



THREE GENERATIONS OF EVALUATION AND DESIGN OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

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DESIGN ISSUE

The goal of this article was to describe and evaluate how direct supervision evolved over three generations of corrections facilities, and to demonstrate the enabling role of post-occupancy evaluations (POE) in the evolution of jail design.

BACKGROUND

The first generation of direct supervision correctional facilities consisted of the metropolitan correction centers (MCCs) in Chicago and New York, built in the 1970s. These facilities were designed with the intent to provide a functional unit that facilitated a non-stressful environment that would facilitate supervision by correctional officers stationed within the housing unit (as opposed to located in secure control rooms or on the other side of a wall of bars). The result, so-called “podular” layouts, was in complete contrast to the linear design of traditional jails. Each unit or “pod” contained 40-50 single sleeping rooms, each furnished with a bed, toilet, sink, desk, and outside window. The sleeping rooms were arrayed around a common dayroom which was carpeted, brightly painted, and had comfortable, movable furniture.

Post-occupancy evaluations carried out at these two facilities revealed the following environmental factors:

- 1) Pod design allowed the staff to circulate among the prisoners watching, interacting, and supervising.
- 2) With the common areas providing adequate opportunity for social interaction and the individual cells catering to privacy, stress, hostility, and confrontation decreased. The ability to control lighting and air flow increased comfort and a sense of being in control. Overall, these strategies helped lessen vandalism.
- 3) The Chicago MCC had more televisions per unit as compared to the New York MCC. Less conflict over access to TV and preferred channels was observed in the former facility.
- 4) The MCC model provided an environment which motivated both staff and inmates to conform to expectations of civilized behavior.
- 5) High-rise facilities resulted in too much dependence on elevators and reduction of floor space, posing management challenges.



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- 6) Data suggested a need for inmates to have the opportunity to go out. The functional unit concept had eliminated the necessity to go out of a housing unit.
- 7) Staff working conditions needed more attention.
- 8) Non-institutional environment worked well.

Although these evaluations resulted in a number of recommendations for the design of future facilities, the pods were generally considered to be very well suited to the federal prisons, or for detention facilities, but not for county prisoners, where security would overrule the concept of an open facility.

The second generation direct supervision correctional facilities were inspired by the federal MCC model. The first of these was the Contra Costa County Detention Facility (CCCDF) in Martinez, California. The CCCDF design team visited the Chicago MCC and received input from the staff before and during the construction.

Many of the positive and negative lessons learned from the MCC model were incorporated into the CCCDF project including, among others: (1) outdoor decentralized recreational areas were provided; (2) a variety of spaces were created for different uses; (3) building height were limited to four floors; (4) stairwell were designed for inmate movement; (5) carpets were used in most areas; (6) visiting rooms were designed to enable both contact and non-contact visits; (7) each pod in CCCDF contained two tiers of inmate rooms, with capacity varying between 30 to 50 beds; (8) each room had a sink, toilet, bed, desk, chair, and storage area; and (9) four television sets were provided in each housing module. The shared amenities of TV areas, kitchenettes, phone areas, and staff station were all located on the lower level, while the upper level housed ping-pong tables, weight machines, and TVs. On occupancy the CCCDF was evaluated to inform the next generation of correctional facilities.

RESEARCH METHOD

A post-occupancy evaluation of CCCDF was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the design and to create a resource for the design of future facilities (the third generation). Questionnaires were designed and administered to staff and the inmates. Architects, project managers, supervisory and line custody staff, medical staff, program staff, and support staff were interviewed on the impact of the building's design on their work. 160 inmates and 109 staff members participated in the evaluation.

FINDINGS

The evaluations revealed the following:



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- 1) Staff expressed satisfaction with the overall appearance and cleanliness of the facility, provision of privacy in inmate toilets, showers, sleeping rooms, and visiting area, the number of TVs, dining space, and the lack of sexual assaults.
- 2) Inmates expressed satisfaction with the number and availability of toilets and showers, the individual sleeping rooms, overall appearance and cleanliness of the facility, the lack of vandalism and sexual assaults, amount of privacy and space, and overall safety.
- 3) Staff expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions of overcrowding in the facility, the need to individually control temperature and air flow, and the lack of a secure perimeter around the building. They also had concerns about the lack of facilities for staff, like locker rooms, weight rooms, lounges or dining areas, as well as inadequate work stations.
- 4) Inmates expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of radios and the inability to control temperature.
- 5) Mutual respect between the staff and the inmates increased. Staff began to see the provision of phones, TVs, recreation opportunities, etc., as management tools. As opposed to the earlier negative perspective of jail duty, correctional officers began to enjoy the challenge of their CCCDF assignments.

The findings of the post-occupancy evaluation of CCCDF demonstrated the successful implementation of the federal model in a county context. The podular, direct supervision model was seen to be effective in reducing violence, aggression, vandalism, and graffiti; and in improving cleanliness. Overall, it revealed a positive perception of the direct supervision model.

Based on the POE, the following recommendations were made for third generation correctional facilities:

- 1) Modify design to address noise from TV and telephones, to provide a secure perimeter, and to provide better control of temperature and air flow.
- 2) Address administrative and medical space needs.
- 3) Segregate mentally ill prisoners from the general population.
- 4) Segregate high-risk prisoners; locate their windows facing an interior courtyard with no visual access to the public.
- 5) Provide for handicapped inmates (this was pre-ADA).
- 6) Use different interior colors.
- 7) Provide a multipurpose area for religious, educational, and counseling activities.
- 8) The visitors' area should be finished with softer materials and should be visually accessible by staff.
- 9) Design exercise yards to keep contraband out; cover them so they are usable during rain.
- 10) Bulletin boards in the lobby should not be placed behind chairs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN PRACTICE



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For design teams embarking on a new or renovation courthouse project, consider the following:

- 1) This paper demonstrates an example where structured examination and mapping of environment-behavior research findings from one project to another results in a number of positive outcomes: (a) continuous systematic refinement of design, (b) ability for engagement and participation of a larger team, (c) buy-in from stakeholders, and (d) justification of design and operational decisions. These, in turn, resulted in a continuous innovation loop catering to the needs of all stakeholders in the correctional facility.
- 2) A broader application of the research model (evaluation of the interaction between design and operational decisions, capturing evaluation information in meaningful representations, and feeding-forward such knowledge to future procurement cycles) would make significant contributions to the design industry.
- 3) The findings and design recommendations made in this paper (not repeated here) may produce positive results in your facility.

LIMITATIONS

Owing to limitations to the research methods, reported elsewhere (methodological issues discussed by Zimring and Wener in the same issue as this article), the authors were concerned about ascribing the observed outcomes to particular environmental features. However, the successful application of the direct supervision concept over two generations of correctional facilities, and the repeated observation of negative outcomes when study-based recommendations were not applied, provide confidence in the role of environmental features in the observed outcomes (both positive and negative).

ADAPTED FROM

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