Evaluating Improving Practice

The Probation Dashboard; linking contact journals, case management and professional development

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It is often assumed that 'evaluation' is about judging or assessing a particular piece of practice or intervention, for example after an initial pilot stage to determine whether to continue, or at the end of a programme of work to determine the impact on client behaviour and recidivism. What may be considered less frequently is the importance of integrating evaluation within the ongoing process of offender supervision, or indeed any form of supervision or therapeutic work with people. It is common in pre-qualifying training programmes for students to be required to reflect on their practice as it develops, to be aware of ways in which they could have worked differently, and to be open to supervision and scrutiny by their supervisor or trainer. This could be described as a case-based qualitative approach to learning and evaluation. Once qualified it is less likely that this will be a requirement of ongoing practice and more likely that the practitioner will be asked to submit 'returns' or statistics on the 'outcomes' of their work with clients, from which judgments are formed about the meeting of overall, quantitative agency aims, objectives and targets.

In the Netherlands, Bas Vogelvang, Professor of Probation, Parole and Safety Policy at Avans University has, together with colleagues, developed a blueprint of an application that can be used by practitioners in a wide range of settings, to simultaneously record their work and to collate data that can be used to evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of their day to day practice with offenders. This application has been named 'Dashboard', in recognition of the advantages of having key information instantly available to the worker on a mobile phone, notebook or laptop as a compass, to guide both their future practice and ongoing professionalization. The application has been designed to offer both the facility to track the progress of the offender and to monitor and evaluate the interventions of the worker. This article offers an overview of the key features of Dashboard with the suggestion that it can provide practitioners with the means to take ownership of, and responsibility for, the development of their own professional practice.

DASHBOARD

Dashboard has been constructed with reference to some of the current models of an evaluative process including the ASPIRE model (Sutton and Herbert, 1992) and the Plan-Do-Check-Act, model. Dashboard takes account of each stage of these models, which comprise:

Assessment
Planning
Implementation
Review
Evaluation

The recording of basic information that addresses each of these stages is generally a non-negotiable feature of all probation practice, although the means of doing this, and the amount of detail recorded, will vary considerably between different probation jurisdictions and between individual workers. The developers of Dashboard recognized that workers are frequently under considerable pressure when supervising offenders and may be inclined to prioritise face-to-face contact with offenders over the less rewarding, although important, bureaucratic demands of the job (Vogelvang, 2015). Frequently these bureaucratic demands can overwhelm the worker, and the purpose of these demands may lack clarity or fail to persuade the worker of their value. The developers of Dashboard wanted to design a piece of software that would minimize these demands, as far as possible, and make the data immediately accessible and useful to the worker. In addition, the developers have included the option to upload the factual information concerning the management of the contact of the client with the agency, into the data-base of the agency, to meet the requirements of a target driven culture, including monitoring, management and policy development.

Reflective or subjective data recorded by the worker is designed to be available only to them or their supervisor/trainer if they chose to share it. This is not considered to be performance management information. This allows workers to feel safe enough to record, and reflect on, their good practice and also any mistakes or gaps they might discover in their practice, without fearing reprisals from surveillance by managers, or for potential performance management issues to arise. A worker is unlikely to choose to voluntarily 'expose' any indications of potentially poor or less than good practice, if they fear they may be negatively judged on this honesty, in recording their subjective thoughts and feelings about their practice.

DASHBOARD HAS FOUR SECTIONS:

A: Contact. This relates to the key requirements and elements of the order to which the offender is subject, and the record of all contacts with the service for the duration of that order. The contact records are linked with the different needs that have been identified within the sentence plan and risk assessment, and how they are to be addressed. The person on probation can be given a copy of the information in section A by e-mail or print, including an updated agenda with goals, tasks and agreements, as a reminder to them of the contract to which they are subject.

B: Process. This section records the case-based progress of the working alliance of the worker and the offender, the individual professional functioning of the worker, and the functioning of the worker in the context of his organization and wider professional network.

C: Results. This section records the outcomes of what has been achieved by the worker and the client during the process of the supervision contract.

D: Summaries. This section does not *require* input, but is used by the worker to collate summaries and analyses of the results of their inputs with a number of different clients, what themes have occurred and what interventions they have used. This section allows the worker to consider and reflect on the outcomes of their practice and to plan how they might develop and what training or learning needs they may have.

SECTION A

Section A is the mandatory part of Dashboard, which the worker must complete after every meeting with the client and/or others involved in the supervision process. It is judged this will take between five and ten minutes for every contact.

In Section A1 the worker is asked to input data on the themes during the contact. After selecting the client from the total caseload and filling in the 'usual' required information about date, time, location and the person(s) that have been met, the full screen on the app will look like this:

A1. Contact: thema's

	T	PVA	WP	RISc		T	PVA	WP	RISc
TOEZICHT:									
Geen inhoudelijk thema / meldplicht		●			Rollen / ervaring toezicht			●	
Bijzondere voorwaarden en controlemiddelen	★	●			Inzet hulpbronnen				
Terug-/vooruitblik op doelen en werkpunten			●						
CRIMINOGENE en BESCHERMENDE FACTOREN:									
Delictgeschiedenis					**Vrienden/vrije tijd**	★			
Huidig delict/ delictpatroon / risico's	★		● 9		Drugsgebruik		● 8		D
Huisvesting en wonen		● 4			Alcoholgebruik				
Opleiding / leren / werk / dagbesteding		● 2			**Emotioneel welzijn**	★		●7	D
Inkomen en omgaan met geld	★	● 9		D	Denkpatronen, gedrag, vaardigheden		● 9		D
Relaties met partner/gezin/familie			● 3		Houding / Motivatie		● 9		D
ZORG / AANDACHTSPUNTEN:									
Gezondheid (ziekte / handicap / zwangerschap / medicatie)		● 1			Zaken van belang bij keuze (gedrags-) interventie/behandeling				

The themes during contact have been divided in three parts:

- themes concerning the supervision process itself (top orange section, e.g. the conditions, or goal planning),
- themes concerning risks, needs and protective factors, or factors relating to their offending history and behaviour (blue section, e.g. thinking patterns, or housing), and
- themes that warrant special attention but are not related to (desisting) offending behaviour (lower orange section, e.g. health, pregnancy).

For each theme, information in four adjacent columns can be provided: T, PVA, WP and RISc. After every contact, the worker will only input data in the first T-column: s/he has to select every theme that was a conversation subject during the contact. After selecting a theme, a green star appears and the theme itself is highlighted in bold. The dots in the adjacent columns are highlighted as red when they already are being actively addressed and grey when they have been met and/or are no longer active. The numbers report the times, the number of weeks and the theme that has been active. For example, during the latest contact a conversation with the client's housing and living arrangement needs took place (green star in T); the worker is already actively addressing this with the client as part of the supervision plan (PVA) (red dot) or they have obtained appropriate housing and it is no longer a need within the order (grey dot). The aim here is to record key facts with minimum information using the software. Red dots recorded in column WP identify a new working point for the client that the worker has flagged up and is promoting for attention. The next time the worker goes into the screen it will appear as an active working point. Finished new working points also appear in grey.

In the blue section, the results of the most recent structured risk assessment will automatically appear (RISc). Colours will signal the low, medium or high contribution to the overall risk of reoffending, and D will appear if the factor has been identified as directly linked to recent offending behaviour.

- The first orange section records contact details including information about the duration and nature of the supervision order, the contact between the worker and the client, their family and other relevant people or agencies in their network. In this example the line in bold refers to policies and controls that are required within the order. The green star under the column 'T' indicates that this theme was discussed during the last contact, and the red dot under PVA (supervision plan) indicates that it is in the sentence plan to be worked on.

- The blue section identifies the criminogenic needs or factors relating to their offending history and behaviour, and the line in bold refers to the current offence and pattern of offending. The green star indicates it is recorded and the red dot under the column WP indicates that within this there is a new working point for the offender that needs to be addressed. The second line highlighted in bold in the blue section refers to income and money, which is logged in the supervision plan for intervention. On the right hand side of the matrix there are two other factors identified with green stars: the first one relates to friends and leisure time and is recorded from the assessment plan, and the second one; emotional needs is marked with a red dot in the WP column, which indicates that it is a new working point that the worker has identified since commencing supervision.

- The final orange section identifies issues that might need particular care or caution within the supervisory process, for example the client might have a disability or be on particular medication. The green dot in the PVA column, indicates that this has been noted in the supervision plan.

- Care or health needs including medical requirements, pregnancy, etc. It will also include the key themes of the order including any mandatory aspects set out by the

court. These goals of the order, determined through the risk assessment and sentence planning process will be recorded here.

Moving on to section A2 the worker is asked to report the actions or interventions for every theme that was selected in A1. For example, if three themes were discussed during the contact the A2 screen will appear three times, once for every theme. The worker can quickly flag the used actions in the first adjacent column.

A2. Contact: acties/interventies
Thema: inkomen en omgaan met geld

SIGNALEREN	Uitgevoerd	Naar B. Proces	Reden en verloop interventie?
Small talk / Vinger aan de pols	O	O	
Informatie verkrijgen / navragen / checken / reconstrueren	●	O	
Delictscenario of ander risicoscenario maken / bespreken	O	O	
CONTROLEREN			
Voorwaarden/afspraken bespreken	●	O	
Normeren: gedrag of gedachten ter discussie stellen	O	O	
Corrigeren/aanspreken/confronteren met ongewenst gedrag	●	●	
Formele waarschuwing geven	O	O	
Retour melden	O	O	
EC of locatie gebod-verbod / drugtest / gedragsinterventie of therapie			
STIMULEREN/MOTIVEREN			
Toezichtsplan / werkpunten maken of aanpassen	O	O	
Rollen en taken uitleggen / verhelderen	O	O	
Reflecteren / feedback geven	●	O	
Perspectief schetsen / bieden	O	O	
Aanmoedigen / belonen	O	O	
Motiverende gespreksvoering inzetten	●	●	
Certificeren, formeel afronden, promoveren	O	O	
DRAAGKRACHT VERGROTEN			
Vergroten probleemoplossend vermogen: gedrag trainen, oefenen	O	O	
Vergroten probleemoplossend vermogen: verbeteren denken / emoties	O	O	
Psycho-educatie	O	O	
Begeleiden bij gedragsinterventies	O	O	
DRAAGLAST VERMINDEREN			
Creëren materiële voorwaarden (huisvesting, financiën)	O	O	
Arrangeren / managen van hulp- en dienstverlening / Overleggen	●	O	
DRAAGVLAK VERGROTEN			
Werken met partner en/of kind(eren)	O	O	
Werken met familie en/of vrienden/kennissen	O	O	
Werken met leidinggevende/collega/opleider van cliënt	O	O	
INTENSIEF / OUTREACHEND WERKEN	O	O	

All actions/interventions in A2 are derived from the standard intervention set of the Dutch probation services, under the headings of:

- Signalling – or highlighting the issue to the client
- Control – if there are concerns about risk
- Motivation/stimulation – using motivational methods to help move the client forward or increase their human capital
- Lessening the burden – helping with material needs
- Working with partner, family or people in their network
- Talking with them about drug use and the particular aspects of this might be, for example:

  o Asking for information about drug use
  o Confronting the clients with the drug using behaviour and its consequences
  o Checking reasons for drug use and giving feedback

- Using motivational skills to help the client think about change
- Contact with the drug agency if the client has missed an appointment and seeking help in enabling him/her to keep the next appointment

In the second adjacent column, the worker can flag any intervention during the last contact that he thinks needs attention in section B, because the particular intervention highlighted went well, or did not go well. This column allows the worker to flag up a 'professional point' if they reflect there was something about how they intervened, or about their particular practice, that needs attention. These professional points are for the benefit of the worker, to enable them to gain an overview of how well they are functioning with this particular client and across a range of clients.

Information recorded in part A is generated automatically into the appropriate columns for the worker to see on subsequent occasions. The worker can then use this information to input data into sections B and C less frequently but as appropriate.

SECTION B

In Section B1 the worker records information about the quality of the working alliance between themselves and the client. This may only need to be updated every three or four weeks depending on how things are progressing in this relationship. This might cover issues such as; the building of trust, joint working towards agreed goals, focusing on agreed tasks, covering the mandated elements of the order and whether the nature of the relationship is facilitating this work being carried out. The quality of these elements would be indicated by a green dot to show it is fine, yellow if it needs attention, and red to indicate there are particular difficulties that need addressing. Again, the final column allows the worker to flag up a 'professional point' if they reflect there is something in the working alliance with this client that needs professional attention.

In B2, the quality of the worker's actions and interventions is addressed with a reference to the particular client. The number of all actions/interventions during all contacts is shown in the grey column (with an information screen showing the particular supervision goals or working points connected to the intervention). The worker is asked to judge the quality of all used actions/interventions as 'good', 'needs attention' or 'critical', and, to the far right, is again given the opportunity to flag a 'professional point'.

B2. Proces: methodisch handelen

SIGNALEREN	Melding contacten	Gaat goed / succes	Vereist aandacht	Knelpunt	Professie-punt
Small talk / Vinger aan de pols	O	●	O	O	O
Informatie verkrijgen / navragen / checken / reconstrueren	✓✓	●	O	O	✓
Delictscenario of ander risicoscenario maken / bespreken	O	●	O	O	O
CONTROLEREN					
Voorwaarden/afspraken bespreken	O	O	O	O	O
Normeren: gedrag of gedachten ter discussie stellen	✓	●	O	O	O
Corrigeren/aanspreken/confronteren met ongewenst	✓✓✓	O	●	O	✓
Formele waarschuwing geven	O	O	O	O	O
Retour melden	O	O	O	O	O
EC of locatie gebod-verbod / drugtest / gedragsint	✓	●	O	O	O
STIMULEREN/MOTIVEREN					
Toezichtsplan / werkpunten maken of aanpassen	✓	●	O	O	O
Rollen en taken uitleggen / verhelderen	O	O	●	O	O
Reflecteren / feedback geven	O	O	O	O	O
Perspectief schetsen / bieden	O	O	O	O	O
Aanmoedigen / belonen	O	O	O	O	O
Motiverende gespreksvoering inzetten	✓✓	O	●	O	O
Certificeren, formeel afronden, promoveren	O	O	O	O	O
DRAAGKRACHT VERGROTEN					
Vergroten probleemoplossend vermogen: gedrag trainen, oefenen	O	O	O	O	O
Vergroten probleemoplossend vermogen: verbeteren denken / emoties	O	O	O	O	O
Psycho-educatie	✓	●	O	O	O
Begeleiden bij gedragsinterventies	O	O	O	O	O
DRAAGLAST VERMINDEREN					
Creëren materiële voorwaarden (huisvesting, financiën)	O	O	O	O	O
Arrangeren / managen van hulp- en dienstverlening / Overleggen	✓	O	O	●	✓
DRAAGVLAK VERGROTEN					
Werken met partner en/of kind(eren)	O	O	O	O	O
Werken met familie en/of vrienden/kennissen	O	O	O	O	O
Werken met leidinggevende/collega/opleider van cliënt	✓	O	●	O	✓
INTENSIEF / OUTREACHEND WERKEN	O	O	O	O	O

Infoscherm: laat zien bij welke thema's / doelen / werkpunten

Finally, in B3, and again related to this particular client, the same system as under B2 is used to ask the worker to judge his/her own functioning (e.g. energy level, balanced relationship building, agency, stress), his/her functioning in the professional network (e.g. the network being complete, other parties being active), and his/her function within the probation organization (e.g. possibilities to prioritize, procedural issues, team support).

SECTION C

Section C identifies the results of the supervision process for a given (adjustable) period, and will keep a tally for the worker of how many occasions they will have worked with the client on a particular theme for the duration of the order and how many times within the last three months. Section C has two component parts; the first relates to the development of the client, their working relationship, how motivated they have been, how well they have reached the goals set, and whether they have met the conditions of the order. Section two looks at the criminogenic and protective factors of the order; whether they have improved or not.

C. Resultaten

Periode: van ---- / ---- / ----- tot ---- / ---- / -----
(---- weken). Start toezicht: ---- / ---- / ----- (--- weken)

	PVA / WP	Gaat goed / succes	Vereist aandacht	Knelpunt	Professie-punt
C1. Ontwikkeling bij de cliënt: samenwerken					
Meldplicht	WP 3/6	○	● (geel)	○	○
Voorwaarden en afspraken	PVA 8/22	● (groen)	○	○	✔
Terug-/vooruitblikken / doelen/werkpunten	PVA 3/6	○	○	○	○
Rolverheldering / ervaring toezicht	WP 2/4	○	○	● (rood)	✔
Inzet hulpbronnen	-	○	○	○	○
Motivatie:		○	○	○	○
Gevoel dat verandering no...		● (groen)	○	○	○
Overgave aan verandering...		● (groen)	○	○	○
Veranderbewustzijn		● (groen)	○	○	○
Confrontatie met problemen		○	● (geel)	○	○
Inspanning en wil tot veranderen		● (groen)	○	○	○
Hoop op verandering		● (groen)	○	○	○
Steun in het netwerk		○	○	● (rood)	✔

> Aantal keren dat werkpunt in contacten in periode en in totaal aan de orde is geweest

	Risc	PVA / WP	Gaat goed / succes	Vereist aandacht	Knelpunt	Professie-punt
C2. Ontwikkeling bij de cliënt: thema's						
Delictgeschiedenis		PVA 7/23	● (groen)	○	○	○
Huidig delict/ delictpatroon / risico's		PVA 2/11	● (groen)	○	○	✔
Huisvesting en wonen	(groen)	WP 2/5	○	● (geel)	○	○
Opleiding/leren en werk/dagbesteding		-	○	○	○	○
Inkomen en omgaan met geld	(rood)	PVA 12/31	○	○	● (rood)	✔
Relaties met partner/gezin/familie	(groen)	-	○	○	○	○
Relaties met vrienden/vrije tijd		-	○	○	○	○
Drugsgebruik	D	-	○	● (geel)	○	✔
Alcoholgebruik	(groen)	-	○	○	○	○
Emotioneel welzijn	D (rood)	-	○	○	○	○
Denkpatronen, gedrag, vaardigheden	D	PVA 3/5	● (groen)	○	○	○
Houding		WP 4/6	○	○	○	○
Gezondheid		WP 2 /4	○	○	○	○
Certificaat gedragsinterventie		PVA 2/ 11	○	● (geel)	○	○

DISCUSSION

There are two broad purposes of evaluation, the first is evaluation designed to inform the development of a piece of work, the results of which are primarily for internal use, this is often referred to as formative evaluation. The second is evaluation designed to inform an external audience about the worth or value of a project, sometimes for accountability reasons, or to support an application for funding and to add to the body of knowledge about effective ways of working with offenders, referred to as summative evaluation (Merrington and Hine, 2001). Dashboard clearly falls within the formative evaluation purpose, with the principle focus being to improve and develop the individual practice of the worker, whilst also meeting the data requirements of the agency. Within this broad heading evaluation can be process, impact or outcome related (Merrington and Hine, 2001). Dashboard has the potential to meet the criteria for process evaluation in particular, although some of the data recorded will assist with impact evaluation in terms of the worker's perceptions of impact and the views gained from the client. It also incorporates information about future offending by integrating the results of a structural risk analysis in section A.

Vogelvang argues that the core skills for good probation practice should include the notion of 'individual professional functioning', which includes the capacity for self-awareness, emotional literacy (Knight, 2014), and systematic reflection on personal values and their implications for practice (Vogelvang, 2015). He cites the work of Krober and Van Dongen (Krober and Van Dongen, 2011) on the skills required to enhance the notion of a support paradigm in which probation organization is viewed not as a machine but as a series of networks that design and establish supervision processes. Part of this support paradigm is the

skills required for team-based professional reflection and the giving of constructive feedback to fellow workers (Vogelvang, 2015). The Dashboard model of providing data relevant for this form of reflection and feedback can clearly be used for this process, for building staff as 'professional learners', and towards what he calls 'professional maturity', as opposed to workers in a 'product' or 'assembly line' perspective on practice.

Reflective practice is now viewed as a foundation for a wide range of professional practice, not just as part of initial training (Thompson and Thompson, 2008). Ideas around reflective practice were initially developed by Schon who was interested in how practitioners across a range of disciplines developed their knowledge base and used this knowledge in practice (Schon, 2003). The ability to step back and view your own behaviour, and the thinking and feeling that accompanies it, is a critical skill in learning and being able to incorporate feedback and self-evaluation. It is acknowledged that the context of ever increasing workloads and bureaucratic demands on practitioners can inhibit the time, and mental and emotional space necessary to allow for such reflection. Workers are generally encouraged to make their practice 'evidence-based', i.e. informed by the best available evidence on 'what works' in similar situations. However, in complex human situations, what may work best for one person may not be appropriate for another, or not at that particular time in their lives. A reflective practitioner will be aware of the need to weigh up alternatives, take into account emotional needs, and consider the current internal and external resources available to the client that may help or hinder change. There are no simple answers to many of these questions. However, a worker who has at their finger tips information about the range of interventions they have deployed with a particular client or across a number of clients, how and when it was used, and the quality of the relationship with that person, will be able to trace patterns and interventions most likely to be effective. This could enable them to make adjustments where appropriate, or seek out further training and development in areas where it is apparent they are not being as effective.

Reflective practice requires a degree of self-awareness, and a willingness to be open to critical feedback on potential mistakes or errors in practice. A defensive stance can block learning, although in order to learn practitioners also need to feel valued and supported by their agency. Workers at the sharp end of, for example, child protection, and in secure forensic settings, need to be able to examine their own values, prejudices, expectations, and assumptions if they are to engage openly and honestly with clients in distress and who may be a risk to themselves or others (Mackie, 2009). As identified by the STREAM project on evaluation [1] there are great advantages to taking an integrated evaluative approach to work with people under supervision in the community.

CONCLUSION

This article has provided an overview of a new case-based qualitative approach to learning and evaluation for probation staff. It provides practitioners with a tool for developing and evaluating their own practice and for sharing their learning with others. Whilst it may initially appear to be very detailed, once the broad principles are understood, the software is user friendly and has the advantage of being accessible from both a mobile phone and a computer. The busy professional worker will be able to input data at a time and place most convenient to them, and access information and evaluative data when it is needed. The application allows for an easy way of uploading the core data required by their agency to meet

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[1] http://www.stream-probation.eu/default.asp?page_id=150

its monitoring requirements and an opportunity to share their qualitative practice skills with colleagues and learn from others.

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