Developing a Strategic Support System:
Monitoring the Bureau's Performance via Trends
in Key Indicators

William G. Saylor
Office of Research and Evaluation
Bureau of Prisons

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In October, of 1984, the executive staff reviewed a research proposal to assess prison social climates periodically via surveys of both objective institutional facts and subjective staff or inmate perceptions. The concept of social climates is concerned with the interactions between physical and social elements that constitute organizational environments. The objective information, gleaned from the Bureau's automated data files and from on-site observation, will record information such as: changes in institutional management, staff and inmate turnover rates, inmate misconduct rates, and other physical characteristics of an institution at multiple points in time. The subjective data, obtained contemporaneously by way of a questionnaire, addresses such issues as safety and security, the quality of life at the institution and its surrounding community, the availability and utilization of services and programs, personal well-being, and issues related to the work environment such as job morale and the effectiveness of organizational lines of communication.

In this synopsis we will provide: 1) a brief history of the development of the climate instrument, 2) an overview of the potential uses of information about prison climates obtained periodically and some examples of the types of analytic insight which could be derived by adhering to a systematic method of obtaining and retaining data continuously through time, and 3) two alternative plans for initiating the flow of objective and subjective types of trend data.

<u>History of Development</u>
The development of the prison climate survey was motivated
by a desire for an institutional barometer to replace the
Correctional Institutional Environment Scale (CIES) which was in
use in the Bureau from the early 70's through the early 80's. By
the early 1980's, the CIES had become antiquated from a
theoretical standpoint, and the staff and inmates had become
saturated and callous with respect to its use due to the lengthy
term of administration. The development of the CIES was heavily
influenced by the medical model of correctional practice which
was in vogue during the instrument's development period of the
mid 1960's. By the early 1980's there did not appear to be a
great deal of correspondence between this theoretical model of
corrections and the mode of corrections which existed in
practice.

Our goal in developing an alternative instrument was to
provide measures of practical issues rather than the more
theoretical and esoteric issues addressed by the CIES.
Furthermore, we were interested in obtaining measures that were
directly interpretable (such as counts of events) since they
would have a more intuitive appeal to correctional practitioners.

<u>Potential Utility</u>

There are a broad range of potential uses for this climate
survey, particularly if it is administered over time with a
constant periodicity. Possibly the most obvious use of this
instrument is in conjunction with research and program
evaluations. In the context of program evaluations one is
interested in discounting unique institutional influences (e.g.,
things associated with the security level and the types of
inmates incarcerated at a facility) which have a confounding

affect on measures of program performance, particularly when the programs are being evaluated at multiple institutions. But, in order to discount these influences one must obtain measures of them. An instrument such as the Prison Social Climate Survey provides measures of these institutional influences so that they can be discounted from one's measures of program performance and consequently allow for a fair comparison of program outcomes. However, the instrument has additional potential.

Although the instrument has received only limited visibility to date, the Office of Inspections has indicated a desire to explore the potential utility of the survey in conjunction with its audit responsibilities. Their speculation is focused around using the survey results in either of two capacities. First, as a barometer, something to register fluctuations in the nature or complexion of an institution and thereby direct an audit team's attention during their review. And second, as a means of providing inspectors and managers with ancillary information about an institution, both in absolute and comparative terms.

A third possibility is an analysis of the relationships among various measures at one or more points in time. In addition to the information traditionally produced by an audit, information from a survey of the institution's social climate would provide managers with some insight into why an audit looks the way it does. An analysis of this sort would contribute to an understanding of why an institution has the characteristics it exhibits and how it arrived at that state.

This third possibility is consistent with information desires recently expressed by some Bureau managers. Bureau managers have generally found objective institutional profiles of interest (e.g., inmate characterizations such as average age,

expected length of incarceration, average security level; or institutional summaries such as number of escapes or number of unauthorized positive drug tests found through urine surveillance). However, there is currently a great deal of interest in the generation and analysis of trend data (data culled and retained in such a way as to make then amenable to analysis of their change over time (e.g., changes in institutional population profiles with respect to such things as age, length of incarceration, security level and the prevalence of unauthorized drugs detected). The research design conveyed in the climate research proposal satisfies the need for both the characterization of Bureau facilities in a fact sheet type format and for trend data.

The proposed research design could greatly augment the types of objective information the Bureau is currently collecting (or any type it begins to collect in a periodic manner) and enhance the possible utility of trend type data for management purposes by providing a systematic analytic framework of related objective and subjective correctional measures. This framework of measures obtained at consistent time intervals could be used to provide an understanding of the nature of institutions at any specific point in time while placing that view in perspective relative to previous and subsequent points in time. Much can be learned from observing the dynamics of an organization in a continuous manner. For example, this approach to data collection would lend itself to analyses of such issues as the impact of job morale at one point in time on subsequent job turnover rates, or the impact of job morale on recorded or perceived levels of violence contemporaneously or at subsequent points in time. Moreover, these periodic measures could be used to provide the Bureau's

managers with direct feedback about the impact of specific policies, that is, whether policies implemented to deal with particular problems have had their intended impact and if so what the magnitude of that impact was.

Implementation

The (October, 1984) proposal presented to executive staff discussed a research design for validating the data derived from administrations of the social climate questionnaire. Nevertheless, the selection of security levels and institutions were chosen to thriftily represent the most common Bureau institutions and thereby allow for a demonstration of the utility of the research as well. This design called for administrations of the instrument at six facilities, two institutions from each security level between levels two and four, at two or more points in time. Although this design provides sufficient data for the purposes intended in the executive staff proposal, the coverage of institutions is insufficient for the interests of the Office of Inspections. In order to provide the Office of Inspections with the information it desires the surveys need to be administered at each facility it audits (presumably each of the Bureau's facilities).

The Office of Inspections appears most interested in a subset of the items from the social climate questionnaire which deal with management issues. A cursory analysis of the data obtained from administrations of the instrument at FCI's Memphis and Ashland (the results of which are displayed in Table 1) suggests that information about five facets of management can be summarized in approximately 25 items. Assuming the Office of

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Research will service the Office of Inspection's concern for auxiliary institutional information, the most succinct design would engage a survey questionnaire consisting of only these 25 or so items. This would be sufficient to provide some indication of change in the levels of job satisfaction, lines of communication and so forth. That is, these items would minimally satisfy that office's primary concern. However, obtaining information on only these items would prevent any explanation of why an institution's management profile looks as it does. Any analysis would be necessarily limited in scope and without the benefit of knowing how that information relates to other aspects of an institution. Any examination would be constrained to a comparison of one institution's management profile with another's, or an institution's profile compared with itself at another point in time. We would be unable to look at management profiles in conjunction with other related elements of correctional institutions (such as issues of safety or sanitation). By using the entire instrument we will gain insight into the reasons management profiles vary across institutions and why they change over time. Information of the second type, ancillary information for inspectors and managers, would also be necessarily limited if a less comprehensive instrument were used. Furthermore, any analysis of the relationships between the physical and social elements that comprise institutional environments would not be possible.

A more inclusive method, which permits an integration of the complete questionnaire with supplemental objective information, could be periodically conducted at each institution in such a way as to minimize any disruptions to the operation of the facility.

A small representative sample of staff or inmates (possibly 15 to 20 percent of institutional complement) could be administered one of the four sections of the entire survey; varying the sections distributed so as to obtain complete coverage of the questionnaire. This would minimize the number of staff or inmates involved and also limit the amount of time each respondent would be required to expend. If conducted in an appropriate manner the results should not be any more limited than would the results of much more demanding survey designs.

The latter implementation strategy has several merits. First, this design will provide the Office of Inspections with a more complete profile of each facility with less opportunity for misinterpretation due to omissions of information (unrecorded or unobserved details of an institution). Second, since the Office of Inspections requires data from every Bureau facility in order to meet its needs, the Office of Research will (as a by product) have a much more extensive database with which to assess the statistical and methodological issues addressed in the previous executive staff proposal. Third, if the proposed methods realize their potential the Bureau will have initiated an integrated source of information; one which could be used to provide profiles and trends of institutional characteristics (with some insight into why similarities and differences are observed). This could supply management with a continuous monitor of many aspects of the Bureau's operations and a readily available framework with which to assess the impact of management's policies.

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William G. Saylor

William E. McGarvey
Office of Research and Evaluation

TABLE 1

Five Plausible Dimensions in
the Prison Social Climate Scale

Factor	Item
Institution Approval	E28. This institution is run very well. E31. I would rather be stationed at this institution than any others I know about. E29. This institution is the best in the whole BOP. E32. I would like to continue working at this institution. E9. In this organization, authority is clearly delegated.
Turnover Likelihood	E17. I will probably look for a new job. E38. I am currently looking for or considering another job outside the BOP. E37. If I have a chance, I will change to some other job at the same rate of pay at this institution. E33. I would be more satisfied with some other job at this institution than I am with my present job. E7. Under the present system, promotions are seldom related to employee performance.
Supervisor Relationship	E12. My supervisor gives me adequate information to perform my job. E22. I often receive feedback from my supervisor for good performance. E15. On my job I know exactly what my supervisor expects of me. E16. The standards used to evaluate my performance have been fair and objective. E39. My supervisor sees to it that I receive the kind of training that I need to perform my work well.

Factor	Item
Emotional Strain	During the past twelve months, how often have you experienced a feeling: E53. of being emotionally drained at the end of the day? E48. of worry that this job is hardening you emotionally? E46. that you've become more harsh toward people since you took this job? E55. that working with people all day is really a strain for you? E57. of being fatigued when you get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job?
Influence with Inmates and Staff	During the past twelve months, how often have you experienced: E45. a feeling that you're positively influencing other people through your work? E44. an ability to deal very effectively with the problems of inmates? E49. a feeling that you have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job? E52. a feeling that you can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with inmates? E58. inmates coming to you to discuss personal matters that are unrelated to your work role?