

Ways to Achieve Greater Staff Participation*

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THERE WOULD APPEAR to be a formula for achieving greater staff participation. Firstly, one defines the areas in which greater participation is required. Next, one defines the task required to be undertaken in those areas. Step three is to assess the skills and techniques required to fulfil these tasks. The fourth step is to prepare the staff by training related to the skills and techniques required, and finally to introduce them to the new task.

At first, staff will appear to try hard but produce rather poor results, however, with patience, support and encouragement, their performance will gradually improve. Part of the support required can be provided by extra-mural training, perhaps in the evening or in staff's own time. After a year to 18 months practical experience in the new task it will probably be necessary to give staff the opportunity of further in-service training.

However, the task is not quite as

simple as that, and it is necessary to look at the whole situation.

From reading prison history and studying the introduction of legislation, it appears to me that in the main the Prison Service, like Topsy, "just grew". Since the rationalisation of prisons which took place in the 19th century, growth has been the consequence of three main features, legislation, changing prison population, and "bright" ideas. Changes in the structure of society too have had some bearing on the growth. The affluent society and the new technological age have brought pressures to bear which have produced new patterns of social behaviour. The work of the courts has increased and the prison population has steadily grown. To attempt to meet the demands made on it, the department has had to provide and staff many new detention centres, prisons, borstals and remand centres. The department has grown in size and the tasks it has been required to fulfil have become varied, resulting in great complexity. These changes have come about

*This article is based on a paper read to a conference for assistant governors held in the South-East Region in early 1967.

whilst the staff have been working under tremendous pressure and the result would appear to have produced confusion amongst staff at all levels.

"Organisation", "management" and "role" are relatively new concepts for the service. Until quite recently and probably quite widely even today, the words which tend to be used instead are "regime", "hierarchy" and "post". These are a legacy of the foundations laid by Du Cane. These foundations, personified by the prisons built in the 19th century, seem permanent and immovable. In the 19th century, and until as late as 1921, the uniformed officer was referred to as a warder. (One who guards or keeps; one in charge of prisoners in a gaol.) Today the national Press continues to maintain this image by persistent recourse to the term in news items. One reason for this may be that although the label was changed to prison officer in 1921, the formal role altered little. Since the 1948 Criminal Justice Act, however, the diversity of the demands made on the basic grade officer and the rest of the staff have progressively increased. The label "governor" may well have been appropriate for the original role, but it has implications which seem to convey a restrictiveness which could be inappropriate. Progressively the role is becoming more and more managerial in its proper sense.

The functions of a manager are—

- (a) to structure the work situation so as to ensure that a

given task is carried out efficiently and effectively;

- (b) once the situation is organised, to supervise the staff to ensure that efficient and effective operation is maintained; and
- (c) to carry out constant evaluation and make adjustments where necessary.

One of the skills of the manager is to delegate areas of management, supervision and evaluation to those subordinate in the line management. Every manager has other demands made on him which require his individual attention, i.e. confidential report writing, acting as chairman at board meetings, dealing with correspondence, and being responsible to higher management. Every manager has at least one person to whom he is responsible and often more, which can be a source of conflict. It appears from all this that managers have to fulfil two demands made on them:

- (a) to organise work and see that people do it; and
- (b) to carry out certain individual functions.

Where then does the uniformed officer fit into this pattern?

In the demands made on members of the uniformed staff, one can identify certain areas where they carry out certain managerial functions. At times these involve other staff and prisoners and at times they involve only prisoners. One can think of the principal officer

i/c court duties, the officer with a working party, and the officer with a prisoner counselling group. The degree of managerial responsibility may be limited but the function remains.

The changing role of the prison officer has been a point of discussion for some time now. It tends to be looked on as something new which needs to be implemented. I would venture to suggest that the change has been going on for many years and that what is really needed is recognition of the evolving role of the prison officer. Once we are prepared to recognise this then perhaps we can help in the evolution. Change does not take place in a vacuum, however, and any recognised change in the formal role, "basic grade prison officer", will have repercussions throughout the department and will necessitate adjustment and change to other roles.

If we intend to implement changes that will effect the formal role of the prison officer then there are certain questions which need to be asked and need to be answered.

WHY DO WE NEED TO HAVE GREATER STAFF PARTICIPATION?

As the result of an increasing population in prisons, a widening public concern, and continuous introduction of new legislation, our task has become broader and more complex. Legislation from 1948 onwards has tended to emphasise more specialised training and treat-

ment, and to meet these demands, specialists were introduced into the service. Psychologists, tutor-organisers, physical education organisers, industrial managers, welfare officers and social workers, became part of the full-time staff. The influx of assistant governors was increased and they too were required to fill some kind of specialised position, although this did not appear to be clearly defined and their role tended to be more informally structured.

Although much of value has resulted from the introduction of specialisation there has not been the expected radical change.

Of late a new rationalisation has been introduced by the service being regionalised. The result of the introduction of specialists has shown up the complexity of our task, and regionalisation will, I am quite sure, make the complexity more obvious still. The new Criminal Justice Act will also inevitably introduce further complexity.

The introduction of further specialists is not the answer to this problem. A more positive and flexible use of the staff we have most of is the only hope. From my experience of working with unformed staff, I am certain that we use only a fraction of their capacities. This is why we need to have greater staff participation.

WHAT KIND OF PARTICIPATION DO WE NEED?

In order to answer this question one needs to have a definition of our

task. We are statutorily required to—

- (a) contain offenders as required by the courts, by means of security;
- (b) care for those in our custody by providing food, clothing, bedding, hygiene, medical care, welfare, etc.; and
- (c) convert them into more socially acceptable citizens (rule 1) by means of training.

Broadly speaking, the task of the department falls into two areas.

(1) *Trial and remand prisoners*

The task is to be custodial and to be the servant of the courts. The prison officer role related to this task has, from experience, become highly specialised and involves knowledge of court procedures, and necessitates relationships with the judiciary, counsel, police, witnesses, probation officers and the accused. It also requires knowledge of reception procedures and the ability to cope with men who are involved in what is often a highly emotional experience. It would appear that in this area officers are called on to perform at a high level, often under considerable pressure. Related also to this task is the question of observation, assessment and classification.

(2) *Convicted and sentenced prisoners*

This task is to implement rule 1 in its broadest sense within the limits imposed by security. The prison officer's role related to this task and his participation is not

quite as specific and has endless variety. Regionalisation brings with it assessment, categorisation and allocation of prisoners and in this area staff participation is increasing and will need to go on increasing.

In prisons dealing with sentenced prisoners, be they local, regional or central, it is the officers having greatest face-to-face contact with the prisoner who thereby have the greatest potential for initiating change in the prisoner. At this level there is, willy-nilly, participation in training and treatment of prisoners.

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE GREATER PARTICIPATION?

The first essential is to accept that staff need to be recognised as possessing ability and their job as possessing status. It is then necessary to increase this ability and status. To do this, one has to assess the skills and techniques the staff will require to fulfil their task and to provide appropriate training, followed by the opportunity to apply the skills and techniques. They will then need encouragement by on-going support and further training.

WHEN CAN WE ACHIEVE THIS GREATER STAFF PARTICIPATION?

Participation at the level needed will not come about overnight as the result of some critical act. It needs to be fostered, nurtured and fed. It may be slow to take root at first and once it begins to grow it may wither if support is withdrawn. Carefully supported it can go on growing and there is no limit to what can be achieved.

Participation of staff makes demands on management and we need to be prepared to meet these demands. When we achieve this greater participation of staff, depends on what we are prepared to do about it.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF GREATER PARTICIPATION OF STAFF?

Giving staff more opportunities to use their abilities makes greater demands on the managers, e.g. in staff training, support, organisation, constant evaluation, and recognition of ability and status in staff. These demands we shall have to meet within the limitations placed on us in our work situations and this is not easy to do. It will inevitably mean a readjustment in our own roles and in the roles of others. Psychologists, welfare officers, and social workers, are beginning to recognise that part of their role is giving support to staff who are in the face-to-face situation with prisoners. It may mean that the assistant governor finds that officers are fulfilling the role of counsellor, adviser, "treatment agent", that he saw as one of the main aspects of his role, and that he needs to develop a consultant and supportive role.

The greater participation there is by staff the greater becomes the necessity for good communication and consultation. There will be demands made on us to help evolve good communication and consultation structures within which the officer has recognised status. The more open communication becomes

the more likely it is that we shall have to face criticism from below and we shall need the skill and patience to deal with this constructively. The full implications are so far reaching that one cannot cover them all in such a paper as this, but we need to be aware of them.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF GREATER STAFF PARTICIPATION

The work done at Blundeston is based on using the total human resources of the prisoner, staff, community, linked to the available resources in outside society. In order to achieve this it is necessary to use much more of the abilities of the staff.

The techniques used are—

- (a) individual face-to-face situations;
- (b) Small group situations; and
- (c) large group situations.

To prepare staff to fulfil the task required of them it has been necessary to give them training in individual and group counselling techniques, in recording and process techniques and linked to these, some psychological and sociological study.

The prison is divided into four separate wings of 76 prisoners. Each wing is divided into eight sections of eight to ten prisoners. Each section has an officer who is responsible for developing relationships with the men on his section and carrying out the individual counselling one would normally

expect from a social worker. The section officers are expected to work closely with the wing principal officer and the welfare officer in all matters appertaining to the men on his section. Each prisoner attends a review board at 10-monthly intervals, with his section officer, the wing principal officer, and either the welfare officer, the deputy governor, or the assistant governor, whoever is available. In this interview the section officer is able to use the knowledge and understanding of the man he has gained to help him look at the man's past, his present, and his future. In this he is supported by the other staff members present. At the end of the review board, when the prisoner has departed, the section officer is then able to discuss the case with the other staff present and make some assessment of how he should carry out his counselling with the man in the coming months.

Each wing has a prisoner wing committee consisting of chairman, secretary and representatives for sports, messing, television and education. There is a wing meeting each Saturday morning between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. and staff attend in a support and guidance role. In this situation it is necessary for staff to have some understanding of group dynamics, skills and techniques, in order that they can use this situation as a learning experience for the prisoners.

Each month the chairman and secretary of each wing attend a central council meeting, with the

governor as chairman, at which available staff attend and prisoners may attend as non-participant members. The function of this meeting is to facilitate feed-back from the wing meetings. This allows community problems to be brought into the open for free discussion.

All sporting, social and recreational activities are run on a group or club basis with prisoners involved in the organisation and administration, supervised by an officer who acts as a liaison officer. In this situation the officer is not the person who runs or administers the group or club; he is a staff member with understanding of small group dynamics, skills and techniques, and he uses this as an opportunity to create a learning situation for those prisoners involved.

The methods used at Blundeston are centred on shared responsibility, open communication and the development of positive relationships between staff and inmates. There is an attempt to use the total human resources to aid the development of a sense of community.

Before the first prisoners were received in August 1963, all staff attended a fortnight's orientation course which was run on group lines. This dealt with all aspects of running the prison, including the routine and an outline of the general training structure. Since then all staff, except three civilian instructors and the industrial manager, have had a further five-day course run on group lines and

aimed at further training in individual and group techniques.

In the winter of 1964-5 about 20 officers attended an evening course in their own time, aimed at developing the skills of individual counselling. At the same time about a dozen principal officers and senior officers attended a course in individual counselling supervision in the evenings, in their own time.

In the winter 1965-6 it was possible to arrange a course called "Skills in Communication" at the local college of further education, and again the staff attended in their own time. This helped them to brush up their basic English and decrease their anxiety regarding competent report writing.

During the winter 1966-7 approximately 20 staff attended a six-month course in social studies which was broadly based and aimed at broadening the staff's understanding of behaviour, management and organisations. All principal officers attend a one hour meeting each week aimed at investigating managerial skills and techniques.

Two courses have been run for junior officers. These courses have been aimed at introducing junior officers to the more specialised parts of their role such as gate duties, reception duties, orderly officer duties and also initiating them into such aspects as remission calculations, bails and fines, prisoners' earnings and prison industry. The later part of the course is aimed more specifically at introducing

junior officers to group work and individual counselling, as well as to an understanding of prison and wing structure and management.

There were also two courses for senior wing officers. These were two day courses and covered four aspects—

- (a) prison management and administration;
- (b) wing management and administration;
- (c) wing officers' responsibilities —"Administration"; and
- (d) wing officers' responsibilities —"Continuity Agent in Human Relationships and Communications".

There has also been a further five-day preparatory course for staff, based on individual and group counselling skills and techniques. The final course run in the winter of 1966-7 was an advanced group work course, entirely group oriented, for staff who have been participating in such groups as the pre-hostel, working-out and discharge groups. The response of staff and their level of operation on this course was most encouraging.

Pre-hostel group

When prisoners have been selected for hostel or working-out training, they are required to attend a pre-hostel group meeting once each week under the supervision of a principal officer and a relief officer, both of whom have had training in small group work. The task of the group is to help men

prepare for hostel, working out, and verbalise their anxieties about eventual release. At the same time this helps them to examine inter-personal relationships and problems of this nature. This is done in the prisoners' association time.

Working-out group

When prisoners obtain outside employment on the working-out scheme at Blundeston Prison, they are required to attend a working-out group once each week under the supervision of an officer who has been trained in small group work. The task of this group is to discuss the problems involved in working out, to examine inter-personal relationships and to enable the men to verbalise their anxieties about eventual release into free society. This is done in the prisoners' association time.

Discharge group

If a prisoner is not selected for hostel or working-out scheme or if he fails on either of these, he is required to attend a pre-discharge group, during working hours, under the supervision of an officer and relief officer who have had training in small group work. The task of this group is to examine the problems of release from a closed community into free society, to examine inter-personal relationships within the group and to verbalise their anxieties about eventual release.

Since the opening of Blundeston Prison, in 1963, the whole prison community including prisoners and

staff have been involved in a changing situation. The regime itself has made new demands on both staff and inmates. Originally prisoners were transferred here in bulk from Chelmsford, Parkhurst and Nottingham prisons, building up to a maximum population. Having achieved this, the preventive detention population slowly diminished, resulting in the introduction of long-term ordinary prisoners. These changes in themselves called for constant evaluation and adjustment. The regime is aimed at growth towards maturity of the prisoners, and as such, change is implicit. If change is to produce growth then constant evaluation and readjustment will be necessary.

Having started from scratch in mid-1963, the staff have steadily achieved greater participation in the work being done at Blundeston Prison. Factors of significance have come to light during this experience. Progress is slow and relies a great deal on on-going support and encouragement by the top management. Greater participation calls for a higher level of responsibility from staff members. It would appear that the staff's perception of their own level of competence is lower than the actual level. As a result of this, they have anxieties about their ability to meet the demands placed on them and tend to fight shy of these extra responsibilities. This phase needs to be worked through with patient and understanding firmness. When value and status are recognised in staff

and they become aware that they have ability that can be used purposefully, there is a tendency to try to run before they can walk; they tend to deny the limitations placed on all staff and attempt to work outside these limitations. In this situation again one needs to work patiently, drawing them back within the boundaries imposed by the limitations of security, statutory rules and regulations, and professional etiquette.

In providing a situation within which prisoners may grow in maturity, competence and confidence, and with the facility of on-going staff training, it is inevitable that staff also grow in maturity, competence, and self-confidence. As a result, demands are made on management to cope with this new competence and status, by way of open communication, consultation, support and further training, and

by being prepared to be trained themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

In writing this paper I have drawn particularly on my experience of working with prison and borstal staff over the past 19 years in closed borstals, in a borstal allocation centre, in a regional prison and at Blundeston. I am confident that staff are, in the main, capable of meeting the demands of greater participation very successfully. I am now pleased, and no longer surprised, when staff demonstrate their increased knowledge and understanding and ability.

The pay-off of greater participation is in terms of increased job satisfaction and feelings of achievement.

Perhaps this paper should have been aimed at the broader involvement of management, rather than the greater participation of staff.



Your point of view

is always of interest to other readers

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