The author replies: we still need to demonstrate program effectiveness

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It was not my contention that "nothing works when it comes to rehabilitating offenders." Pamela K. Lattimore and Ann D. Witte repeatedly state this to be my position. There is an important difference between saying nothing works and saying no one rehabilitation strategy has consistently been shown to be successful. Just as Professors Lattimore and Witte subscribe to the latter view, so do I.

They state that I favor abandoning or abolishing employment programs for offenders. There was no such recommendation in my article. Rather, the conclusion asks whether "*some* of the dollars currently spent on facilitating the labor market adjustment of offenders could be better applied to increasing the education and training of those young people with the least access to these services."[1]

Lattimore and Witte argue for stronger interventions. They characterize work release, transitional aid, and some prison training programs as intrinsically weak rehabilitative treatments. Hence, "insignificant effects on behavior are precisely what should have been expected." Although the plea for stronger rehabilitative treatments may be correct, it may not always be easy to discern the weaker interventions from the stronger ones. For example, in Witte's 1977 evaluation of work release ("Work Release in North Carolina—A Program That Works!")[2] there was little indication from the title or the content that work release was a weak intervention from which little could be expected. Although Lattimore and Witte also use transitional aid as another example of a weak intervention, this strategy is supported in another 1977 article coauthored by Witte.[3]

Lattimore and Witte state that, whenever possible, the evaluation of rehabilitative treatments should involve careful planning, random assignment, adequate sample size, and measurement of labor market performance and recidivism. When random assignment is not possible, carefully designed quasi-experiments are appropriate. I agree.

The record to date

Lattimore and Witte suggest that rehabilitative labor programs may not have performed better because these interventions were not "implemented precisely as planned." If the disappointing performance of some or all of the rehabilitative treatments reviewed in my article is to be attributed to inadequate implementation, rather than to the treatments themselves, Lattimore and Witte have missed an excellent opportunity to be more specific as to which interventions have been significantly affected by poor implementation and in what ways. Unsupported generalizations such as "implementation has been a problem in many manpower programs" do not substantially advance the dialogue.

More detailed information regarding the difficulties of implementing rehabilitative interventions would have been especially helpful in understanding the findings from the "Supported Work" program. This approach, with its emphasis on peer group support, close supervision, and gradually accelerating performance expectations, was implemented for groups of ex-offenders, welfare recipients, ex-addicts, and youth. Although the program was judged to be successful for welfare recipients and ex-addicts, program objectives were not achieved for ex-offenders and youth.[4] If implementation problems frustrated the successful application of this program to help ex-offenders, how is it that such problems did not undermine the services provided to welfare recipients and ex-addicts?

This is not to deny, however, that program implementation may not seriously constrain the success of rehabilitative manpower efforts for offenders. In his review of these programs undertaken in the 1960's and early 1970's, Robert Taggart analyzes some of the inherent difficulties in administering rehabilitative treatments for the offender population. Taggart asserts that implementation is often thwarted by hostility toward those programs on the part of offenders, officials of the criminal justice system, and potential employers. Taggart concludes, "This negative attitude can be a greater impediment to the success of manpower services than any identifiable problem in the system or the individual."[5]

In discussing the importance of program implementation in their "Promising research directions" section, Lattimore and Witte indicate that recent progress has been made. They cite two recent studies involving innovative approaches to the problem in the education area. On the basis of these comments by Lattimore and Witte, it may appear that because we now know more about program implementation, it should be a somewhat straightforward matter to implement a given rehabilitation strategy designed for offenders and then carefully evaluate the efficacy of the intervention.

A review of the two studies suggests that this may not be the case. The implementation technique tested by Ronald G. Tharp and Ronald Gallimore was applied in what even the editors of the volume in which the article appears concede was a rather unusual environment. The approach relies upon what the authors admit are subjective signals in determining whether the implementation should continue and whether it is proceeding according to plan. It also relies upon subjective and somewhat *ad hoc* methods for correcting any particular perceived deviation from the intended implementation.[6]

The strategy tested by Gary D. Gottfredson is similar to that discussed by Tharp and Gallimore and shares some of the same potential threats to successful replicability. Sub-

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jective judgments appear to determine the detection of deviations from an implementation blueprint and the appropriate corrective actions.[7]

Although these models of improved program implementation have been successful, it remains to be seen if they can be applied in many organizational and environmental settings. This is especially true because, as Gottfredson concedes,[8] the approaches are very expensive and require the services of the relatively small number of researchers with the requisite skills to apply these models. In sum, implementation is a complex and unsettled problem. It seems much too early to determine to what extent the innovations cited by Lattimore and Witte may be generalized to employment programs for offenders.

Rehabilitation as the one program goal

Lattimore and Witte raise an interesting and important question regarding the objectives of prison rehabilitation programs. They argue that facilitating the labor market adjustment of releases may be just one objective of such program activities. Prison training and rehabilitation services may lower prison costs, facilitate prison management, and attract less sadistic and authoritarian personnel. It is correctly argued that if rehabilitation programs efficiently advance these other objectives, they should be continued even though they may not be effective in rehabilitating inmates. Although it may not be possible to make any conclusive judgments at this time, this position deserves additional consideration.

With respect to the impact of rehabilitation programs on prison costs, a recent examination of costs in 19 institutions by Peter Schmidt and Witte indicates no systematic statistical association between rehabilitation programs and either short-run or long-run prison costs.[9]

It would have been helpful if Lattimore and Witte had explained the hypothesized relationship between rehabilitation programs and prison management. However, an earlier analysis of this issue, coauthored by Witte, does construct such a relationship:

> To survive the ordeal of captivity, an offender must hope that he will emerge from it capable of enjoying life in a free world, and he must be assured that the portion of his life that is spent in prison was not entirely wasted. Without hope and a sense of significance, he is more likely to become embittered and to view himself as a victim of society's arbitrary vengeance. The offender who feels society is trying to help him may accept some of the restrictions imposed on him. The offender who feels that society has no other goal other than to punish him will feel justified in attacking his captors.[10]

In that same work, Seymor Halleck and Witte also explain how prisons attempting to rehabilitate, rather than warehouse, prisoners attract a higher quality staff:

> Correctional workers, too, must have hope and a sense of usefulness. No one wants to be his brother's keeper unless he is convinced that the process of keeping will be helpful. Our correctional system already has too many lethargic, bureaucratically insensitive and even sadistic employees. A warehousing philosophy attracts more of them and reduces the possibility of creating a benign environment.[11]

This is a powerful analysis. However, unless prison training and rehabilitation programs can, at some point, demonstrate that they are effective in improving post-release outcomes, will not these programs eventually risk being viewed by all concerned as a sham or simply as busy work? In that event, would they not exacerbate rather than ameliorate the alienation and embitterment of the inmates? If prison rehabilitation programs do not eventually establish a credible record of effectiveness, would prisons still succeed in attracting more humane correctional personnel? □

——*FOOTNOTES*——

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[1] Frederick Englander, "Helping ex-offenders enter the labor market," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1983, pp. 25–30. My suggestion that *some* of the funds now allocated to rehabilitation programs be diverted to what may be called prevention programs implies, of course, that the remainder of the rehabilitation funds should not be transferred. If it were my position that "nothing works," it would be inconsistent to support the continuation of rehabilitation, even on a smaller scale.

[2] Ann D. Witte, "Work Release in North Carolina—A Program That Works!" *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Winter 1977, pp. 230–51.

[3] Seymor L. Halleck and Ann D. Witte, "Is Rehabilitation Dead?" *Crime and Delinquency*, October 1977, pp. 372–82. Of course, interventions that are weaker need not be less effective or subject to more modest expectations. Irving Piliavin and Rosemary Gartner ("The Impact of Supported Work on Ex-Offenders," University of Wisconsin, Institute for Research on Poverty, 1981) suggest, following the early success of transitional aid, that this weaker intervention may have been more successful than earlier, stronger interventions, because transitional aid encouraged a sense of self sufficiency, while more comprehensive assistance may foster institutional dependency and perpetuate the stigma of being an ex-offender.

[4] Board of Directors, Manpower Development Research Corp., *Summary and Findings of the National Supported Work Demonstration* (Cambridge, MA, Ballinger Publishing Co., 1980).

[5] Robert Taggart, *The Prison of Unemployment: Manpower Programs for Offenders* (Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

[6] Ronald G. Tharp and Ronald Gallimore, "The Ecology of Program Research and Development: A Model of Evaluation Succession," in Lee Sechrest and others, eds., *Evaluation Studies Review Annual*, vol. 4 (Beverly Hills, CA, Sage Publications, 1979).

[7] Gary D. Gottfredson, ed., *The School Action Effectiveness Study: The First Interim Report* (Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools, 1982); and Gary D. Gottfredson, "A Theory Ridden Approach to Program Evaluation," *American Psychologist*, forthcoming. Note that Gottfredson envisions a closer union of the evaluation researcher and program implementer who would "collaborate in evaluation design, question formulation, and planning. As a result, researchers extensively intervene in project development—indeed they become part of the project." This would seem to threaten the objectivity of the evaluator.

[8] Gottfredson, "A Theory Ridden Approach."

[9] Peter Schmidt and Ann D. Witte, *An Economic Analysis of Crime and Justice* (New York, Academic Press, 1984).

[10] Halleck and Witte, "Is Rehabilitation Dead?" p. 379.

[11] *Ibid.*