

Development for Managers in the Prison Service

Jean Hutton describes the involvement of the Grubb Institute in development training for senior managers on the theme of 'Being a Manager' during the period 1997-2000

The Institute's approach to training starts with identifying the distinctiveness of being a manager in a particular kind of institution. For example, in schools teachers engage in careful planning and service delivery for the development of young people. In hospitals doctors and nurses develop their knowledge of illness so as to heal people in delivering a health service. These institutions pose many problems but the process is developed for the well being of the child and the patient in a caring and humanising environment. The distinctiveness of being a manager in the Prison Service is that prisons administer the severest sanctions of the law, and in their work of understanding criminal behaviour, this is a specific factor which has to be addressed. My colleague Bruce Reed has pointed out that, while individual criminals have their own reasons for committing a felony, in the wider context of society the very existence of crime has no logical explanation - it is irrational.

dehumanisation. The challenge which therefore faces managers in the prison service is how to manage an institution that has to employ dehumanising procedures to try to cope with irrational behaviour. If this is not taken fully into account as managers plan or respond to situations in the daily life of the prison, they are in danger of exacerbating the dehumanising process, consciously or unconsciously. The values which inform the way managers manage in prison are vital to their success, and a key value in their practice is justice. Training therefore involves developing the ability to deliver efficient regimes so that prison, despite irrationalities and dehumanising, can become an institution of justice. The purpose of the prison service clearly states this when it speaks of the duty of keeping people in custody and at the same time maintaining values of justice and humanity. In designing training for managers in the prison service, our starting point is to consider how to take up the role of a manager in this sort of

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Values in practice

Society's 'rational' response to controlling this irrational behaviour is to lock criminals up, deprive them of their freedom and put them under constant surveillance. This is of its nature a process of

situation. In speaking of roles we refer to the way a manager relates themselves and their capacities to achieving the purpose of a system from their position within it. It is about what it means to be a manager, which is greater than doing a series of management activities. Managers need all kinds of knowledge, information and skills to help them, but if they cannot find the appropriate way to take up the role because they cannot understand the system they are managing, they are in difficulty. Each prison has its own characteristics but shares with all prisons the factors of irrationality and dehumanisation mentioned above. In this context, to help managers to develop their understanding and behaviour in their roles, the Institute's approach is to invite participants in our courses to focus on their own working experience, so that they stay in touch with the realities of their establishment and their working roles.

Conceptual frameworks

This includes the reality of their own experiences of irrationality and injustice as well as other more



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positive experiences. The training itself has to be able to contain these experiences so they can be worked with creatively. This is a learning model rather than a teaching model in that it puts the emphasis on participants sharing their experience and knowledge and learning to analyse it. As they work with colleagues they develop insights into themselves as managers, finding new significance in the work of prisons in society, as well as coping with the realities of budget management and political imperatives. The Institute has developed a series of conceptual frameworks on which the course design is based, which work on the boundary between subjective feelings and experience, and objective action and behaviour in carrying out the aim of the course member's institution. Under the general theme of 'Being a Manager', different events over a period of five days bring alive aspects of each manager's total working experience, viewed from the different perspectives of person, system, role, culture and context. In the session on 'Behaving Personally', a participant explores his or her personal behaviour and self-management at work. In 'Defining the Culture', the aim is to identify the values, assumptions, ethos and behaviours experienced while holding prisoners in custody, and how this culture is influencing the organisation, management and leadership of their establishment. In 'Achieving the Purpose' participants work at the purpose of their establishment, and how they are contributing to it as a manager in the context of the stated aims of the Prison Service. In 'Working in Role' participants explore the way they behave in

their roles so that they can contribute to the purpose of the prison, get in touch with the prisoners' experiences, and understand what is going on in the system. Through working at current critical situations they are facing, they develop their capacity to handle complex organisational situations in new ways. The evaluation of these courses shows that they help participants to work with their experience and to get in touch with the core process of prisons. Members repeatedly confirm that it has opened up new possibilities for them that the institution and its culture itself can be changed. One of the options for wider development of this kind of training would be that it could be shared with other criminal justice agencies.

Jean Hutton is Development Manager of the Grubb Institute. The Grubb Institute has been involved with the work of prison governors and other senior members of the Prison Service in a variety of ways since the 1960s.

Reference

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