staff more tense than in the early 1960s when we ran the original offender-new careers study. We lost a valuable opportunity then to use that nucleus as a base for institutional change. It just may be that, like student militancy, offender militancy is ready for an alternative. Let us pray!

Discussion

Storr: Staff in some English mental hospitals have been having similar group discussions, with criticism of each other's work. This is also the way the Balint group technique trains general practitioners how to handle their neurotic patients, with self-criticism and criticism by peers playing an important part in the whole process.

Wright: How exactly do you start such a project, Mr Grant?

Grant: We don't really know the best way to start. We got into the Oakland Police Department almost by accident. The Chief of Police was present when Hans Toch and I reported our study⁷ of violent inmates to the School of Criminology at Berkeley. About half-way through the Chief said, perhaps facetiously, that if we were interested in violence we were studying the wrong population; we should be studying his staff. We told him we would be over on Monday and we were. We interviewed the thirty-five officers who had been involved in the most citizen-officer conflicts over the past year. They ranged from thirty-two to eight incidents, whereas the average officer has less than one a year. Afterwards we added to the book, *Violent Men*,⁷ a final chapter which was a proposal as to how to reach the officers with a high number of such incidents. There was a new Chief by then who was trying to bring about change and I think our project sounded safe to him.

One nice thing about this strategy is that we work quietly with several problem people in a corner and don't attract publicity either inside or outside the department. The Chief only really became committed to the study when he saw the results of the critical incident questionnaire which his own officers developed. He saw for himself how much variation existed within his department concern-

ing how to handle potentially violent incidents. It is encouraging that we obtained access to this police culture without a deep commitment from the agency's administration.

After access, the really hard work is to find a suitable nucleus. In Oakland, three of us interviewed groups of five of the sixty officers with the highest records of citizen-officer conflicts. This interview was to discuss the project. We wanted colleagues to work with us in studying citizen-officer conflict. We wanted officers who had experience with the phenomenon to help us study it. We were very much interested in the interaction among the officers as the interviews proceeded. Each of us made independent ratings as to which officer of the five had the most influence on the group. Frequently this was not the officer who talked the most. By that simple device, we were able to identify seven officers who were doers and not just talkers and who had a strong influence on their officer peers.

Gray: In the original questionnaire, did you include a built-in element to test whether the person was lying?

Grant: No. One would expect lies and this is what upset the Chief: his officers did not trouble to lie but admitted that in many of these conflict situations they would violate legal and policy procedures.

Morris: The new careers project begun by you and your colleagues has indeed been of enormous significance and value. In Chicago it has led to one project in which ex-offenders become federal probation and parole officers. This has recently been institutionalized as a line item in the federal budget. There are twenty such positions in which the men have security as federal civil servants and opportunity to progress to any level of seniority.

I have heard Charles Gain saying that now one knows who are going to be the discordant and violent policemen, it should be possible to get better recruits. In a sense that may reverse what you want to achieve.

Grant: Yes, we are concerned about working with problem people who are in the system. The screening-out problem is another issue.

Morris: But after you have developed a culture that is less prone to violence you get people who don't have to go through a period of extreme violence before they can fit into a less violent police culture.

Grant: Yes. We would expect the culture to influence the new recruit. We are more concerned about culture variables than about personality variables.

Morris: What incentives do you use to get people to collaborate?

Grant: 'Officer power' was the interest of the original officers. They wondered whether the Chief really cared about the project. Would it make a difference if they came up with something? The possibility of demonstrating that officers could contribute effective change in police operations was a strong motivating force.

Mueller: Did you use any other standard tests to see how much an officer with 32 incidents of violence on his record changes his measures of identification of violence after this kind of programme?

Grant: No, but it could and should be done.

Avebury: Quite a lot of these officer-citizen conflicts seemed to be of a racial nature, since you said that at the end of the exercise the police officers didn't make racial jokes. It seems to me that however much effort you put into this work, if you don't have the proper recruitment procedures—which you said were not a function of this kind of research—you are wasting your time. If you get racist cops into the force then you are tackling a problem that shouldn't have existed in the first place. In his commentary on Derek Humphry's work, *Police Power and Black People*,⁹ Gus John says that the black community should not cooperate in efforts to establish relationships between their community and the police, because if they do they are propping up the existing order of society, which in itself is a method of victimizing the black people. If that is so, how are you ever going to get the black community to cooperate in your work?

Grant: The idea that we can't work within established institutions because by doing so we only intensify the forces working against those who are being victimized is an interesting position. It would appear to leave only one change strategy: revolution. I don't think we can use just one strategy or just one set of forces. We shall have to identify and develop alternative ways of bringing about change.

I would not expect that this kind of screening device would help much with the recruitment problem. As you know, the United States has become very concerned with equal opportunities and the correlates of variables used in screening people out of employment opportunities. I would recommend evaluations of performance and the use of culture-influencing strategies in staff development. I think much more about good and bad situations than I do about good and bad people.

In the programme for offenders that I described, many of the men had been diagnosed as psychopaths, schizophrenics and so on, by professional people. They were also poorly rated by the staff. Yet one man obtained a doctor's degree. Many of the others have equally impressive achievements to their credit. They had an average measured I.Q. of 105. They were people whom society had pretty well written off. Yet, obviously, tremendous power exists in these people. The same thing is being demonstrated by the police officers.

One can't go through these experiences without being overwhelmed with the negative aspects of present diagnostic systems. 'Screening out' that sneaks in the back door in the name of professional integrity needs to be watched. We need to know much more about the potential of concepts like opportunity

structure and peer involvement, concepts that use social dynamics in predicting and influencing behaviour.

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