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CALIFORNIA ADULT PROBATION ADVANCES THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFORTS

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PRODUCE ACTION PLAN

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

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All submissions must be in English. Authors should provide a one paragraph biography, along with contact information. Notes should be used only for clarification or substantive comments, and should appear at the end of the text. References to source documents should appear in the body of the text with the author's surname and the year of publication in parentheses, e.g., (Jackson, 1985: 162-165). Alphabetize each reference at the end of the text using the following format:

Anderson, Paul J. "Salary Survey of Juvenile Probation Officers." Criminal Justice Center, University of Michigan (1982).

Jackson, D.J. "Electronic Monitoring Devices." *Probation Quarterly* (Spring, 1985): 86-101.

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**STUDY
QUALITY**

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MEASURING SUPERVISION FIDELITY IN PRACTICE:

LOS ANGELES COUNTY ADULT PROBATION DEPARTMENT SUPERVISION FIDELITY STUDY

by W. Carsten Andresen, Ph.D.

It is important for community corrections agencies that wish to evaluate the effectiveness of their work to consider both supervision fidelity and client outcomes. Supervision fidelity, which refers to whether the supervision practices of an agency follow Evidence-Based Practices (EBP), provides an agency with the evidence to determine if they are administering high- or low-quality supervision to their clients. Client outcomes, on the other hand, measure the actual probationer or parolee behaviors. Positive outcomes include prosocial behaviors (i.e. staying out of trouble, adhering to probation requirements, participating in treatment, maintaining stable employment/educational advancement) and poor outcomes include recidivating behaviors (i.e. technical violations, new arrests, revocation and incarceration).

Despite the combined importance of supervision fidelity and client outcomes, the community corrections field has primarily focused only on measuring client outcomes. Many evaluations that assert that agencies are using EBP, for example, address only client outcomes in their findings. The few studies that measure supervision fidelity demonstrate that although it is critical to have high supervision fidelity, it is also quite complicated to analyze an agency's supervision practices (Latessa, et al., 2009; Lowenkamp, et al., 2006). By focusing only on client outcomes, many formal evaluations force the reader to make a leap of faith about whether supervision fidelity is actually occurring. While it is important to ensure positive client outcomes, it is just as important for an agency to measure supervision fidelity if they wish to measure whether their supervision practices are truly effective (or if something else is occurring).

Supervision fidelity is also important because the few studies that focus on supervision quality indicate that high supervision fidelity is linked to positive client outcomes. In one of the few available studies, Bonta, et al. (2008) analyzed the audio-taped interactions of 62 officers meeting with their probationers and found that although many officers displayed "poor adherence" to EBP, those officers who had higher supervision fidelity ratings also had better client outcomes. Two other large studies that focused on several correctional treatment programs across Ohio and Pennsylvania also affirm the importance of EBP fidelity. Using the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory, a formal correctional program evaluation conducted by specially trained researchers,

Latessa, et al. (2009) and Lowenkamp, et al. (2006) found that high fidelity in correctional programs resulted in positive client outcomes; and that, conversely, low program fidelity resulted in poor client outcomes. Although supervision fidelity is important, these studies indicate that few correctional interventions actually provide high fidelity supervision.

Recently, Travis County Adult Probation (TCAP) faced a similar dilemma. The Council of State Governments (CSG) conducted an extensive external evaluation (2009) that found positive client outcomes, suggesting that TCAP had implemented EBP well throughout the organization. According to the evaluation, TCAP experienced the largest reductions in felony technical revocations and overall felony revocations across the state. Also, CSG reported that TCAP experienced a progressive decline in new arrests: the department continued to experience a drop in arrests during and after EBP implementation. Despite these good outcomes, TCAP lacked empirical evidence about their supervision fidelity, which made it impossible to determine if their supervision practices had resulted in the positive client outcomes. At the same time, given that most Texas urban probation departments also experienced declines in technical and overall felony revocations, some could argue that something else happened - statewide - to drive down TCAP's recidivism. Because the department had a professional and financial investment in EBP, the degree to which their officers used EBP to supervise their probationers became an especially important question to investigate.

To test if they had high supervision fidelity, TCAP decided to conduct the EBP Supervision Fidelity Study.¹ Specifically, the department wanted to focus on measuring whether a correlation existed between their supervision fidelity and their improved client outcomes. Specifically, this study addressed two questions: Did the positive outcomes result from effective supervision or some other factor? Is EBP supervision measurable?

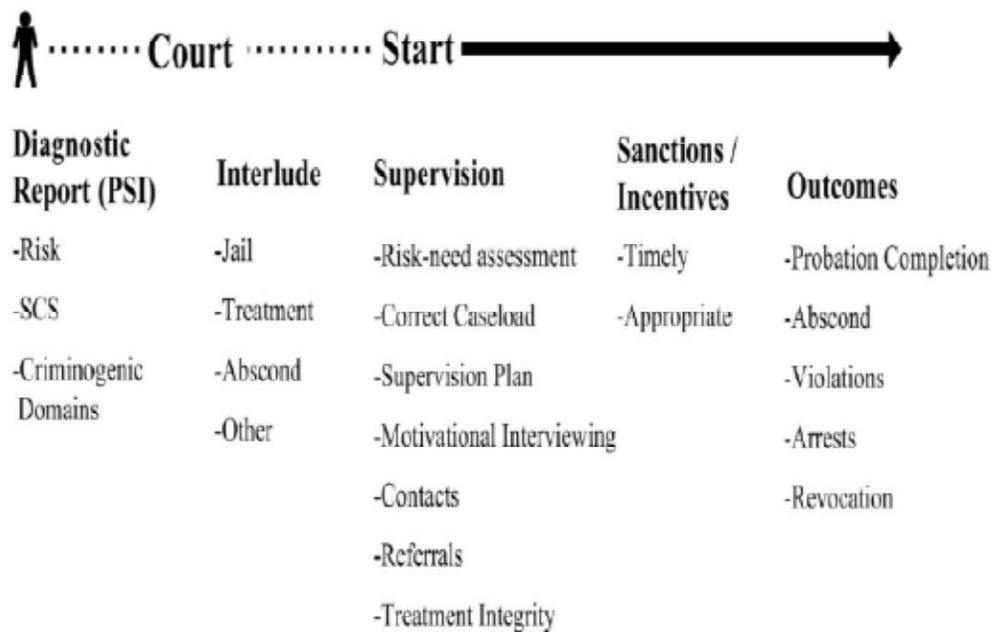
TCAP created a working group composed of various staff -- employees from operations and programs, administration and training -- to analyze supervision fidelity.² As they devised their study methodology, the working group confronted several challenging questions.

What does EBP supervision look like in practice?
 What specific EBP supervision actions by officers are observable?
 How does one measure the frequency—the dosage—of EBP supervision that an officer administers to his or her probationer?
 The Supervision Fidelity Study

was not merely an audit—the working group created a set of supervision fidelity measurements—six supervision trajectory dimensions with individual item measures (see Figure 1) —based on the eight principles of EBP.³ Ultimately, the working group decided to track two probationer cohorts from the pre-sentence stage thru their first six months of supervision.⁴

The working group had to consider an important question before selecting a time period to examine TCAP’s supervision fidelity. Specifically, was it best to examine supervision fidelity during the introduction of EBP, the start of EBP, or sometime later, when officers had more experience using EBP? The

Figure 1. Initial 12 Month Trajectory of a Person Placed on Probation



timeline in Figure 2 presents several EBP milestones that the working group considered. Ultimately, the working group decided to examine the supervision fidelity of all felons placed on probation in January 2008 for two reasons. First, by measuring supervision fidelity right after the EBP implementation, the working group could identify the supervision dimensions they needed to strengthen right away, as well as have an EBP baseline evaluation for them to measure their future performance against. Second, the observation period allowed the working group to administer a pop quiz to TCAP: a surprise test of their supervision fidelity. The working group wanted to measure supervision fidelity in a real way, as it occurred in the field, rather than study how officers supervised clients when they knew a team of evaluators was watching them. By selecting January 2008 in the spring of 2009, the working group ensured

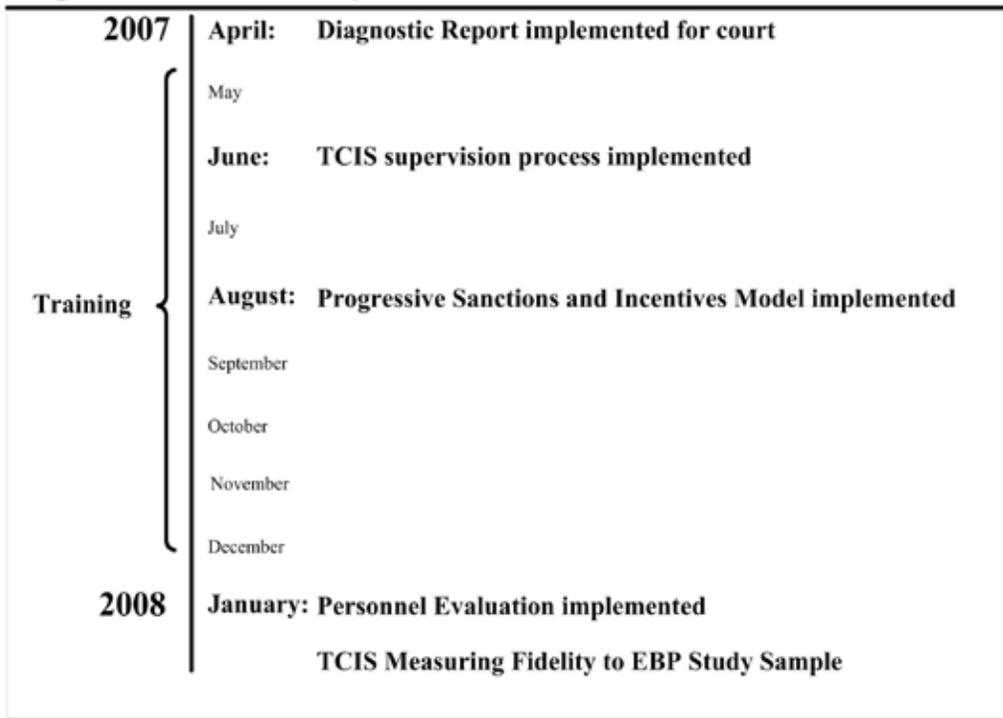
that officers could not prepare for the study in advance. In November 2009, the working group also decided to focus a second wave of supervision fidelity analysis on a cohort of felons and a sample of misdemeanants who began their probation in January 2009.

To begin identifying evidence of supervision fidelity, the working group designed a case file review form⁵ to capture the several different dimensions of probation supervision—the diagnostic report (pre-sentence

investigation), the court-ordered conditions of probation, the supervision agreement, the officer’s use of motivational interviewing (MI), and the behavior of the probationer and actions of the officer—during the first six months of supervision.

The development of the case file review form was no simple matter: the working group had to identify the appropriate items to accurately monitor the supervision process, while at the same time, not selecting too many variables,

Figure 2. Travis County Adult Probation: Evidence Based Practices



Training

which could overwhelm the study. After finalizing the case file review form, the working group coded two data sources: the probationer’s paper case file and the electronic data in the department’s automated case management system.

Ultimately, the Supervision Fidelity Study emphasized different supervision dimensions in each probationer cohort. For the first cohort, the working group analyzed the beginning of the probation supervision—the diagnostic process, the court conditions and the initial supervision between probationer and officer. During the second wave of the study, the working group examined the supervision process itself in greater detail—the supervision agreement, MI, and the sanctions and incentives model.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

How well did TCAP conduct diagnostic assessments? The working group especially focused on this question because probationers have their first sustained contact with TCAP during the diagnostic report evaluation (pre-sentence investigation), prior to their court hearing. The initial diagnostic report is also key to the supervision process, as it provides the courts with risk and needs information

and provides recommendations for the court-ordered conditions of probation. The diagnostic report sets the stage for every supervision contact and treatment decision. Currently, the diagnostic unit uses a hybrid risk-need assessment instrument that

includes the Wisconsin risk assessment; the Strategies for Case Supervision (SCS), a case planning assessment; and eight criminogenic need domain scores that research has shown place an offender at an increased risk of recidivism.⁶ The working group found that the diagnostic officers correctly assessed probationers using the risk and need assessment (see Table 1). In examining how consistently officers scored each assessment, we found that officers arrived at the same risk level score

Table 1.
Assessment Results for the Travis County Adult Probation Supervision Review

Supervision Case File Review Areas	2009
<i>Assessment</i>	
- Wisconsin Risk	95%
- Strategies for Case Supervision	95%
- Criminogenic Domains	89%
<i>Court Conditions</i>	90%

(minimum, medium, maximum) for the Wisconsin 95 percent of the time, the same SCS level 95 percent of the time, and the same criminogenic domains scoring 89 percent of the time. It is worth stating that the working group reviewed the criminogenic risk domain areas with an exacting standard for accuracy. The diagnostic officer could score each domain area in one of three ways: not an issue, a potential concern or a salient problem. Evaluators coded a domain area as incorrectly assessed if the diagnostic officer was off by a degree. For example, if the diagnostic officer coded drug use as a potential concern, when it was actually a salient concern, the evaluator coded this as an incorrectly assessed domain. In the few instances where there was an error, officers tended to under-diagnose the domain areas and assign a less severe score.

The Supervision EBP Fidelity Study also examined whether judges set court-ordered conditions of probation that were consistent with the recommendations in the original diagnostic report. It was important to measure whether judges, by choosing probation conditions that aligned with the initial Diagnostic Report, had faith in the initial diagnostic report. Without the support of the judiciary, TCAP would have a difficult time supervising probationers in a manner consistent with EBP. In Table 1, the results from both cohorts show that judges set probation conditions that aligned with the initial diagnostic report 90 percent of the time.

Both iterations of the fidelity study focused on whether the officers developed a supervision agreement or case plan with the probationer and placed a signed

(officer and probationer signatures) paper copy in the case file. During the initial two months of the felony probationer's sentence, officers are expected to meet with probationers to jointly develop a supervision agreement identifying their top three criminogenic need areas and specific strategies they will use to neutralize specific recidivism triggers. The working group coded whether the officers could have created a supervision agreement for the probationer and a small number of felony cases were excluded because probationers absconded, refused to cooperate with the supervision process, entered into inpatient treatment or went to prison. The Supervision Fidelity Study found positive results: for the 2009 cohort, officers completed supervision agreements for eligible felony probationers 85 percent of the time, a 24 percent improvement over the 2008 cohort, where officers completed supervision agreements 61 percent of the time.

The working group also scrutinized the supervision agreement for evidence that the officer actually collaborated with the probationer to create this document (see Table 2). Specifically, they evaluated whether the officer obtained the probationer's signature and documented his or her discussions with the probationer about the supervision agreement. At the same time, the working group also measured how successful the officer was at creating a relevant supervision agreement that focused on the specific criminogenic risk and need factors identified by the diagnostic report and field risk and need assessment. Finally, the working group examined the case file and chronological notes to determine if the officer drew on

the initial supervision agreement during future office visits, because the supervision agreement should help frame the interactions between the officer and probationer.

The working group also focused on the officers' chronological notes to determine if officers used MI with their clients. The case file review form captured whether the circumstances of the probationer's case warranted supervision, how often the officer used MI, and also provided a criteria for identifying evidence of MI.⁷ See Figure 3 for a section of the case file review form which illustrates the definitions for MI and MI dosage. Focusing on medium- and high-risk felons, the Supervision Fidelity Study found that 83 percent of officers used MI sometimes and 53 percent used MI most of the time.

For the Supervision Fidelity Study, the working group also focused on whether the officers used the new sanctions-incentives model with probationers. Specifically, the working group coded the type of violation committed, the officer follow-up and time it took the officer to take action. See

Table 2.
Officer and Probationer Work on Supervision Agreement

Supervision Agreement Areas	2009
- Was it signed by the probationer?	81%
- Was it negotiated?	68%
- Were criminogenic needs identified?	87%
- Criminogenic needs same as the Diagnostic Report (PSI)?	76%
- Was the Supervision Agreement the foundation for office visits?	84%
- Criminogenic needs discussed?	84%
- Did probationer make progress toward Supervision Agreement goals?	71%

Figure 4 for a section of the case file review form which illustrates how we coded violations and officer responses to probationer behavior. The January 2009 felony cohort committed a smaller percentage of violations compared to the 2008 felony cohort, with 46 percent of probationers committing some type of violation, a decrease of 9 percent from the prior year. The working group also found that during the 2009 cohort, officers responded to violations in a timely manner that conformed to the sanctions-incentives model and court guidelines 75 percent of the time.

Figure 3. Case File Review Excerpt: Supervision/Motivational Interviewing

Supervision/Use of MI									
Do the circumstances of the case/offender warrant the of MI			No <input type="checkbox"/>						Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, Does PO use MI?	Never	0	1	2	3	4	5	Always	
<p>0 = No evidence of use of MI 1 = Use of MI limited to one instance documented in case file 2 = Use of MI limited to two instances – initial ov/supervision plan, not carried through in subsequent visits, as applicable. 3 = Use of MI found in several instances and in different forms 4 = Use of MI consistently used from initial ov and carried through to subsequent visits, also use of MI in different forms 5 = Use of MI reflected almost all categories listed below, from visit, to visit, as applicable to defendant’s stage of change, etc.</p>									
Use of EPE guideline/EPE approach									<input type="checkbox"/>
PO uses collaborative approach									<input type="checkbox"/>
PO clarifies dual role & ▲’s autonomy									<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of OARs									<input type="checkbox"/>
Probationer leads and problems solves									<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognize/elicit change talk									<input type="checkbox"/>
▲’s motivation for change explored									<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of change tools (e.g. pros/cons list)									<input type="checkbox"/>
Stage of Change for ▲ identified									<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 4. Case File Review Excerpt: Violations/Sanctions

Violations/Sanctions/Incentives										
Violations	Type:	Violation Level: (1, 2, 3 or 4)			Level Applied:					
Rush VR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Summons ordered			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Warrant Ordered		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Why do we care about summons/warrant?
	Fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	___			___				
	CSR	<input type="checkbox"/>	___			___				
	FTR	<input type="checkbox"/>	___			___				
	Tmt	<input type="checkbox"/>	___			___				
	Class	<input type="checkbox"/>	___			___				
	Other	_____				___				
Violations addressed timely?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Recommendations _____						
How: MTR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Date _____							
Admin Hearing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Date _____							
Sup Hearing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Date _____							
Admonished	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Date _____							
Court Guidelines/Sanctions Model Followed?				<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No						
If No, explain specific action taken as violation response in comments, below										
Incentives used appropriately?				<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No						
Comments:										

CONCLUSION

The Supervision Fidelity Review analyzed two cohorts of probationers and provided a research-driven assessment of TCAP's supervision fidelity. This study provided empirical confirmation that TCAP had a high degree of supervision fidelity. Specifically, the working group found that diagnostic and field officers correctly assessed probationers, appropriately supervised them according to their criminogenic risk and need factors, applied the principles of MI and responded in a timely manner to violations with the appropriate level of sanction. At the same time, however, the analysis of each cohort provided TCAP with a frank assessment of the areas of their supervision practices that need strengthening. After examining the first cohort, for example, the department realized that additional training and evaluation on the supervision agreement were needed. Based on the analysis of the second cohort, TCAP is focused on the use of MI for medium- and high-risk felony probationers. While the department was pleased that this study showed progress in implementing EBP, the overall goal of this study was to distinguish those supervision areas that needed strengthening, so they could direct their time and resources only toward those areas in need of improvement.

The Supervision Fidelity Review illustrates the complexity of capturing and analyzing the interactions between officers and probationers—what is actually happening during the supervision process—in a research study. This study provides a methodology for researchers and practitioners to rigorously analyze whether

the supervision practices of their agency adhere to the tenets of EBP. A benefit of this methodology is that it demonstrates how an agency can study their supervision fidelity using the data that they already possess—the different administrative records that document officer and client interactions. Ultimately, the Supervision Fidelity Review demonstrates that community corrections agencies have the means to periodically measure and review both their supervision outcomes and their supervision fidelity.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ In November 2005, Dr. Geraldine Nagy, the Director of the department, formally adopted the EBP philosophy to develop and implement organization-wide changes to improve assessment, supervision,

sanctioning, staff training and quality control policies. By September 2007, the Department had finished their EBP re-organization and focused on fine-tuning the implementation.

² The following staff worked on the Supervision EBP Fidelity Study: W. Carsten Andresen, Gary Carlile, Donna Farris, Pam Hollowell, Julie Moss, Kelly Pond, Dorcus Rockwell, Dawn Tannous, Craig Valashek, and Jose Villareal.

³ The eight principles of Evidence-Based Practices: assess actuarial risk-needs, enhance intrinsic motivation, target interventions, skill train with directed practice, increase positive reinforcement, engage ongoing support in natural communities, measure relevant processes-practices, and provide measurement feedback (Bogue, et al. 2004).

⁴ The second wave included three field managers in the working group. Their contribution benefited the working group, providing a hands-on view of how TCAP was implementing EBP.

⁵ Donna Farris (Division Director of Operations) and Dawn Tannous (Division Director-Specialized Supervision) created the case file review form.

⁶ Criminogenic Domains: Criminal behavior, peer relations, assaultive behavior, alcohol use, drug use, sexual behavior, vocational/employment skills, and family/marital.

⁷ The working group modified the case file review form for the second cohort, and included more specific criteria for MI.

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