Improving Parole Outcomes with Performance Leadership and Data: Doing What Works

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NEW YORK TIMES, JANUARY 3, 2007—"Embattled Chief Executive Resigns at Home Depot." The resignation follows an investor group's proposal to evaluate the company's direction and management because its stock had underperformed due to "deficient strategy, operations, capital allocation, and governance."

Businesses and their leaders come and go based on measured success. Government agencies and the criminal justice system in particular, however, have just recently begun adopting business tools and metrics to embrace accountability to stakeholders. Only in the last 2 decades has "what works" research in criminal justice validated the use of assessed offender risk as the most important metric for predicting recidivism.[1]

The Georgia Parole Board's Field Operations Division is focused on the core business of increasing successful parole completions by managing risk. Georgia was selected in 2004 to participate in NIC's Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative (TPCI) based on its commitment to implement NIC's evidence-based and data-driven reentry model. TPCI is about *how* to effectively do what works.

The leaders of 12 Georgia state agencies spent the first year in TPCI studying offender transition policies, practices, and data, resulting in a slate of recommendations for action. Some recommendations knitted together uncoordinated processes that were already in place. Others required new processes or collaborations. A factor underlying every recommendation—and a key to the initiative's success—is the use of data to track work processes and progress. This article describes the evolution of the Georgia Parole Board's business-oriented data and performance leadership model, beginning in the late 1990s and continuing into the Georgia TPCI project.

Business is Data Driven; Government Should Be, Too

The cornerstone of success in business is a plan that: 1) operationally defines the objective, 2) describes the rationale for how the objective is accomplished, and 3) establishes feedback mechanisms and benchmarks for monitoring progress. Business plans typically are not funded unless they demonstrate how the business will become profitable or meet its objective. Businesses study production costs, market share, profit margin, and customer opinions on almost everything about the product. The ubiquity of customer satisfaction assessments is evident, for

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1. Paul Gendreau, Claire Coggin, and Tracy Little, *Predicting adult recidivism: what works*, Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1996. Online at *http://ww2.ps-sp.gc.ca/publications/corrections/pdf/199607_e.pdf.*

example, on sales receipts from The Home Depot and its rival Lowe's, which ask buyers to take an online survey about their services and the buying experience.

Governments are now taking an empirical approach to demonstrate accountability to their main stakeholders—the public. In the criminal justice arena, perhaps the longest running and most widely reported set of outcome metrics is the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Reports. An application of a data-driven approach to managing crime is New York City's CompStat system, which uses crime statistics that measure performance to drive work activity. Data on the locations and types of crime being committed are presented at regular CompStat sessions at which commanders are held accountable to discuss the steps they are taking to improve neighborhood safety vis-à-vis the performance measures.[2]

Many police departments across the nation have adopted their own versions of CompStat. Local governments also are embracing accountability metrics for other government services, such as how quickly potholes are filled, wait times when calling government agencies, and length of time spent in driver's license renewal lines. These types of performance measures are tracked and reported to the public. A quick Google search lists scores of government websites that report on measures that matter to the public.

Georgia's Data-Driven TPCI Plan

Recommendations of the Georgia TPCI planning team include implementing risk/needs assessments, expanding programming, improving the coordination of services, and developing transition plans at the point of entry to the criminal justice system that follow the offender through the system and back into the community.[3] Included with each recommendation is a requirement that data be used to determine what programs are implemented and which offenders are placed in specific programs.

The final recommendation is: *Evaluation: Create measurable benchmarks and standards against which the initiative is evaluated.* Each partner agency is tasked with developing measures of service delivery and effectiveness. The parole management team has considerable experience identifying what data is useful and effectively informing and focusing managers and parole officers on the core business processes and activities that increase successful parole completions.

Computerized Information Systems: Essential Data to Support Accountability Measures

Georgia's correctional agencies have long shared a robust, mainframe computer system that holds a large data set on every offender who has been under the state's

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2. Paul E O'Connell, *Using Performance data for accountability: the New York City Police Department's CompStat model of police management* (Cambridge, Mass.: The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for the Business of Government, Harvard University, 2001). Online at *http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/Oconnell_Report.pdf*.

3. Georgia Reentry Impact Project Policy Team, *Recommendations*, unpublished report distributed to the Steering Committee, October 25, 2005.

jurisdiction since at least 1980. Offender-specific data include demographic, mental health, education, diagnostic, criminal history, prison behavior, and program information. The Parole Board has developed expertise in analyzing and using this data, for example, in a 1992 reassessment of the Parole Board's release decision guidelines. The analysis included determining the actual length of time various offender groups had served before release from prison and updating and re-validating the association of each guideline risk factor with the likelihood of committing a new crime.

In 1998, the agency deployed a computerized case management system (CMS), designed by parole officers and managers to fully document supervision activities in data form. As the leadership team gained experience in identifying pertinent data items, creating effective reports, and subsequently revising the data elements and reports, they came to rely on the CMS data as vital to effective operations.

Prior to launching CMS, supervision activity was documented on paper. Parole officers hand-counted data for a monthly activity summary (MAS), which managers and others up the chain of command compiled into a statewide summary that was typically completed 3 weeks after the end of each month. The MAS included counts of various types of contact with parolees on different levels of supervision, investigations and other reports written, parolee losses and gains, revocations, etc. It was used primarily to determine staff allocations and to provide data for the agency annual report and legislative funding requests.

The Parole Board also prepared a monthly production report, generated from the mainframe computer system, to track parole revocations and discharges. This information was not available until at least 30 days after the end of month and was only available as statewide totals, with no breakdown by regions or districts.

In 2000, the agency created a computerized MAS that tabulates data entered by parole officers during the course of their usual work activities. The original instruction for creating this computerized MAS was that it should look exactly like the paper version; managers were comfortable relying on this information. The computerized MAS significantly reduced the time required to compile and view operational data. However, managers quickly realized information necessary for improving performance was still lacking.

Managing with the Right Data
Having the right information is essential to success. Successful businesses thrive with accurate and timely information about the work processes which contribute most to the quality and quantity of the product. Considerable thought and analysis is necessary to identify which activities and associated measures best predict desired outcomes/results.

During a Franklin-Covey training program, "The Four Disciplines of Execution," Parole Board managers heard a story about a company that sought to increase sales through area stores. Its staff, managers, and executives brain-

stormed many ideas to determine which measures, when monitored and adjusted, best predicted total monthly sales. Many factors were found to affect sales, but the single best predictor was the number of delivery trucks on the road each day. Focusing and providing feedback to managers and line employees on this measure significantly increased sales.

As explained during the training, such predictor numbers (e.g., trucks on the road) are "lead measures." By definition, they can be adjusted and have a direct affect on the outcome. The outcome (in this example, total sales) is the "lag measure." Successful organizations identify, monitor, and adjust lead measures to achieve their goals, or lag measures.

Our parole field management team focused on identifying its lead and lag measures. Fortunately, this was relatively easy. Over many years of thoughtful and deliberate review, the agency mission had been refined to read, in part, "To enhance public safety by successfully transitioning offenders back into the community." The Board's outcome or lag measure of successful transition was therefore identified as the parole completion rate. The parole completion rate provides a clear performance benchmark that aligns well with the agency mission of successfully transitioning offenders.

The next step was identifying the lead measures that influence the parole completion rate. While surveillance for community safety was a continuing necessity, the research was clear: to improve the parole completion rate requires reducing criminogenic risk—that is, addressing parolee attributes that are associated with the likelihood of committing crime.

The senior management team had already recognized that the first computerized MAS did not provide key information on the most important processes (lead measures) that would improve successful parole completions (our lag measure). Our new lead measures are specific to Georgia's parolees and can be used by both managers and parole officers. They are based on an actuarial analysis conducted in 2002 using the CMS supervision data on over 6,300 parole completions between July 2000 and January 2001.[4]

Ten factors were found to best predict the likelihood of a new crime being committed while an offender is under supervision. This finding was used in developing an automated risk assessment instrument that recalculates risk nightly for each parolee, adjusts the risk score when needed, and notifies the parole officer via email when the risk level moves up or down across a predetermined threshold. The four dynamic factors in the risk assessment are positive drug screens, residential moves (each of which increases risk), the number of days employed, and the number of months of program attendance (each of which lowers risk).

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4. George Braucht, Tammy Meredith, and John Prevost, "Automating Offender Risk Assessment," *Topics in Community Corrections: Annual Issue 2004, Assessment Issues for Managers*, 35-41. Online at *http://www.nicic.org/Library/period272*.

This analysis strongly supports and extends the application of the "what works" research to Georgia's parole population. Current parole supervision lead measures are employment rate, drug test results, and program participation. The MAS was subsequently revised to include this vital data. This analysis cements the strong relationship between risk and parole completion. In essence, the parole officer influences a parolee's risk to commit another crime by focusing on the dynamic factors (lead measures) that are directly related to completing parole (lag measure). Figure 1 presents a sample of the new MAS report.

Figure 1. Updated Monthly Activity Summary

Supervision Monthly Activity Summary For SEP-2007
Statewide

Date of Report 13-NOV-07

PAROLED/LOST	Paroled	% Paroled	Lost	% Lost	Discharged	Revoked	% Discharge	Month End Population
Details	956	4.57%	906	4.33%	662	244	73%	20,913

INTERACTIONS	Level	Total Cases	Total F/F	At Least One F/F	% At Least One F/F	% EV	% RV
Details	High	5,293	5,663	4,918	93%	72%	81%
	High - Other Status	1,839	618	469	26%	N/A	8%
	Standard	11,379	6,796	6,213	55%	68%	50%
	Standard - Other Status	2,402	638	480	20%	N/A	5%
	Total:	20,913	13,715	12,080	58%	69%	49%

EMPLOYMENT	Employable	% Employable	Employed	Employment Rate	Exempt	% Exempt
Details	14,200	68%	11,991	84%	2,524	12%

PROGRAM ACTIVITY		Sub Abuse		Cog		SO		MH		Emp		Edu		TOTAL	% of Pop
Details	Enrolled		3,343		451		143		542		334		151	4,486	21%
	Attended	69%	2,306	79%	357	78%	112	50%	271	52%	175	40%	61	3,017	14%
	Program Ends		271		31		3		29		111		3	431	2%
	COMP|TERM	271	0	31	0	3	0	29	0	111	0	3	0	431 0	2% 0%

DRUGTESTS	# Tested	% Tested	Tested Positive	% Positive
Details	5,336	24%	665	12%

RANDOM	Selected	# Tested	% Tested	Not Tested	Unable To Test	Tested Positive	% Positive
Details	1,359	1,190	94%	78	91	120	10%

Effective Reports: Easy to Access, Read, and Understand the Causal Link

Successful companies use the right lead measures to alert managers early on to the likelihood of making a profit. Such measures can include production costs, products ordered, and even trucks on the road. Lead measures are vital because they can be adjusted to ensure later profits. Public organizations also need lead measures that are monitored, shared, and predict the need to adjust work processes to improve the agency's chances of achieving the desired results.

The availability of timely performance (lead) and outcome (lag) data is key to driving both effective parole officer management and offender supervision. The MAS is now deployed in a web-based system called STATS. A series of reports can be run by any agency employee at any time, and the information is no more than 2 to 3 days old.

The MAS displays supervision data in drill-down reports at five levels of agency operation, providing relevant summaries for staff at various levels:

♦ At the highest level, the MAS shows statewide totals;

♦ The regional report displays the information for each of the six regions;

♦ The district report shows comparative data for all parole offices (districts) in the associated region;

♦ The parole office reports show the data for all parole officers in a district; and

♦ The parole officer report lists all parolees on the caseload by name and shows each individual's risk factors and interventions.

Figure 2, below, shows a partial MAS report by regions. Managers can quickly learn, for example, the employment rate for all parolees in the state, in a region, in a district, and/or on a particular parole officer's caseload. These comparisons are particularly useful for identifying what may be affecting changes in the rate.

All levels of MAS reports present parolee data in two assigned levels of supervision, either high or standard. These levels are based on the automated risk calculation and certain policy overrides. Priority for field contacts and attention to criminogenic needs is placed on the high supervision parolees.

Figure 2. Monthly Activity Summary by Region (excerpt)

Interaction Activity During SEP-2007

Region	Supv.	Totals	F/F	% of Cases	EV	% of Cases	RV	% of Cases
Central	High	901	855	95%	467	83%	797	88%
	High-Other Status	265	89	34%	--	--	37	14%
	Standard	1,936	1,116	58%	1,124	78%	1,137	59%
	Standard-Other Status	360	88	24%	--	--	29	8%
	Not Determined	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Total	**3,462**	**2,148**	**62%**	**1,591**	**79%**	**2,000**	**58%**
Metro	High	743	682	92%	349	68%	537	72%
	High-Other Status	295	57	19%	--	--	17	6%
	Standard	2,088	711	34%	997	62%	679	33%
	Standard-Other Status	439	66	15%	--	--	11	3%
	Not Determined	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Total	**3,565**	**1,516**	**43%**	**1,346**	**63%**	**1,244**	**35%**
Northeast	High	836	772	92%	407	73%	675	81%
	High-Other Status	200	58	29%	--	--	14	7%
	Standard	1,724	1,054	61%	848	67%	918	53%
	Standard-Other Status	317	76	24%	--	--	13	4%
	Not Determined	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Total	**3,077**	**1,960**	**64%**	**1,255**	**69%**	**1,620**	**53%**

The MAS is the Field Division's most important report for displaying both lead and lag measures. However, data by itself can be difficult to interpret without a context. Two additional reports present the completion rate in powerful contexts: ranked lists of offenders' completion rates by parole office and by parole officer.

Because everyone in the agency can see these reports, they have generated a tremendous amount of discussion about the range of completion rates across districts, which is typically 50% to 90%. These reports are valuable tools for generating questions about why the differences exist and what can be done to improve the rates, especially in the district offices with the lower completion rates. Figure 3 provides a sample from the report on parole completions by office.

Figure 3. Comparison of Parole Completion Rates by Office (excerpt)

Parole Completion Rates by Office from Highest to Lowest

	Year to Date Summary 01-JAN-06 to 30-SEP-07				Six Month Rolling Summary 01-MAY-07 thru 31-OCT-07		
District Name	**Comp %**	**Parole Ends Comp #**	**Rev #**	**District Name**	**Comp %**	**Parole Ends Comp #**	**Rev #**
1. Conyers	81.61	253	57	Jefferson	92.06	58	5
2. Dekalb Parole Center	80.27	826	203	Conyers	87.13	88	13
3. North Fulton	79.85	440	111	Dekalb Parole Center	83.21	233	47
4. Jonesboro	79.26	535	140	Athens	82.72	67	14
5. Griffin	79.03	603	160	North Fulton	82.05	128	28
6. Lawrenceville	78.18	387	108	Griffin	80.47	173	42
7. Jefferson	78.03	174	49	Jonesboro	79.62	125	32
8. Clarkesville	76.42	175	54	Canton	78.89	71	19
9. Marietta	75.8	595	190	Thomaston	77.68	87	25
10. Ellijay	75	165	55	Marietta	76.85	166	50
11. Gainesville	74.87	292	98	Clarkesville	76.32	58	18
12. Canton	74.78	258	87	Ellijay	76.27	45	14
13. Brunswick	74.57	173	59	Brunswick	75.76	50	16
14. South Metro Parole Center	74.02	678	238	Lawrenceville	75.16	115	38
15. Adairsville	73.77	346	123	Lyons	74.76	77	26
16. Douglasville	73.71	342	122	South Metro Parole Center	73.73	188	67
17. Athens	73.66	193	69	Douglasville	73.55	89	32
18. Monroe	72.29	287	110	Monroe	73.33	88	32
19. Savannah	72.06	655	254	Hartwell	73.26	63	23
20. Thomson	71.65	91	36	Savannah	72.59	196	74
21. Columbus	69.43	411	181	Gainesville	72.28	73	28
22. Rome	68.8	344	156	Carrollton	72	90	35
23. Americus	67.86	114	54	Dalton	72	90	35
24. Carrollton	67.35	229	111	Statesboro	70.19	73	31
25. Macon	66.21	290	148	Adairsville	70	91	39
26. Hartwell	66.14	168	86	Louisville	68.97	40	18
27. Lagrange	65.55	312	164	Thomson	67.92	36	17
28. Cuthbert	65.43	53	28	Macon	67.8	80	38
29. Dublin	65.27	218	116	Rome	67.07	112	55
30. Dalton	65.26	248	132	Jesup	66.29	59	30

Several STATS reports have further clarified the causal linkage between parole officer activity and improved outcomes over time. While the MAS shows performance at one point in time, information displayed in line graphs can be used to show and compare information over time. For example, the sample report in Figure 4 shows the completion rate for one district over 19 months compared with the regional and state completion rates. The longitudinal report is available at the state, region, district, and parole officer levels.

Figure 4. Sample Longitudinal Report of Parole Completion by District
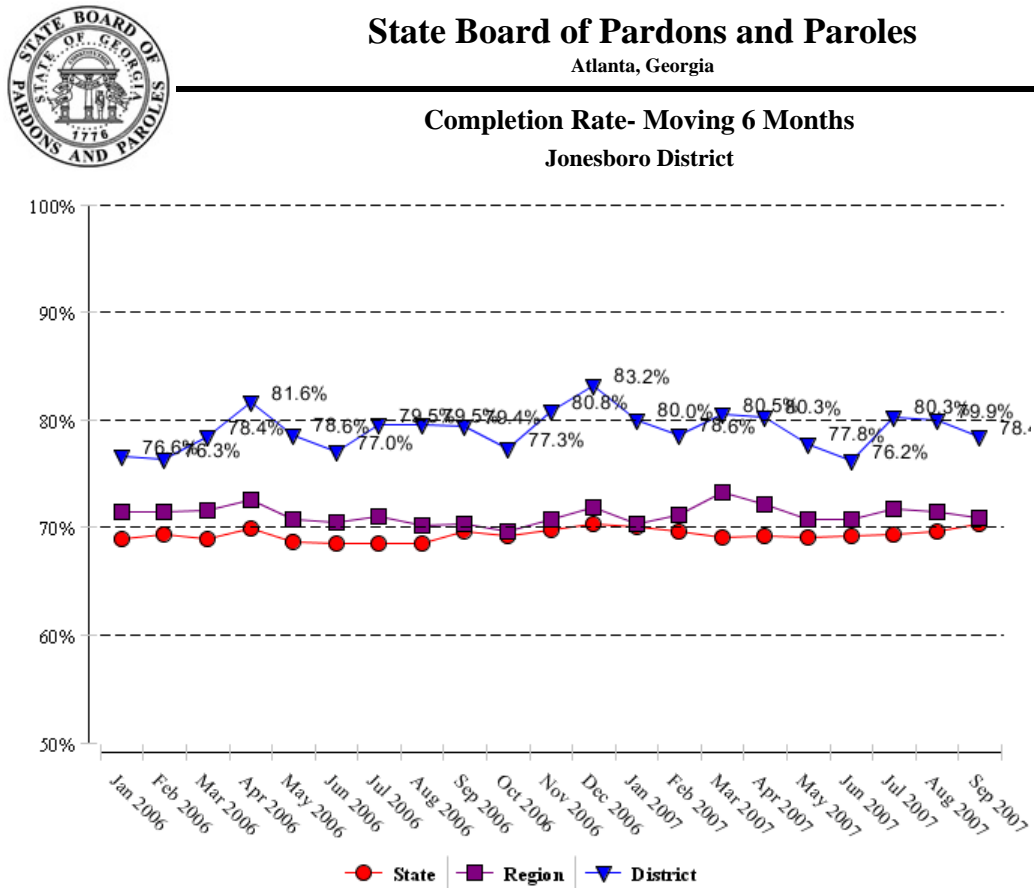
Performance Leadership: Speak Mission and What Works Language at Every Opportunity

As leaders do in successful businesses, leaders in effective public organizations first identify their mission and goals, then develop plans to move the organization toward those goals. Georgia's parole leadership has clearly identified its mission and the research-based lead and lag measures that drive performance and quantify success.

However, one additional factor is required to achieve and sustain success. In business and in government, appropriate measures must be accompanied by organizational leadership that clearly and consistently articulates the mission and the causal link between day-to-day activities and the mission. Georgia Parole's central office and regional managers have invested significant time and energy in helping local chief parole officers and their staff understand this linkage. The Field Division Director spends considerable time at parole offices reviewing the MAS and other reports and discussing each measure and its causal linkage to parole completion. His consistent message, combined with the hands-on data, has resulted in both improved lead measures and higher completion rates.

Performance leadership is reshaping the focus of the parole officer's daily activities. Officers are not only conducting basic residence and employment contacts but also giving more attention to possible drug use and sustained participation in programs. Participation in and successful completion of substance abuse, mental health, and cognitive skills programs are reported on the MAS. Many parole districts conduct orientation sessions, inviting not only new parolees but their families as well, to establish a team approach to success. Parole officers view themselves as advocates and service brokers for offenders who have unmet criminogenic needs, which officers increasingly understand to be associated with the chances of successfully completing parole.

In their book, *The Three Pillars of Public Management: Secrets of Sustained Success*, Ole Ingstrup and Paul Crookall note, "The most demanding task is making the mission part of the overall corporate life. It must become the department's way of thinking, behaving, and relating to issues and opportunities… All initiatives should be proposed and explained in terms of the mission."[5]

The Field Division Director's scope of responsibility includes 50 parole offices, almost 500 staff, and approximately 21,000 parolees located in 159 counties. Focus on the core business is modeled every month during the Regional Directors meeting in reviews of the MAS and STATS reports; the data are discussed in a similar way to how the Division Director's parole office visits are conducted. Managers are expected to consistently speak "mission language"—the Regional Director with her or his Chief Parole Officers, and they in turn with their staff. These discussions reinforce the importance of the causal linkage between the lead measures for reducing risk and increasing successful parole completions. Annual meetings of the Parole Board's field managers include recognition by the Field Division Director of the 10 offices with the highest annual parole completion rates.

One result of this sustained focus is a new initiative called Parole Success Advisory Teams, launched in August 2007. Rather than being imposed by upper management, the advisory teams represent a bottom-up approach by line

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5. Ole Ingstrup and Paul Crookall, *The Three Pillars of Public Management: Secrets of Sustained Success* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998, 45.

managers and parole officers to assist and learn from each other to reduce risk and improve outcomes. The teams will harness the collective experience of field managers to assess and share offender supervision strategies, interpret STATS data to improve parole officer and caseload management, compare office cultures and practices, make recommendations to improve programs, and conduct other activities while monitoring how changes affect risk and parole completion. Interaction and assistance can range from one chief parole officer discussing strategies with another chief parole officer to a thorough review of every aspect of supervision activity, manager supervision of staff, and office culture.

The formation of these teams further demonstrates that performance leadership is making a difference in Georgia Parole. Performance leadership and its emphasis on the causal linkage between parole officer activity and completion rates is not only prompting collective questions among field staff on why completion rates differ, but it also encourages a learning environment for sharing ideas on how to improve completion rates across the diverse conditions that exist in Georgia.

The Parole Board's performance-based leadership has created a clear mission and vision for the agency and defined the most pertinent objectives, work activities, and metrics for accomplishing the mission. The lead and lag measures are being used in an organizational environment that encourages learning to improve success by collaboratively involving staff. The management team recognizes that these metrics and work activities evolved over several years only through a healthy and open learning environment.

TPCI: How to Do What Works

TPCI is helping Georgia's criminal justice system identify and articulate its goals and focus its work on coordinating the processes that best achieve those goals, within and across agencies. New demonstration projects and revamped work processes are being implemented as offenders enter the system and pertinent risk information accompanies them to sentence completion. By focusing on offender data, the Georgia Parole Board is contributing to the adoption of risk management strategies that are most likely to lead to successful parole completions.

As more actuarial data becomes available about specific offender needs and the interventions offered to address them, the lead measures illustrated here will be modified. The critical point is that, just as business success relies on performance-based leaders who effectively communicate relevant, timely, and accurate data, the corrections field is benefiting from performance leadership and offender intervention strategies that apply a business-like, data-driven model for success. ♦

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For additional information, see National Institute of Corrections publications on effective correctional management (e.g., http://nicic.org/Library/021041) and implementing evidence-based practices (e.g., http://www.nicic.org/Library/019342).