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Special Edition: The Perrie Lectures

Image courtesy of Koestler Arts: Stories, Socks & Jay Cloths, HM Prison and Young Offender Institution Low Newton, John Crockett Highly Commended Award for Themed Catergory: Interlude, 2019.

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Special Edition Editorial: The Perrie Lectures

*This edition is guest-edited by **Professor Rosie Meek,** who is based at Royal Holloway University of London, and serves as a member of the Perrie Lectures committee.*

The Perrie Lectures is an annual event which has the purpose of stimulating dialogue between criminal justice organisations, the voluntary sector, and all those with an academic, legal, or practical interest in people in prison and their families. Since 1995, the Perrie Award has been presented during the day of the lectures. It is awarded by the Perrie Lectures Committee in recognition of efforts to promote an understanding of the work of the Prison Service, and the development of penal policy. Through the Perrie Lectures and the Perrie Award, it is hoped that the care of people in prison can be improved, and penal policy, in its broadest sense, advanced. The Perrie Lectures are named in honour of Bill Perrie, who retired from the Prison Service in 1978. He worked as a prison governor for 32 years, latterly at HMPs Hull, Long Lartin, and Birmingham, and he attended the lectures every year until his death in 1997. We are grateful to have the opportunity to guest edit this edition in honour of Bill and the annual event he inspired.

Readers of the PSJ will be familiar with the back story and day-to-day reality of our prisons crisis, with staff facing increasing challenges in their ability to carry out their duties safely and effectively. Understandably, the Prison Service has been working on its culture — a positive culture for staff, and a rehabilitative culture for those in prison, both of which are critical in enabling the Service to deliver. But for many of us it wasn't clear what such a focus on culture might mean in reality, and how that might play out in policy developments and in day-to-day practice within our establishments.

For some time, the Perrie Lectures committee has planned this year's lectures in response to the focus on prison culture, in order to provide a challenging and stimulating platform on which to explore in what ways those individual and collective efforts to promote positive cultures in prisons has or has not progressed, and to think about the barriers and enablers in doing so. We knew we wanted to bring stakeholders together, but we faced our own barriers in doing so — firstly due to Covid-19 and then due to train strikes — so when we finally succeeded in our mission to gather at Newbold Revel on a blisteringly hot day in June it felt like an achievement in itself.

We had tasked our carefully selected speakers with a broad remit. We all know that managing the risks of Covid-19 posed a massive challenge to the prison estate, which demanded centralised guidance and control. But as we (have attempted to) transition back to the 'new normal', we wanted to ask how we balance control, accountability, and autonomy — for prison leaders, prison staff, and prisoners themselves. We know that organisations with a healthy culture encourage innovation and accept that at times things may go wrong, but we also know all too well that in the context of criminal justice in particular, avoiding risks and averting criticism can dominate decision making.

The culture of an organisation relies heavily on good leadership, excellent communication of its aims, and a shared understanding of those aims. How far is visionary and brave leadership being cultivated at all levels of the Service? What progress has been made in the quest for a learning culture? Is it still possible to achieve a rehabilitative culture, or is it just another slogan on the shelf? We posed these questions, and our speakers and audience (with representation including prison staff, the voluntary sector, and academics) responded heartily to the challenge, chaired ably by Phil Maguire, Chief Executive of the Prison Radio Association.

In this edition of PSJ we bring together a collection of essays from some of our remarkable speakers. We open with the acceptance speech delivered by Paula Harriot of the Prison Reform Trust upon being presented with the Perrie Award. We have also included as the cover image for this edition the striking artwork (from the Koestler Trust) that accompanied her award. Although Paula's speech was given towards the end of the day, we chose to include her contribution at the beginning of this collection as it serves as an effective and emotive call to arms. The

subsequent paper from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Charlie Taylor, reflects on his first 2.5 years in post and asks us to consider the importance of, amongst other things, risk, trust, and accountability. Professor Shadd Maruna and colleagues take us back to Covid-19 and ask us to consider how in our prisons those lockdowns became the 'new normal', weaving powerful direct quotes from prisoner interviewees into the article. As an experienced prison governor, Gareth Sands reflects on his own experiences of navigating culture change, offering a raft of illustrative examples and tips. David Breakspear (of Revolving Doors) offers his own powerful reflections from his experiences within the prison system, reminding us of the unique value of seeking the voices of those with lived experience in building a more effective system. And we close our speaker contributions with Gill Attrill, a Deputy Director in HMPPS with direct responsibility for prison culture, offering a practical, robust guide to seeking effective, safe, and rehabilitative cultures. Finally, the edition concludes with two book reviews, one for 'Prisons of the World' by Andrew Coyle, and the other for 'Criminal: How are prisons are failing us all' by Angela Kirwin.

Getting ready for culture change; a personal narrative.

Paula Harriott *is a lived experience leader, the current lead for Prisoner Involvement at the Prison Reform Trust and the 2023 recipient of the Perrie Award. She works to build the frameworks for equitable representation of people with lived experience of prison, probation, and social injustice in policy and public narrative change.*

This contribution attempts to both expand and sum up on the impromptu speech I gave at the Perrie Lectures in June 2023 as the proud recipient of the Perrie Award.[1]

As a former prisoner and now prisoner activist in matters of social justice and imprisonment, I write here as an advocate for change, leaning into my own embodied and lived experience of imprisonment alongside my learned and practice experience as Head of Prisoner Engagement at the Prison Reform Trust.[2] This is a personal narrative of how change has happened in my practice and why it has been important in shaping my work.

For those of us who work in this field, we often feel our knowledge and wisdom is constrained and confined within both physical and literal prison walls. Working as a changemaker in the prison and justice field may often feel like living on an isolated island; forgotten and obscure, separate from the rest of the world. A world that is not really interested in what goes on in prison and is not willingly engaged in broader and more sophisticated philosophical and policy debate about crime and punishment. It is a world which is invariably satisfied with singular and facile depictions of good and bad and fascinated with sensationalism and the voyeurism of true crime stories. In our work we can react to these constraints by making ourselves and our ideas smaller and less radical, fearing the 'Daily Mail test' and even deeper potential marginalisation. Self-suppression as defence against ridicule.

Our key political leaders, and seemingly our wider public, cling to a deeply held belief in the power of punishment (and prison) for transformation of people and communities. In so doing, they demonstrate an apparent disregard for the broader evidence base of what works, and what clearly does not work, to create deep public safety and community harmony. Those who express alternative views are often categorised as 'looney lefties', 'bleeding heart liberals', derided as members of the 'woke' generation or naïve idealists. Against this backdrop of apparent stagnation of political thought and leadership, the task of changing culture about imprisonment and affecting change in prison can seem like an uphill and thankless struggle.

The physical separation of prisoners creates a sense of safety for the wider public; they are 'out of sight and out of mind'. But this is a dangerous delusion; most prisoners are coming back to the society they left, to be someone's neighbour, someone's work colleague, once more. Prisons and prisoners are intricately woven into the broader societal ecosystem. Prisons serve as a reflection of the values, policies, and systems of the societies they exist in. They are a manifestation of how a community addresses issues of crime, justice, and restoration.

We are undeniably faced with the fact that incarceration is our chosen methodology in the UK for dealing with crime. We do not just punish individuals alone; the impact of imprisonment cascades through multiple aspects of the eco-system, affecting families, communities, and social structures. The health and effectiveness of the prison system profoundly influences societal well-being, shaping the trajectory of individuals who re-enter society after incarceration, and their families, and their intersections. It is a grave decision to send someone to prison.

So, why have we and, do we, over and over, chose imprisonment? The use of prison as a response to crime is deeply rooted in historical, social, and cultural factors and these influences, either overtly acknowledged or unconsciously absorbed, are required to be under the microscope as we seek to clarify what we actually know and think and disentangle our thinking from that which hinders us.

When we are harmed, our immediate response is that we seek to redress the harm. The principle of retribution seeks to balance the scales of justice by punishing wrongdoers proportionally to the harm caused. Imprisonment is viewed as a way to exact retribution for the harm caused. The punitive tradition

1 www.perrielectures.org.uk
2 http://prisonreformtrust.org.uk

cites punishment as a means to deter criminal behaviour and seek justice by isolation and infliction of loss of freedom and autonomy. In terms of public safety, imprisonment is justified by the belief that we all are safer by the removal of those who have caused harm, and finally imprisonment rests on the principle of deterrence, that the idea of imprisonment will deter people from committing crime.

If we put these reasons for imprisonment under our own individual and personal microscopes, do we agree? Are they defensible positions to hold? Do they make sense to us? Are we convinced? What does our own feeling and knowledge about the world say to us in the quiet of our mind? If I answer from my own embodied knowledge, then I am hesitant to get behind these reasons; I do not believe punishment universally deters; it depends on what the circumstances and conditions a person finds themselves in. Retribution and damage are not always proportionally reflected in sentence duration, and deterrence only works when a person is making choices based on fear of imprisonment; in my own case I was not thinking about that whilst using illicit substances; it was hidden away from my consciousness in a normalisation of substance misuse at the time, for instance.

Retribution and damage are not always proportionally reflected in sentence duration, and deterrence only works when a person is making choices based on fear of imprisonment.

There is another way; one of alternative responses, such as restorative justice, diversion programmes, community-based sentencing, and prevention initiatives, and reimagining prison as a place of therapeutic interventions if needed. We could also plan redistribution of wealth and the building of equitable futures. These approaches are driven by, embedded by, practised by, and adopted by culture change agents who go against the grain, who learn as they go, who believe in the art of the possibilities. People who use creativity and imagination, who are open and inclusive. These are the thought leaders who open the path to the future, and they are here in our collective.

Within our midst today we have talent, we have ideas, we have imagination, we have skills, we have persistence, tenacity, and focused intention to create anew. This work is lifelong, for it occurs both within us and outside of us simultaneously. The work is also the critical introspection; for you cannot give away and teach something new to a critic if you have struggled to contend with the learning yourself. Our ideas and examples to others live and breathe in our own authenticity and self-integration. Without doing this work, we are mere performative actors, speaking lots but transforming little.

Who does not remember the iconic Bob Marley telling us to 'free ourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind'. He is calling for liberation of the imagination, liberation of creativity, and the ignition of desire to move into liminality; to be comfortable with unknowingness as we seek to find creative and refreshed ways of being and doing. We hold onto the old because it has familiarity. Even when we know it does not work. For the alternative is to face our fear that what we believe to be the answer, is not the answer; and in this lack of courage, we condemn ourselves to being less than we should be.

To be effective we must dig deep to excavate that which we both feel and want to believe in. We must find that which we hold to be true, and to work hard to disengage ourselves from limited narratives and beliefs. We must interrogate ourselves relentlessly. Talking and thinking about imprisonment, talking about prisons, working in prisons; none of these things are morally neutral spaces nor endeavours, and it is necessary for us to be aware of this and be alert to gain clarity of thought and action.

Discussions about imprisonment inherently involve complex moral considerations related to human rights, justice, inequality, rehabilitation, and social responsibility. Recognising and addressing these moral dimensions is crucial for developing a deeper and more just response to crime. Often in the public sphere, conversations about imprisonment are emotive. They trigger deep-seated feelings based in archetypes about 'good' and 'bad'. We can encounter feelings of fear of repulsion, compassion, desire for safety, revenge, and retribution all at the same time. But developing a vision for our work in the deepest sense means we cannot and should not gloss over these difficult conversations.

Imprisonment involves the deprivation of individuals' freedom and autonomy. As such, discussions about prison inherently touch on fundamental human rights and dignity. The debate about justice and punishment centre on the purpose of imprisonment: whether it should be primarily retributive, rehabilitative, or restorative. Different views on punishment are rooted in moral beliefs about

accountability, rehabilitation, and the nature of justice. Discussions about prison inevitably bring up issues of social inequality and discrimination. The overrepresentation of marginalised and minority communities in the prison system raises questions about systemic biases and unequal treatment. Imprisonment not only affects individuals serving sentences, but also has significant impacts on families and communities. These discussions involve moral considerations about the broader social consequences of imprisonment. Moral considerations also come into play when determining how to strike a balance between the two objectives of public safety and human rights. And finally, there is also a moral conundrum to be resolved in thinking about the existence of profit-driven incarceration. Even alternatives to incarceration are bounded by moral considerations as they relate to the balance between punishment and restoration as a methodology for restitution/ retribution. Clarity of our own position on these matters is like body armour on the battlefield; we are strong because we hold opinions which are defensible and well-argued, we know what we think and thus who we are and where we stand.

And from my experience, unearthing the answers to these moral questions is a critical step on the journey to reimagining justice.

We also ought to examine whether the stories we tell ourselves stand up to critical examination and whether dominant narratives stand up to the evidence. Do our own beliefs stand up to the evidence? And it is important to reflect on whose evidence counts; for in the knowledge production process there is a hierarchy of knowledge that can obscure alternative views and experiences from emerging. For instance, my own lived experience and evidence of imprisonment is an embodied knowledge. Embodied knowledge refers to the wisdom and understanding that comes from lived experiences, practical skills, and direct engagement with the world. It is acquired through subjective experiences, cultural practices, and interactions with others. Emphasising the value of embodied knowledge acknowledges that not all forms of knowledge can be easily captured in traditional academic settings. By recognising and respecting this type of knowledge, we open avenues for individuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute their unique perspectives to the collective imagination.

Part of the work of changing the world as we understand it, is to challenge oneself as to what knowledge we value, how we value it, how we hear it, and how we act upon it. We should reflect on the ownership, modes of production, and hierarchy of knowledge production. We should reflect on how all knowledge is set within an ecology of knowledge in the first instance. We would do well to see diversity of experience and expressions of knowledge as part of a flat ecosystem of knowledge, rather than a hierarchy of knowledge. This principle of knowledge equity, for me, is at the heart of the deconstruction of what is and sets the scene for the construction and reimagining of what can and will be. By embracing knowledge equity as a principle, we listen more deeply and with more respect to those who have often been silent. We enable a more diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas to be shared and valued. Diverse perspectives challenge conventional thinking and provide fresh insights, sparking creativity and innovative ideas. This, in turn, enriches the collective pool of knowledge available to society, nurturing an environment where imagination can flourish. Embracing diverse ways of knowing allows for unconventional ideas and solutions to emerge, fostering a culture of creativity and innovation. This will lead to the liberation of previously suppressed ideas and narratives and has the potential to reframe our collective understanding and vision for change.

By creating inclusive spaces where diverse forms of knowledge are respected and valued, we pave the way for innovative ideas, creativity, and social change.

Knowledge equity and appreciation of embodied knowledge are powerful forces that unleash human imagination. By creating inclusive spaces where diverse forms of knowledge are respected and valued, we pave the way for innovative ideas, creativity, and social change. This collective imagination becomes a catalyst for a more inclusive, compassionate, and forward-thinking world.

I have also been strengthened in vision and purpose by the study of quantum physics; for such study reveals the intricate and interconnected nature of reality at the subatomic level. Quantum physics emphasises that everything is connected and part of a vast, intricate web of existence. This understanding can challenge the simplistic belief that locking up more individuals will automatically lead to increased safety. Instead, it encourages us to explore multifaceted and integrated thinking that addresses the root causes of

crime and disorder and focusses on social well-being. Again, good to reflect that at the quantum level, events are probabilistic rather than deterministic. Similarly, metaphysical philosophies often propose that reality is not fixed or preordained. This concept challenges the notion that the future is entirely predictable and controllable, encouraging us to question the effectiveness of punitive measures as a sole means of ensuring safety. In conclusion, it is good to challenge ourselves to investigate and absorb approaches and philosophical positions which directly challenge that which we thought we knew; being open to quantum physics and metaphysical philosophy can lead to a transformative shift in our understanding of safety and justice. It encourages us to move away from a rigid, fear-based mindset that relies solely on incarceration and punishment, and opens the door to more compassionate, holistic, and effective approaches to building safer communities through the appreciation of interconnectedness and human relationships.

There are so many enquiries to make of the self in the work of preparing to create change, not least understanding of and sensitivity to power, to relationships and equitable practice. But again, and again, imagination is also key. It is important to seek out methodologies and approaches that create a space for imagination to thrive and to be released. Imagination practice supports us to envision new possibilities, process complex problems, and to see through them. It allows us to scan for the future to anticipate future challenges. It trains the mind in flexibility and adaptability. I make space for meditation purposely, make space for silence to find a route for insight, creativity, and sparks to connect. Spending time in the imagination can sometimes feel like a luxury, especially when we feel demoralised and anxious and in reactive mode to things that have not been going right. We may be in resistance and not emergence, we may feel we are needed at the front line fighting the fight, or in organising for the fight. But we should see imagination practice as part of organising for the fight, part of the weaponry that we should have to hand to deliver compelling arguments that inspire and motivate us. Imagination guides us to an ultimate vision and purpose. Stagnation is not an option in change work; we must keep moving and adapting, for there is a deep truth in 'For those that do what they always did will always get what they always got.'

And vitally there is cultivation of courage and belief in our own collective destiny; it is the courage of Moses who could not see the Promised Land but kept going, nonetheless. It is the courage of the Aneurin Bevan as founder of the 'free at point of access' National Health Service, and it is the courage of Fidel Castro to lead Cuba to a socialist revolution in modern times. He famously spoke of the power of commitment and not numbers: *'I began the revolution with 82 men. If I had to do it again, I do it with 10 or 15 and absolute faith. It does not matter how small you are if you have faith and plan of action.'*

And finally, I think we must draw continuous inspiration from our vision and purpose and, in citing Castro once more, recognise the power of a shared idea:

> *'The fact is, when men carry the same ideals in their hearts, nothing can isolate them — neither prison walls nor the sod of cemeteries. For a single memory, a single spirit, a single idea, a single conscience, a single dignity will sustain them all. Long live the revolution!'*

The importance of culture where it comes from, where it goes wrong, and how it can be sustained and improved.

Charlie Taylor *is HM Chief Inspector at HM Inspectorate of Prisons for England and Wales*

Thank you very much for having me, I am delighted that we can finally get together after last year's postponement. I want to talk today about the importance of culture, where it comes from, where it goes wrong, and how it can be sustained and improved.

I have now been in post for two and a half years, having started during the dark days of November 2020, when prisons were locked down and fears that the pandemic could sweep through crowded wings remained. To the credit of both my predecessor, Peter Clarke and the Prison Service, the inspectorate remained in the field throughout. As Chief Inspector, I was very lucky to take over an organisation that already had such a strong reputation, forged by the likes of Anne Owers, Nick Hardwick and the late David Ramsbotham — who very sadly died last year.

And I also inherited an outstanding team of knowledgeable and dedicated professionals. If we put out an SOS on a Sunday night, because we're suddenly short of an inspector, volunteers will come forward, prepared to jump in their cars and drive half-way across the country, to make sure the inspection goes ahead.

We have imported some of this can-do attitude from the Prison Service, where leaders know they need to stick around until the job's done. The Inspectorate also has a culture that encourages challenge. When I came into post, having worked with the Civil Service for eight years, I was both taken aback, and also delighted by the way my colleagues would argue, when they didn't agree with me.

I am sorry that governors and prison leaders don't get to be a fly on the wall when we are deliberating our healthy prison test scores, at the end of the inspection. They would, I think, be reassured by the robust debate that takes place before a final judgement is made. As a leader, I was fortunate to inherit an organisation with such strong values and ethos.

Imagine how much more difficult my job would have been if I had to create that culture from scratch. How would I go about encouraging people to challenge each other, particularly if they came from organisations where it isn't done? How would I get people to volunteer to spend the best part of two weeks away from their families, if it wasn't already established in the inspectorate? When we proposed returning to inspection, just after the lockdown had begun, no one demurred, they just got on with it.

Being inspected of course, is never easy. I've been a head teacher and I've had that phone call. But it provides leaders with the opportunity to get an independent check-up on the culture of their prison. Our anonymous surveys give an indication of morale which we can further triangulate in our conversations with prisoners and staff. Once measured up against what the data shows and what leaders tell us, we have a pretty good snapshot of the culture of the jail.

I find the best way to define the word culture is to think of it as a series of habits and values that add up to 'the way we do things round here'. One of the reasons my job is so interesting, is because every prison has such a different culture. Even those with a similar population and category, in the same part of the country, have a particular atmosphere. In the same way that isolated islands have acquired their own unique flora and fauna, prisons, situated on just a few acres of land, and necessarily closed to the outside environment, develop their own ecosystems that have taken years to evolve. The architecture and design also make a difference — compare the open spaces of Wormwood Scrubs against the more closed Pentonville. Even the identikit prisons like Bullingdon, Highdown and Elmley all feel very different to walk round.

Understanding how cultures get created also helps us to understand how to change them. In the last two years, we have been consistently critical about the levels of purposeful activity in jails, with too many prisoners locked up with nothing to do. There have been some exceptions. In January 2022, we inspected Coldingley. There we found, despite a Covid outbreak, prisoners unlocked for much longer than we had seen in the other category C prisons that surround London. Similarly, at the end of the pandemic, in most reception prisons, we found prisoners locked up for up to 23

hours a day, but Elmley and Altcourse were managing to run far more open regimes. What I found out subsequently was that these three jails had always had a decent track record of getting prisoners unlocked. Because of the pervading culture, governors had fewer difficulties in persuading staff to return to an open regime — it was just what they did.

HMP Stocken is another prison that has bucked the trend. When we inspected earlier this year, we found five hundred prisoners in free flow around the jail. This was despite Stocken experiencing difficulties with recruitment, a reason we are frequently given for why regimes in other prisons remain locked down. With some of the lowest levels of violence in the category C estate, Stocken also gave the lie to the idea that less restricted regimes equal more violence. As one prisoner put it — 'if you want mobile phones or drugs, you've come to the wrong place.'

Similarly key work on which we reported on in last year's joint thematic on offender management in custody, remains a very underused way of building relationships and supporting prisoners on their journey through the system. When we inspected New Hall last year, it had the lowest levels of self-harm in the closed women's estate. It was also one of the few prisons that is running an effective keywork scheme. I am in no doubt that these two findings were related.

Oakwood, the largest prison in the country, is another jail that was flourishing despite the pandemic. But this was not always the case. When it opened in April 2012 it acquired the nickname Jokewood and our first inspection revealed some substantial difficulties. But under the remarkable leadership of John McLaughlin, it was transformed. When we inspected in May 2021, John had left, but progress was being maintained by his replacement Sean Oliver.

What was remarkable about Oakwood were the levels of trust that the jail was prepared to give to prisoners. One was running a workshop in which he was teaching wood working skills to some of the most vulnerable prisoners, helping them to gain in confidence and cope better inside. They made products such as bird boxes, benches and picnic tables that could be sold outside the jail or made to order for staff members. There was no direct staff supervision, despite there being all sorts of potential weapons available -a level of freedom that would be inconceivable for prisoners in most other jails. One man, doing a very long sentence, told me he had a sense of meaning in his life that he had never felt before, either inside or outside prison.

There were many other prison-led initiatives with an army of trusted prisoners moving busily round the prison. The jail simply couldn't have run as successfully without the prisoners' help. The men at Oakwood appreciated the trust they were given and were desperate not to lose the opportunities they had been offered. As a result, the behaviour at the prison is usually excellent. When he left to open Five Wells, John Mclaughlin, sadly now retired, was able to take some of his Oakwood prisoners with him specifically to help transport the culture into the new prison.

In other jails, governors face very different challenges. Some prisons were built more than a hundred and fifty years ago with ways of doing things that have been formed and sustained over many years.

The hardest job for any governor is to change the culture of a prison, to remove those things which are undermining progress while enhancing its positive aspects.

The hardest job for any governor is to change the culture of a prison, to remove those things which are undermining progress while enhancing its positive aspects. When taking over a prison in real difficulties, the first step is to get things operating properly. Making sure that the regime runs on time, that prisoners reliably get the basics — soap, towels, sheets, clothes, and pin numbers for the phone. It is also essential that staff and prisoners are clear what is expected of them and that the prison is bearing down on the ingress of drugs and other contraband to prevent associated violence.

Only when these expectations are fully embedded, and the prison has become a safe place to live and work, can the governor begin to delve deeper into the culture. To some extent, making these systems run smoothly is the easy bit — that isn't to say that it doesn't take enormous dedication and personal commitment from leaders, but easy, because running a more predictable and well-organised jail, is in everybody's interest.

Where governors get the most resistance is when they begin to dig into the bedrock of the culture. Translating a vision from the governor's office to the wing is the most difficult part of all. Most of us find change difficult and some people hate it. When Paul Newton took over Birmingham, he said that it was only when he had been in post for a few months, that he realised the scale of the task he faced. Every stone he

turned over he found problems, some which were long-term, deep-seated, and often protected by vested interests, who did not want to be exposed or held to account.

But you must have some sympathy with staff when it comes to change — in some jails it feels like there is a revolving door of governors arriving and then quickly moving on. When we inspected Manchester in 2021, I saw on the board that there had been 10 governors since the turn of the century. While each one no doubt did their best to change things, and some remained long enough to make good progress, when Rob Knight took over in November 2019, parts of the jail still retained bits of culture that had been there since the Strangeways days.

Why would officers who had seen governors come and go bother to buy in to the new boss? It is no surprise that staff are more likely to take their lead from longer-serving uniformed staff than from what they see as another here today, gone tomorrow leader.

In jails where leaders have stuck around for many years, they own the culture. What happens in the jail, and what they are prepared to tolerate, is on them. Governors like Judith Wallsgrove at Parc or Emily Thomas at Isis have been there long enough to be able to mould the culture, so that it aligns with their own vision. But creating culture cannot just be dependent on the charisma and drive of one brilliant leader, however important that may be.

The best leaders create a set of values that are understood, shared and lived by the whole staff. They build a leadership team that is resourceful, skilled, challenging and collaborative.

The best leaders create a set of values that are understood, shared and lived by the whole staff. They build a leadership team that is resourceful, skilled, challenging and collaborative. If you visit the therapeutic prison, Grendon, you find an ethos that pervades the institution. Officers are a crucial part of the therapeutic programme, supporting prisoners to make sense of their previous lives and plan for their future. Expectations of officers are high at Grendon, but they are also well trained.

In other parts of the estate, things are more difficult. Absurdly, the first-time governors meet newly recruited staff, is the day they start work in the prison. How can you make sure that someone has the right values if you've never even met them? Governors tell me of their frustration of having to go through protracted HR processes to get rid of staff, who, had they been involved in the recruitment, would never have been taken on in the first place.

Senior uniformed grades are another group who do not get enough support or consideration. These officers, custody managers and senior officers are the culture carriers for prisons. They have often been there the longest and have seen governors come and go. If the values of the leadership team do not enthuse and permeate through this group, then a glass floor forms which leaders will be unable to penetrate. They will get passive acquiescence rather than the real commitment that they need.

The army recognises the importance of sergeants and corporals as a critical cog in the chain of command. They are carefully selected, and then thoroughly trained. Indeed, training is seen as too important to be left to individual units and is run at the centre. Sadly in prisons, there has been nothing like the level of investment in custody managers. They often tell me they have had no real training and are just expected to learn on the job. That is no way to create a cadre of expert professionals.

What this means is that while many custody managers are outstanding, some become a malign influence on the prison. And, because they have so many staff to manage, they tell me they spend much of their time chained to a computer. This is at the expense of where these staff should be adding the most value — leading their teams, making sure that standards are kept, that people do what they are supposed to do and that new recruits are supported and mentored. They should be setting an example of how to look after, manage and interact with prisoners, not spending their day on the phone to HR chasing up someone's back pay. Custody managers are simply too important to be left to make it up for themselves, without the right supervision or support.

What assessments of workplaces often show, is that people who lack autonomy at work become more stressed. Leaders, at least, can make decisions, solve problems, and engineer change. The further you are down the food chain the more you just have to suck it up. Successful organisations push down responsibility to the lowest possible level. The army, that you might expect to be entirely hierarchical, understands that every soldier must be a leader. In battle, there won't always be an officer or a corporal to give you an order.

To be successful, you have to be able to trust those who are both above and below you. I am convinced that trust must be an essential part of every tier of the prison system. In a large Prison Service, in which, when things go wrong, they can go very badly wrong, there is an understandable temptation to maintain central control. But if you want people to flourish, you have to make them responsible for the things for which they are accountable. I am well aware of the frustration governors feel, when we criticise their prison in areas over which they have limited authority, such as education provision, works programmes and recruitment.

But if, like me, you believe governors should be given more control of the levers of change, then they too must be prepared to pass down greater responsibility to custody managers, wing staff and ultimately to prisoners themselves. Of course, risks need to be managed and people at every level need to be held accountable. It therefore worries me greatly when officers say they never see the governor around the prison — and depressingly, at one place I inspected, prisoners couldn't even tell me if the governor was male or female.

Giving trust also involves taking calculated risks, because inevitably things will go wrong. But giving the right level of trust to the right people, with the right training and support in place, will allow those who live and work in our prisons to flourish and the culture of their jail to be transformed.

How the covid lockdown became the 'new normal'

Shadd Maruna *is Professor of Criminology at Queen's University Belfast and President of the American Society of Criminology. with* ***Gillian McNaull****,, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Queen's University Belfast*

This research was carried out with colleagues from Queen's University Belfast and the User Voice organisation, including Gillian McNaull, Mark Johnson, Hazel Scully, Daniel Hutt and Nina O'Neill, among many others.

When the 2022 Perrie Lectures were postponed, I was slightly worried that my planned topic was going to be badly out of date by the time the Lectures were rescheduled in 2023. After all, I had been invited to speak about the research that I had been involved in over the past two years with Mark Johnson and the User Voice organisation looking at life inside prisons during the Covid-19 crisis. Yet, by 2022, the world was finally moving on from that bizarre period, and I feared that by 2023, few would be interested in even hearing the word Covid anymore.

Indeed, looking back, so much of the Covid crisis of 2020-2022 already feels like some bizarre, half-forgotten, bad dream. Did we really make arrows out of tape on the floor of supermarkets directing the flow of foot traffic? Were there really restrictions on how many people we could invite into our home or how long we could leave our houses? Did we really block off middle sinks in public restrooms so people would not stand side by side as they washed their hands? On the other hand, some of the things that seemed completely strange during the Covid crisis — like holding business meetings online with faces in little squares on a screen — have now become taken for granted as the 'new normal' of the post-Covid world. Some of the weird adaptations we adopted proved to be more efficient and economical than the 'old ways' and have arguably made our lives better.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case with British prisons post-Covid. When my colleagues at Queen's University Belfast and the User Voice charity first proposed to research life in prison during the Covid crisis, we assumed that what we would be studying was an unprecedented adaptation to incredibly exceptional circumstances. We pitched the research to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) as a once-in-a-lifetime natural experiment.[1] What would happen if virtually every person in the prison system was locked in their cell for 22 or 23 hours per day in isolation from their fellow prisoners and deprived of meaningful work, education, or rehabilitative interventions of any sort?

It was a grim question, and the answer was even more harrowing than we had expected,[2] but we presumed that whatever the results, this experiment would be a temporary one, a reaction to unimaginable circumstances. As soon as it was safe to do so, the lockdown would be ended with our research report existing as the only formal record of what really happened to that deeply unfortunate cohort of prisoners.

Alas, it is with no pleasure at all that we are routinely told that our research from this seemingly unique time in British penal history is 'still as relevant as ever' inside British prisons. That is, although the Covid crisis may be largely over in wider society (with the cessation of almost all the public health restrictions), the so-called 'Covid lockdown' remains in place across far too many prisons in 2023. In his annual report for 2022-23, HM Chief Inspector for Prisons for England and Wales writes:

> *Despite final COVID-19 restrictions being lifted in May 2022, we found far too many prisons continuing to operate greatly reduced regimes in the last year. This meant that prisoners remained locked in their cells for long periods of time without the purposeful activity that would support a successful reintegration back into society at the end of their sentences (p. 5).*[3]

1. Funding for the research described in this article was provided by the Economic and Social Research Council, project reference: ES/V01708X/1

2. User Voice & Queen's University Belfast (2022). Coping with Covid in Prison. London: User Voice. https://www.uservoice.org/consultations/coping-with-covid/

3. HMIP (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons). (2023). HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2022-23. London. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/07/15.91_HMIP_HMI-Prisons_ARA-2022-23_Web-Accessible.pdf

The Inspectorate's report found that, in 2022-23, around 60 per cent of surveyed prisoners were locked down for at least 22 hours per day on the weekends and 42 per cent on weekdays (compared to 28 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively, in 2019-20).

In short, the 'Covid Lockdown', although originally motivated by the need to save lives during an extreme crisis, has somehow become 'the new normal' for a large minority of the prison system. Call it the post-Covid crisis, perhaps, but it is just as real.

Learning the lessons of the covid lockdown

No one needs reminding about the severity of the threat that Covid caused to human life. Associated with almost 7 million deaths since 2020, Covid-19 triggered an extraordinary break with ordinary social life in the name of preserving public health and saving lives between 2020 and 2022. Universities shut their campuses, funerals were moved online, elderly relatives languished alone without visits from grandchildren for fear that one might spread a deadly virus. For a variety of structural reasons, prisons are particularly risky environments for contagion of this sort and became the epicentre for the spread of the virus internationally.[4] Indeed, in April 2020, epidemiological modelling conducted by HMPPS and Public Health England (PHE) suggested that between 800 and 2,000 prisoners in England and Wales might die as a result of the virus.[5] In response to this massive threat to health and safety, many countries around the world implemented widespread prisoner release plans (both early releases and temporary releases of those serving longer sentences).

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In England and Wales, a large-scale release plan was floated, but rejected. Instead, the primary mechanism for saving lives became the implementation of a system wide 'lockdown' inside prisons whereby most of the 80,000 serving prisoners were kept in their cells away from other prisoners for 22 or 23 hours per day. According to Rule 44 of the United Nations revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment Incarcerated People, known as the 'Mandela Rules', this sort of isolation without meaningful human contact qualifies as 'solitary confinement'. If this confinement exceeds 15 consecutive days, it is considered by the Mandela Rules to be 'cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment'.

This extraordinary measure implemented at the start of the Covid crisis, however, was intended to save lives, and it almost certainly did. By the time the Covid lockdown was officially deemed to be concluded, fewer than 200 residents in HMPPS prisons had died after testing positive for Covid-19 — far fewer than was forecasted by public health experts. What was not known is what the costs of the lockdown had been and will be going forward for those who lived through it. A large body of research evidence suggests that solitary confinement can lead to severe mental health and behavioural problems.[6] What would be the result of confining an entire prison population in this way — even in the name of preserving lives? This was the pitch we made to the ESRC and HMPPS with the User Voice organisation in 2020: someone needed to collect systematic data about what was going on during this unprecedented moment inside British prisons.

Like almost every other social interaction inside prisons during this dangerous time, prison research had come to an almost complete standstill during the lockdown. Prisons could hardly become a protected bubble from the dangers of Covid if researchers and other outsiders (teachers, employers, trainers) were revolving in and out of the facilities each day spreading the virus to the captive population. The only way the virus could get into prisons, after all, was from those living on the outside. Luckily, we had a different idea for how to collect the much-needed data: we wanted to train people in prison in research methodologies and help them to conduct this research on their own. After all, who better to tell the story of the lockdown, we

4. Maruna, S., McNaull, G., & O'Neill, N. (2022). The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of the Prison. Crime and Justice, 51(1), 59-103.
5. HMIP (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons). (2021). What Happens to Prisoners in a Pandemic? London. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/02/What-happens-to-prisoners-in-a-pandemic.pdf.
6. See e.g., Haney, C. (2018). The psychological effects of solitary confinement: A systematic critique. Crime and Justice, 47, 365– 416; Shalev, S. (2011). Solitary confinement and supermax prisons: A human rights and ethical analysis. Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice, 11(2–3), 151–183.

argued, than those experiencing this isolation day to day.

In the end, User Voice and Queen's University Belfast trained a team of 99 peer researchers across 11 prisons in research ethics and data collection methodologies, and strategized with them about how best to survey their wings and landings in a manner that was systematic but also safe. This remarkable group of imprisoned leaders far exceeded any of our expectations of what could be done, returning a sample of 1600 completed surveys and interviews (with response rates surpassing the expected norms), providing a goldmine data about the experiences of those at the frontlines of the Covid lockdown.

Outside of this data collection triumph, there was of course little to celebrate in this study. The actual findings were brutally bleak with, at best, a few bright spots of hope (the installation of in-cell telephones was definitely a lifeline for many). At the same time, the results were hardly surprising. Basically, it turns out that locking tens of thousands of human beings up in solitary conditions for months on end, with no visits, no education, no work, no basic socialising with peers can be rather damaging to their mental health.

Indeed, two thirds of the survey sample agreed or strongly agreed that mental well-being had 'never been worse' in their prison, and two thirds agreed or 'strongly agreed' that 'many people in this prison are becoming desperate and losing hope'. These insider judgements were verified by two standardised measures for screening for mental health: the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and the Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) that are routinely used inside and outside of prisons in the UK and beyond. Using this validated measure, almost half (49 per cent) of the sample scored in the 'severe' depression range (15+) on the PHQ scale — nearly doubling the rate of severe depression found in a recent study that used the same measures in prisons before the Covid lockdown. Likewise, half the sample reported symptoms of an anxiety disorder (like post-traumatic stress) with 34.9 per cent scoring in the 'severe anxiety' category — again nearly doubling the rates identified in previous studies before the lockdown.[7]

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In short, the Covid lockdown helped to save lives during a hugely dangerous time, but it did so at a considerable cost to the health and well-being of the people in the care of the prisons. We argued that the mental health data from the project represented a 'ticking time bomb' putting prisoners, prison staff, and the general public at heightened risk.

Lockdown as the 'new normal'

A key focus of the research was around the process of recovery and the idea of 'building back better' after the Covid crisis passed. The prisoners we worked with, however, were far more dubious that there would ever be an end to what they were experiencing or indeed that the lockdown they were facing even had anything to do with Covid. One told us:

> *It is a high security prison, but we only ever see it going downhill. And Covid is just one of things which is almost you might say, giving them an excuse to send it even more downhill. And that's the direction it has been going in over the restrictions. We can't see a way for it going back up hill again, because we are not being given any positives in relation to workshops, education, we know they are there but the access to them is unfair, so it is not something you can get into a positive mind set about.*

In the early days of the Covid lockdown in spring 2020, interviewees said they understood that the entire world was 'all going through this together' and they welcomed the protection from the virus. However, as the world moved on, prisons seemed to stand still. One respondent told us:

> *When we first went into lockdown, there was in a strange sort of way, more clarity, because outside everyone was in lockdown. You saw*

7. Butcher, E., Packham, C., Williams, M., Miksza, J., Kaul, A., Khunti, K., & Morriss, R. (2021). Screening male prisoners for depression and anxiety with the PHQ-9 and GAD-7 at NHS Healthcheck: patterns of symptoms and caseness threshold. BMC psychiatry, 21(1), 1–11.

on TV that people were being furloughed, and not allowed to football matches, and all that was being stopped. Then there was a period of time when we were being locked up for long periods, only being allowed out in small cohorts, but we got used to that. That became a routine regime. We're not saying we liked it. … But then there came a period of time which is more recently, where it lifted for a while, and you could see outside things were being lifted — on TV, papers, radio — you could see now people are now going to football, going to chapel, doing things that are important to them. But then we are seeing the confusion almost, or how best to move out of the regime we've been in, and it seems harder now in my opinion.

Research participants generally felt that, by summer of 2021 when we were conducting our interviews, the Covid crisis was being used as an 'excuse' and that the real motivation for the lockdown was more about staff shortages or else trying to get control over the levels of violence that characterised so many British prisons prior to the Covid crisis.

A lot of the cracks in the prison are being plastered over with Covid. Before Covid started there was big problems and this is the way they hide it. They can mask all the problems around this now.

Covid is used as the excuse for everything. Once this Covid kicked in, I've never seen anything like it, no-one has ever seen anything like it in the world. I've been in jail since I was 14. The impact that Covid has had on the system is crazy. I would go so far as to say, worse than the spice epidemic in prison. Covid has had the worst effects.

They are using Covid as an excuse. It's not the disease anymore. Things have settled down with the disease, but they are still using it as an excuse to do what they wanted to do anyway.

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Participants also felt that little would change because they thought the restrictive regime 'suited' staff better:

Staff want to keep it like this. … It's an easy life now with lockdown. Unlock is getting shorter and shorter. … No one can claim to be listening to the science at this point.

It's like Covid has been a trial to see how regimes can be used in prisons and they have obviously noticed that it works better by having more lockdowns, it makes their job easier.

Now Covid has allowed them to lock our doors, that's, that's another level of control.

In particular, participants felt that younger, more inexperienced staff without any experience of the old 'normal' prison regimes lacked the skills to be able to manage a traditional prison regime:

Through Covid, a lot of staff have left, new staff have come and now they feel like they're vulnerable, cuz they aint got a clue, and so they feel like they can't contain us. They're struggling to give jobs and do things like that and that's just day to day things in the prison.

This place is a ticking time bomb because the majority of prison officers have never experienced anything outside of Covid. Situations like that there, on the top corridor, happened six or seven times a day, and they won't have a clue how to deal with them.

Our research participants were also acutely aware of rhetoric from politicians and prison leadership that there had been a 'silver lining' to the lockdown, which was that prisons were now much calmer, with reductions in the record-levels of violence experienced just before the lockdown. Interviewees worried that this outward appearance of violence reduction was being used to justify the restricted regime they continued to experience:

That's what we're worried about. There's nothing we can do about Covid but what we

are worried about is that [the lockdown] becomes the new norm…we are hearing reports that violence is down.

It's time to get control back in the jails but now they're thinking this is easy, violence is down, drug use is down, the small group that are doing that sort of stuff are people who are locked down.

*It just seems to be that they've got control back of the jail and their happy with that and f**k the impact it's had on people.*

The myth of violence reduction

The irony of this argument for violence reduction is that the people living in prisons did not feel any safer despite the lockdown. When asked to rate how the lockdown has impacted their feelings of personal safety and security, around 1 in 6 of the people in our survey said they felt safer in the lockdown. Yet, 28 per cent of survey respondents responded that the lockdown had made their safety concerns 'worse' (12 per cent) or 'much worse' (16 per cent). The most common response (given by 606 respondents) was that there had been 'no change' in terms of violence levels as a result of the lockdown.

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We also asked survey respondents whether they thought that 'Most people in prison welcomed the lockdown because it has reduced violence and bullying'. Over half of survey respondents (56 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this and only around 22 per cent agreed. Clearly, a minority of respondents do feel that the lockdown has led to improvement in personal safety, primarily because the lack of movement or human interaction meant fewer opportunities for conflict. The vast majority, however, argued that official measures of violence were not capturing what they were seeing in the prisons:

They took violence away? They haven't took violence away…They say there's no bullying? Ha, I think it [the lockdown] has made it worse…what they've created is more toxic than what it was before.

Participants reported that violence was manifesting in different ways, with prisoner-on-prisoner bullying occurring between cell-mates, or else becoming self-directed for those isolated alone.

A majority of the singles [single cells] they just bolted a bed on top [to create a double cell]. Yeah, and then they go 'Why's the violence risen?' Cos you got two men living on top of each other for 24 hours a day. They don't have a clue whether they're coming or going. You're feeding them pop and crisps, and then giving them a sausage roll for their dinner.

Interviewees reported that many of their fellow prisoners were directing their violence towards the only thing they had any control over — their cells:

We had one prisoner who smashed up his pad, he wasn't happy, because the phone wasn't working, so he smashed his pad up.

There is one fella who is probably £70,000 in debt from breaking cells.

Interviewees warned that this build-up of negative relationships between prisoners and staff could also lead to increased risk of violence being directed towards staff:

Well by the time you figure that out, 7 of your officers are off because they've got punched in the face because people are fed up, people in pain so they can't come to work — it's mad — this whole place is like a circus.

Likewise, participants commented on the impact that being locked down in prison might have on people on release:

*Can you imagine the pent-up energy of being locked up in a cell for 6 months and then getting let out and going yeah, I don't give a s**t if I go and burn a house down.*

Finally, numerous research participants suggested that there was high potential for rioting or large scale disruption inside the prisons if the lockdown continued:

This idea that violence has reduced because of the lockdown is nonsense. I mean, at first people accepted it [lockdown] because there was a sense that the country as a whole was all in it together. We were 'clapping for carers' just like everyone else. But the longer they keep people segregated, the risk of violence goes up tenfold. You get to the point where a riot is going to happen. They are making themselves a deep hole.

When things are getting properly back to normal outside, and it's getting worse in here and it stays like that, there's going to a lot of things that go wrong, a lot of rioting and that. They can only contain it for so long.

They'll end up pushing it back to the 90's where we had riots — don't look backwards, look forward.

Importantly, research participants attributed this possibility for aggression directly to the frustrations of the endless lockdown. They described how lockdown conditions 'made me feel like a zombie or an animal or not human. You get angry'. Others echoed this theme:

There is more angst and more anger about certain situations. A lot of people fighting, it may be about certain situations, but it is more about being locked up for so long and then the staff members talk to you and you snap at that staff member and things escalate, don't they?

That's why prisoners get angry with staff, they get angry about being locked up. And they say, oh prisoners get aggressive with staff — that's because they are being locked up for so long.

In this sense, participants felt that, rather than reducing violence, the continuing lockdowns and prolonged periods behind the door, were shoring up of risk of violence for when landings opened up again:

Lack of education, of exercise — hundreds of men full of testosterone willing to prove themselves — it's going to go through the roof. The outcome is going to be, when you do open the prison, we've got people we don't know with other issues from outside and different blocks and wings and it's just going to be madness. Violence is going to happen.

In short, the continuing restricted environment made men feel they had nothing to lose:

*You can only supress people for so long before you get a reaction and with mental health deteriorating the way it is, you act more reckless, and you think f**k.*

What do you think locking people up for hours and hours is going to do to people when they are let out? They have a lot of angst in them, it's no good for anybody full stop being locked up for that amount of time. Locking people up its only going to anger people more — it's a vicious circle. Lock-ups and then there's fighting, lockups and then there's fighting; it's non-stop.

What hope for making good?

Hopefully, not all of these predictions will come to fruition. Interviewees would likely be the first to admit that the bleak vantage point of 2021 was probably not the best place to make rational risk calculations about the future of the prisons. The anger and frustration that all prisoners were experiencing during this time surely seeped its way into our research findings, driving some of the bleaker assessments.

I will say, however, that the research participants turned out to be exactly right about the lockdown continuing long after Covid was under control. They also appear to have been right about predictions of rising self-harm and violence across the prisons. As we learned when doing our research, people in prison have a unique vantage point that often those of us on the outside cannot see. In other words, if the Government wants to ignore our 'Coping with Covid' research findings, that is fine. Yet, ignoring the warnings of people inside — especially at such a difficult time in the history of the prison service — strikes me as exceedingly risky.

Changing culture: Stories not statistics of a movement not a mandate.

Gareth Sands *joined HMPPS as a Prison Officer in 1997 and has governed / directed six prisons across two jurisdictions in the public and private sectors. He is currently the Governing Governor at HMP Full Sutton.*

'Culture is like the wind. It is invisible, yet its effect can be seen and felt. When it is blowing in your direction, it makes for smooth sailing. When it is blowing against you, everything is more difficult.'[1]

Cultures and prisons

I have had the enormous privilege of having governed or directed six prisons in two jurisdictions in the public sector and the private sectors. Each of these prisons had, and still has, unique cultures and subcultures and each presented quite different challenges around an approach to culture and change. You will quickly see that this isn't an academic paper but is instead a record of a recent Perrie Lecture and a practical overview and insight into what has worked and hasn't worked for me in trying to shape and change cultures in prisons. Culture change is difficult territory to navigate through. Regardless, I aim to explain what culture means to me and outline a few methods and practical steps for attempting to tackle the issue of multiple cultures, all existing and evolving concurrently in a single establishment, sometimes working towards a single goal but often not.

Ever-changing subcultures

Prisons are not simply one homogenous culture but are instead made up of a series of ever-changing subcultures which feed into, and draw out of, the overall culture. For example, there is a Senior Management Team culture, an A wing culture, a catering department culture, a dog section culture, and a psychology department culture, to name but a few. The complexities around culture and prisons are significant, and my quite simple approach has been to drive and motivate the team to work incredibly to sow seeds of positive change and deliver tangible progress to make a difference and create a norm around momentum and incremental improvement.

Culture change takes time

Whilst obvious to most, culture change in prisons takes time, often years, before an establishment fulfils its potential in terms of culture. However, continuously sowing the seeds of change remains essential, as does succession planning at a senior and middle management level in terms of passing on the baton, the baton being the ethos, the principles, the cultural norms, and the standards.

The baton passing sees successive leaders and leadership teams inheriting cultures, to take them to the next phase of their evolution and then passing them on. This paper includes multiple lists which deliberately aim to highlight the scale, pace, volume, and variety of changes, projects, approaches, and improvements required to tackle culture and create momentum. The 'lists' are followed with a question of 'so what?' in an attempt to communicate the reason and the value of action or approach.

History and inheritance

The context and condition of the prison that a Governor inherits in terms of history, performance (past and present), team, resource, and investment determines how one tackles the culture challenges faced. For example, I have personally found that a poor performing prison in, or bordering on, special measures requires an extraordinary amount of effort to prevent it from slipping backwards before tangible improvements can be achieved around culture and performance.[2] I have also found that a significant, yet different effort and energy is required to 'wake-up' and reignite a prison where performance and culture might be good but where complacency and stagnation might exist alongside a lack of energy, urgency, or desire to improve. A creative and more nuanced approach is necessary where there is no additional resource available as opposed to a 'blank cheque' rescue or

1. Walker, B., & Soule, S. A. (2017). Changing Company Culture Requires a Movement, Not a Mandate. Harvard Business Review.
2. 'Special measures' was an HMPPS process activated when a prison is assessed as needing additional specialist support to improve to an acceptable level. In 2019 this was replaced by the 'Prison Performance Support Programme'.

prison 'downsize and reinvest' situation. There is also careful handling needed in a prison, and sometimes a senior team, which has witnessed significant trauma, discord, or burnout. This is difficult as the need for improvement and change in performance and culture sits alongside a need for care, kindness, compassion, as well as a clear communication of intentions of a shared vision.

Predecessors and organisational memory

In taking up new roles, I have tried to understand and respect who and what has gone before me to appreciate the history and circumstances the best I could to inform the future challenges faced. Unpacking the past by stepping back to appreciate the historical context is important. I have found that connecting with predecessors wherever possible or appropriate to understand past decision-making and cultural issues is incredibly helpful and provides invaluable intelligence and insight into the role. I enjoy acknowledging and referencing predecessors to encourage an appreciation of the continuous nature of prison cultures and a collegiate, joined-up, and continuous improvement approach. This allows for the rich organisational memory to retain value where it might otherwise be distorted or lost.

A personal 'rogue' measure of improvement: 2 years = improvement of 1

In terms of my journey as a Prison Governor and Prison Director, I have listed the establishments and dates of tenure below (Table 1) and included my own personal score of the prison from a culture, performance, and potential perspective. I believe it takes a leader around two years to deliver and embed incremental improvements of '1' on a 'scale' of 1-10. This is not intended to be a rogue rating system but is instead a personal score and rating which reflects my opinion and experience of what I regard as marginal gains in culture change and performance improvement against overall potential. I have focused on the establishments listed for the simple fact that these are ones which were inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) during my tenure, which in turn gives me a certain level of 'ownership' of the personal assessment.

I have listed some of the work undertaken to address performance, culture, and subculture issues, and have provided a particular focus on HMP/YOI New Hall from a 15-year longitudinal and improvement perspective, again from my perspective without wider consultation and with reference to HMIP reports. I will also share some stories from HMP Lowdham Grange during a period of significant expansion and at the half-way point of a 25-year contract where the importation of large numbers of long-term prisoners presented new risks. I will also touch on the resistance and forces at work at Mt Eden Corrections Facility (MECF) in Auckland, New Zealand, to highlight the value of looking backwards to draw learning and understanding around culture, whilst also stressing the importance of a strategic and future focused approach in shaping culture.

HMP/YOI New Hall, 2007-2009

In describing my experience of New Hall, I wanted to share my journey from 2/10 to 3/10 in terms of what 2/10 looks like, how the cultures and subcultures impact, what the financial and performance related issues were, how the services for women were, and what the overall conditions were like, before listing what action was taken. Therefore, this section looks across a 15-year period, presents edited HMIP headlines and suggests several golden threads of changes and improvements made and how a culture shifts over time.

Table 1. *Establishments, dates of tenure, inspection dates and improvement gain*

Establishment	Period of tenure	HMIP inspection	Improvement gain
HMP/YOI New Hall	2007-2009	2008	2/10 to 3/10
HMP/YOI Askham Grange	2008 (clustered)	NA	No change
HMP Lowdham Grange	2009-2013	2011	5/10 to 7/10
Mt Eden Corrections Facility	2013-2016	NA	5/10 to 7/10
HMP Hewell / HMP Hewell Grange	2017-2019	NA	2/10 to 3/10
HMP Full Sutton	2019-present	2020	5/10 to 7/10

My personal rating of New Hall in 2007 was 2/10. Firstly, it was important to prevent further decline and slippage to 1/10 before building back on some solid foundations. In terms of inheritance, I found New Hall to have an overall toxic culture alongside a reputation of protracted poor performance over several years, and with staff struggling with recent self-inflicted deaths of colleagues and prisoners. The prison was unsafe, we had a national high sick absence rate, a poor previous HMIP report, a £1.2 million forecasted overspend at the halfway point of the financial year, and an embedded a culture of acceptance around constant observations,[3] dilapidated buildings, and poor living conditions. The regime was chaotic and unpredictable, and the staff appeared to be gripped by a feeling of learned helplessness, easily swayed by an influential trade union, and underpinned by a stark staff-management divide. Once again, this was my experience as Governor, a description which bears no resemblance to the high performing prison New Hall is today.

I had to urgently work through multiple outstanding grievances against one of the senior leaders, some genuine and others malicious, and was required to review multiple cases of inappropriate use of force concerning several colleagues. The children and family services and facilities were stark, several staff were suspended, and several pending disciplinary hearings needed urgently administering. Access routes to substance misuse support and counselling services were wholly inadequate, and we continued to receive extremely late out of area receptions throughout the week,[4] and on Fridays in particular, as women's prisons locked out from south to north.[5] I found a large section of the workforce to be anti-management and, along with the local trade unions, were vocal about their opinions and clear about 'how things are done around here'. There was a real confidence and swagger amongst sections of the workforce, reinforced by the influence they had inflicted on the performance and culture of the prison.

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Personally, I needed to demonstrate some operating principles and communicate how we would introduce, deliver, and embed an agenda of legitimacy, procedural justice, truth, transparency, decency, optimism, challenge, conviction, and creativity. This wasn't easy. I wanted us to create a prison which was safe, consultative, nimble, progressive, proactive, and innovative and one which was both staff- and prisoner-focused. There was no honeymoon period nor a first 100-day window to assess what was needed. We were bleeding resource and needed rapid action to prevent any further deaths. To achieve this, we needed to support and challenge sections of the workforce back to work, prevent a declining performance, address the significant overspend, and to manage the anti-management agenda which had gathered momentum.

Culture movements in any organisation often start with emotion. Despite my initial feelings of anger and frustration, I also experienced a strong sense of enthusiasm and optimism as I sensed that we needed to provide a voice for the prison, for the staff, and for the women and the girls, and that we also needed communicate a positive vision and a path forward that was within our gift to deliver. New Hall was on the map for the wrong reasons, we had no additional resource and there was no established Women's Directorate as we know it today. I urgently needed to get the management team on board and create a small group of ambassadors who were prepared to work hard to secure several wins, which would in turn demonstrate some level of efficacy, hope, and momentum. The early months were hard, desperate, and lonely at times. I did not have a blueprint and I was learning quickly. However, a small movement had started to gather momentum in the early months as several Senior Management Team (SMT) ambassadors stepped up, as did some wonderful Custodial Managers, all serving as culture carriers as we moved ahead.

The first year felt like a battle ground. The issues and challenges felt relentless but overall, we were committed to turning the tide. There were threats of a 'no confidence vote', some significant resistance and multiple unofficial staff meetings popping up throughout the months to discuss and debate the latest changes. Against this backdrop and context, we started to create a movement and shape a culture and we took many practical steps, both big and small, and hit the multiple issues hard. Some of the practical steps are outlined below in Table 2.

3. Used when a prisoner is at high risk of imminently harming themselves.
4. People being received into the prison from geographical areas far away from the prison.
5. This means that the prisons were at capacity and unable to take anyone else.

Table 2. *HMP/YOI New Hall 2007-2009: Practical steps (to create a movement) and related stories*

- ❏ A meeting with the POA to challenge and correct their view and statement that they were 'running the prison'.
- ❏ Mobile morning meetings introduced, visiting different areas of the prison each day of the week.
- ❏ Meetings became proactive and used as coaching opportunities.
- ❏ Funding for a brand-new reception building secured.
- ❏ All of the women and girls asked to list 10 suggestions to make life at New Hall better and then acting on most of these.
- ❏ Issuing 400 new quality duvets, pillows, and appropriate covers to replace blankets and poor bedding.
- ❏ Challenge reckless decision-making of the Psychiatrist in placing women on constant observations unnecessarily.
- ❏ Demanding recommissioning of Mental Health Services outside the commissioning cycle (and succeeding).
- ❏ Constant observations approvals sat only with the Governor for the first few months.
- ❏ Located in Dial Wood, naming all units after trees: Mother and Baby Unit changed to Maple House, Segregation to Sycamore House, Healthcare to Holly House and so on.
- ❏ Transformed Sycamore House (Segregation Unit) through team rotation, increased support services, introduction of library and therapeutic room, repainting and recarpeting, and reduction of the roll from full capacity to one.
- ❏ Carpeted and softened the Lifer wing, creating a quieter living space with modern furniture and fish tanks.
- ❏ Drove the punctuality of the regime and challenged a culture of complacency and slippage.
- ❏ Removed and replaced the Deputy Governor and recruited a new Head of Residence through open and fair competition.
- ❏ Dismissed several staff for inappropriate use of force, unprofessional conduct, and poor attendance.
- ❏ Introduced Telemedicine and promoted it as a default option, reducing the need for women to attend hospital handcuffed.
- ❏ Introduced regular Full Staff Meetings and Governor's address including sharing the vision, priorities, reward, and recognition.
- ❏ Gripped the budget, applied self-help principles, and sought creative sponsorship and investment solutions.
- ❏ Painted the visits hall, fitted new carpets, recovered the chairs, and improved facilities for children.
- ❏ Drove sick absence down through support and challenge, home visits, wellbeing support, and robust challenge.
- ❏ Modernised Maple House (Mother and Baby Unit).
- ❏ Drove the Staff Survey and achieved a 95 per cent completion (second highest in HMPPS).
- ❏ Addressed cases of significant land creep by residents living nearby who had expanded their properties onto Crown land.
- ❏ Held a 'colleagues and partners celebration event', 100 colleagues and partners attending but many boycotting the event.
- ❏ Held a second 'celebration event' months later which sold out within days and with 250 attending.
- ❏ Employed a driver to safely take the women to release addresses and protect them from exploitative males waiting nearby.
- ❏ Involved the local media in positive stories about the prison and promoted the work and recruitment of volunteers.
- ❏ Introduced movie and concert nights, inviting popular singers such as Kate Rusby and Foy Vance to perform.
- ❏ Clustered with Askham Grange and improved avenues for movement from closed to open conditions for the women.
- ❏ Engaged architects to scope out an open site in the grounds next door to support closeness to home and employment.
- ❏ Increased the use of ROTL including local employment at the National Mining Museum and to attend a Regional Dance School
- ❏ Other projects, initiatives. and changes.

Table 3. *Extracts from the November 2008 Inspection report by Chief Inspector Anne Owers*

- ❏ New Hall is a busy, complicated establishment holding a needy and challenging population.
- ❏ It is commendable that this full announced inspection found a reasonably safe and purposeful prison, beginning to focus on resettlement.
- ❏ Admission arrangements were satisfactory, with good support for those with substance abuse issues.
- ❏ Reception remained a poor facility.
- ❏ Relatively little use of force, segregation, or special accommodation.
- ❏ Chaplaincy was well integrated into the life of the prison.
- ❏ Healthcare was generally satisfactory.
- ❏ Mother and Baby Unit was bright and well resourced.
- ❏ Time out of cell was reasonable.
- ❏ Quality and quantity of education was satisfactory.
- ❏ Work and skills provision was sufficient and access to the library and gym was reasonable.
- ❏ Substance abuse services needed further development.
- ❏ Managers have to deal with a wide array of risks and needs among a diverse and complex population. Commendably, the prison had risen to some of these challenges.
- ❏ The prison provided a generally safe environment, with a reasonable amount of purposeful activity and an increased focus on resettlement.
- ❏ There remained much still to do.

So what? What difference did this make? What were the big hitters?

On their own, individual actions can make a small difference but combined, these multiple actions gave us tangible delivery, demonstrated raised standards, provided important messaging, and showed that change was possible. As I reflect back on this time, the 'big hitters' as such were; demanding and securing the recommissioning of Mental Health Services to offer adequate services and meet the significant need: building a new reception to replace the existing and woeful one; issuing duvets in order to improve sleep patterns and in turn engagement and wellbeing levels; increased visibility of managers across all parts of the prison so that standards could be discussed and addressed; staff celebrations which created a sense of community, pride and fun; the renaming of units as a cheap, soft, and impactful change; and breaking the cycle of constant observations to move away from a culture of dependency to one of multi-disciplinary, bespoke, and individualised care and support whilst addressing trauma and emotional and addiction issues.

Further big hitters including rebalancing the influence of the trade unions to give confidence back to managers, the launch of full staff meetings as symbolic opportunities for messaging around culture and standards, the improvement of access to services for betterment and repair of the physical environment, embedding regime punctuality to reflect procedural justice, and transforming the segregation unit into a safe and decent environment as a barometer for the prison. There was lots going on at once, but the tide turned, the range of changes show a relentless approach and commitment, there was an acceptance that self-starting was necessary in that no external parties were going to rescue us, and we knew that we needed to pull together as a team. We were able to leverage the momentum, stop the decline and begin a movement which normalised change, energy, and pace, and create a living and working environment which was better for all. We were starting at a low point and, despite what we'd done, there was still much to do. However, the first test came in the form of HMIP in 2008.

So what did HMIP say a year on?

Extracts from the HMP/YOI New Hall HMIP executive summary are below in Table 3:

By 2009, and a year after HMIP, we had seen the toxic culture fade further still, we had stopped the rot, had seen the recommissioning of Mental Health Services, and had ensured that there were no self-inflicted deaths during the past two-year period. We had significantly reduced levels of self-harm, improved consultation and communication throughout the prison, begun to build the new reception building, and had improved living conditions and overall levels of cleanliness. We had brought the budget under control and instilled an air of positivity, fun and pride in New Hall. A movement towards something much better had begun and, in terms of my own personal rating, we had moved from 2/10 to a solid 3/10, a position and marking which, whilst still short of the potential for the prison, was an incredibly proud position.

In stepping back for a moment, one can liken the journey of a prison to a tapestry where the tangles, threads and knots beneath the surface are representative of the detail and stories of the mess, successes, failures, setbacks, and hard work undertaken which sit behind this but of which much is unknown, unseen or forgotten. The image below shows the tangled web of knots which sits behind the golden crown.

Figure 1. 15-years of New Hall (2007-2022): Change, Tapestry and Golden Threads of Continuous Improvement

As I touch on the 2012, 2015, 2019, and 2022 HMIP reports below (Table 4),[6] I do so sensitively and respectfully, acknowledging that each report, as with every passing year, has its stories of outstanding leadership and hard work sitting behind them. As an overview, my attempt is to highlight the extraordinary efforts and skills of the leaders and colleagues at New Hall who have, according to HMIP, shifted and embedded an impressive and positive culture in subsequent and recent years to my involvement, each year becoming better than the last. The following HMIP extracts show that change takes time, that incremental improvements matter, that there is always hope and potential in any prison and that 'Golden Threads' of care, compassion, conditions, mental health services, good leadership, and safety are evident throughout these reports, each one building on the last.

Table 4. *Extracts from HMIP reports on HMP/YOI New Hall between 2012-2022*

January 2012 (Chief Inspector Nick Hardwick, Acting Governor Nigel Hirst)

- ❏ This inspection found that considerable improvement had taken place.
- ❏ The women felt much safer and treated with respect.
- ❏ Much better reception procedures and a more welcoming environment.
- ❏ Now good mental health provision and better drug treatment.
- ❏ Drug treatment systems responded effectively to need.
- ❏ Improvements all contributed to a significant reduction in self-harm.
- ❏ Reduced numbers of women on suicide and self-harm procedures since the last inspection.
- ❏ Senior officers had led a major drive to improve staff-prisoner relationships.
- ❏ External environment was generally clean and tidy.
- ❏ Mother and baby unit was an excellent facility.
- ❏ Effective help given to return to the community without reoffending.
- ❏ Overall, New Hall has improved, and most women are held safely and respectfully.

June 2015 (Chief Inspector Nick Hardwick, Governor Diane Pellow)

- ❏ Improved still further.
- ❏ Ofsted unusually rated it 'outstanding'.
- ❏ Support for women with complex needs was good.
- ❏ Support for women with substance misuse issues had moved forward.

6 Full HMIP inspection reports can be accessed via: https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspections/

- ❏ Relationships between staff and prisoners were a real strength.
- ❏ Clean, decent and had benefited from a great deal of effort to improve the overall presentation of many areas.
- ❏ Mother and baby unit provided excellent support.
- ❏ Health services were particularly strong.
- ❏ Excellent mental health provision.
- ❏ Provision for women who had been abused or victimised was very good.
- ❏ New Hall is a safe and very respectful prison.
- ❏ Excellent range of purposeful and vocationally based activities.
- ❏ Among the best of its type and we commend staff and management for the positive work they have done to achieve these outcomes.

April 2019 (Chief Inspector Peter Clarke, Governor Natalie McKee)

- ❏ Most prisoners felt safe.
- ❏ Three self-inflicted deaths since we last inspected.
- ❏ Those with complex needs received good oversight and case management.
- ❏ Segregation unit was a clean but austere facility with a basic regime.
- ❏ Environment in the prison was good.
- ❏ Quality of accommodation was variable but reasonable overall.
- ❏ The mother and baby unit was excellent.
- ❏ Health care was similarly good but mental health provision was undermined by staff shortages.
- ❏ Prisoners experienced good time out of their cells.
- ❏ Provision of learning, skills and work was improving.
- ❏ Coordination of resettlement work had improved greatly.
- ❏ Offender management was clearly focused on risk reduction.
- ❏ New Hall New Hall remains a good prison, delivering effective outcomes for those held there.

November 2022 (Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor, Governor Julia Spence)

- ❏ Overwhelmingly safe and respectful place.
- ❏ Very well led by a governor who knew her prison well.
- ❏ At the heart of the governor's leadership approach was a commitment to prioritising key work.
- ❏ This is a good report about a capable prison.
- ❏ Attendance was too low because other activities clashed.
- ❏ There was too little support to help women maintain or rebuild relationships with their children and families.
- ❏ Use of body-worn video cameras was too limited, hampering assurance processes for the use of force.
- ❏ Public protection arrangements had a number of weaknesses, and some risks were not managed well.

Year on year marginal gains and sowing the seeds of change

In summary, each year will see lists of what Governors and their teams have delivered and maintained in order to protect the prison from any slippage and to drive it further forwards. A positive culture and subcultures are critical in achieving this and, as previously mentioned, golden threads of continuous improvement, care, compassion, culture change, and consistency are evident in the findings above, all which serve the prison well in terms of safety and security and, importantly, have become normalised over time as leaders and their teams continue to sow the seeds of change for future years.

HMP Lowdham Grange, 2009-2013

The culture challenge at Lowdham Grange I found to be very different to that at New Hall. The prison was performing reasonably well and there was a decent level of confidence in the contract and its delivery. However, I found that the performance, assurance levels, and culture were dipping and stagnating in parts, that a culture of complacency had crept in, that there was untapped potential and missed opportunities, and that several contractual and commercial risks and issues were becoming apparent.[7] At the time we were at the midway point of a 25-year contract and were also about to expand with the opening of a new houseblock and the preparing for the influx of a new and

7 HMP Lowdham Grange is a privately managed prison by Sodexo.

challenging population. My personal assessment of the prison was that we were operating at around 5 out of 10 in terms of culture and performance and I was encouraged that the team was energetic, responsive, and positive, and that there was little resistance to the work we did to challenge, shake, and shift the prison for its next phase and stage.

What was striking was the lack of voice of the workforce and the absence of a trade union presence, one of the many issues we needed to work through. There were also some individual HR issues which needed urgently addressing, including reviewing staff suspensions, and looking at some individual performance management matters. Finally, I had an inclination that the contract itself required some attention and, in partnership with our Commercial Assistant Director, commenced a 'page turning exercise' which gave a line-by-line analysis of the contract, looking for signs of commercial inaccuracies and 'contract creep' where we could review if we were under- or over-delivering. There was also the opportunity to draw from a Prisoner Amenities Fund which had grown over recent years due to a small percentage of the in-cell telephony spends being put back into the fund to be used for the greater good. This presented an opportunity to both improve the prison and fulfil the commercial requirements from the centre. In summary, we worked through a range of issues and actions over a 36-month period. The first of the actions listed are below (Table 5) which were taken forwards in the first few months to help shape expectations, create momentum, and reshape the culture.

Table 5. *HMP Lowdham Grange: 2009-2013: Stories of Early Actions around a Movement and Culture Change*

- ❏ Lifted inappropriate suspensions on key (including senior) staff.
- ❏ Encouraged increased trade union membership, presence, voice, engagement, and 'teeth'.
- ❏ Held multiple 'listen to improve' sessions (staff, prisoners, and visitors).
- ❏ Utilised a significant and untapped 'Prisoner Amenities Fund' to invest in facilities for prisoners and activities for staff and prisoners.
- ❏ Ceased weekly mid-afternoon SMT local pub catch-up sessions.
- ❏ Created stunning staff memorial garden and fountain.
- ❏ Moved to 'non-smoking' site for staff prior to legislation and removed the staff and SMT smoking culture.
- ❏ Addressed daily systemic reporting and acceptance of 'incorrect roll-checks'.
- ❏ Completed contract page turning exercise to address invoice inaccuracy and under-charging.
- ❏ Created prisoner-run Call Centre for frequently asked questions, support, and advice.
- ❏ Improved staff retention levels including improved terms and conditions for staff linked to increased invoicing through contract review.
- ❏ Commenced radical accommodation review of staff and prisoner areas and facilities.
- ❏ Improved signage throughout the prison and made reception more welcoming.
- ❏ Created futureproof OMU, Psychology and Business Unit open plan hub working areas.
- ❏ Introduced two additional segregation unit exercise yards linked to decency, wellbeing and progressive behaviour.
- ❏ Introduced regular full staff briefings and shared priorities and successes.
- ❏ Drove a reward and recognition agenda and awarded 'Lowdie Lion' soft toys to staff for good work.
- ❏ Refurbished the visits hall and replaced chairs and carpets.
- ❏ Designed and opened an outside children's playground with a slide, swings, roundabout and rabbits and guinea pigs.
- ❏ Launched a 'You Said, We Did' campaign which HMPPS later replicated as good practice.
- ❏ Achieved 92 per cent staff survey completion.
- ❏ Held concerts for staff and prisoners by artists such as Michael Kiwanuka and Foy Vance.
- ❏ Commissioned the 'Beyond This' 20x12 Cultural Olympiad music and recording with acclaimed composer Mark-Anthony Turnage.
- ❏ Heavily subsidised staff diner meals.
- ❏ Launched a prisoner led call centre and maximised in-cell telephony.
- ❏ Held half-day staff and prisoner 'cooking together' relationship building events in the main kitchen.
- ❏ Held staff and partner / family celebration events.
- ❏ Held healthy relationship-building courses for men and their life-partners including learning, listening, and eating together.

So what? Why was any of this important? What were the 'big hitters'?

My reflections of this are that the prison was in a good position and that it was doing everything required of it. However, I felt that there was much more we were capable of doing and delivering, and that without a culture shift, we were at risk of regressing. This early approach allowed us to inject a sense of urgency, to move quickly, to raise the bar, to set some new standards and expectations, and create a movement and momentum around staff voice and requesting more in terms of engagement and decency, all with a view to making HMP Lowdham Grange the best it could be and creating a workplace of choice for the staff. In terms of the 'big hitters' as such, the staff and prisoner accommodation reconfigurations, changes, and investments were significant. The introduction of a children's playground sent a message around decency and normalised visits sessions, adding significant quality to the visits experience. Running relationship courses for the men and their life partners was powerful, as was holding high impact and energetic full staff meetings for recognition and communication. Furthermore, holding concerts with high quality musicians was also good, and provided an opportunity for creativity, escapism, and normalisation. Another 'big hitter' included the contract 'page turning exercise' which saw the correction of the charging system and the generating of increased revenue for investment, including improved terms and conditions for staff. Finally, the building of a memorial garden and the launch of a prisoner-led call centre combined with the rest to create a culture of change, momentum, 'voice', investment, pride, energy, control, and confidence.

Aside from the contract performance reviews, the first significant test was HMIP in 2011, two years after some of the changes had taken place. So what did HMIP say (see Table 6)?

Table 6. *Extracts from the 2011 Inspection report by Chief Inspector Nick Hardwick*

- ❏ Previously commended the prison and it is pleasing to do so again.
- ❏ All the more creditable because although the prison had expanded significantly and taken a large number of potentially challenging prisoners.
- ❏ Impressively safe and decent place, with plenty of activity and a sound focus on resettlement.
- ❏ Despite a growing population of serious offenders, prisoners reported feeling safe at Lowdham Grange.
- ❏ Security was effective and proportionate use of force had declined and drugs were less of a problem than at many similar jails.
- ❏ Staff prisoner relationships were good, supported by an improving personal officer scheme.
- ❏ Staff appeared more confident and settled, and the level of turnover had fallen significantly.
- ❏ Accommodation was generally excellent, particularly the newest wings.
- ❏ Prisoners spent plenty of time out of cell.
- ❏ There was enough work and education, but there was scope to improve quality and some waiting lists were too long.
- ❏ Overall, there was too little vocational activity for a training prison, although what there was offered impressive and marketable skills.
- ❏ PE provision was very good.
- ❏ Resettlement had improved.
- ❏ It is commendable that Lowdham Grange continues to improve, develop and innovate. It has done so despite a significant growth in population and an increase in the numbers of potentially very challenging prisoners.
- ❏ Overall, this inspection found Lowdham Grange to be not only a safe and decent place, but also among the most impressive category B training prisons in the system.

This was a deeply satisfying time in terms of expanding the prison, improving the performance, establishing Lowdham Grange as a workplace of choice, and being recorded as 'not only a safe and decent place, but also among the most impressive category B training prisons in the system'.

Mt Eden Corrections Facility (MECF), Auckland, New Zealand, 2013-2016

The culture challenges I experienced whilst at MECF in Auckland, New Zealand were extraordinary and complex. The time included working with an outstanding SMT, topping the New Zealand prison performance table for over two years, driving an agenda of innovation, and operating under intense political and media scrutiny as the only private prison in the country, under a demanding and highly punitive contract. There was a concerted effort from multiple angles to disrupt, frustrate, and discredit the contract and to ultimately return it to public sector hands. Handling this meant working with a multitude of

cultures and subcultures against the backdrop of significant pace, prisoner churn, and volume of issues. We were proactive, had operational grip, committed to partnership working, innovated, delivered to a high level, and managed a diverse and largely resistant former public sector staff group. We responded to an ongoing national prison population crisis as the country's biggest remand centre, handled approximately 800 reception movements each week, worked through multiple staff corruption cases, and handled issues around competence, collusion, and corruption amongst key stakeholders in an aggressive anti-private sector campaign.

Political context

One lasting memory is of a day I spent with former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, then a List MP,[8] as we toured the prison together. Despite her relatively positive experience of the prison, and her reluctance to agree that she had felt safe throughout her visit, we debated private sector involvement in New Zealand prisons and the fact that her Labour ideologies would not allow her to shift her opinion that the prison should be back in public sector hands. After several hours together, Jacinda left the prison to meet a waiting media and reported on unsafe staffing levels, repeating a line which the trade unions had used for months. A year later, significant media coverage reported on leaked mobile phone footage of several cases of in-cell fighting, an incident which went on to become the second biggest national media story in the country of 2015. The prison dominated the media for days and it seemed as though everyone wanted to have their say on private prisons, sharing their apparent shock concerning fighting in prisons. As context, New Zealand has one of the highest incarceration rates per capita in the western world, second only to the USA, and as a private prison MECF provided an easy distraction from a wider and much more difficult topic. There were no safe spaces for me as Prison Director, there were no clear staff ambassadors outside of the SMT, the wave of resistance to the prison sustaining its success was palatable, and the leaked footage was shared with the media whilst I was overseas and unable to respond in person. The commissioning and governance around the investigation into the incident was questionable with often-used phrases such as 'fix it' in response to isolated incidents against a backdrop of longstanding systemic failings which were never addressed. This time was operationally and culturally rich and demanding, and the leadership team were truly remarkable in terms of their integrity, energy, commitment, cohesion, and work ethic.

So what? What's the relevance to culture and change? When can culture change be impossible to achieve?

The cultural and performance challenges of this time were complex, wide, deep and, despite MECF leading the prison performance table for two consecutive years, culture change was arguably impossible given the scale of resistance from so many parties to make the necessary changes. We had moved a quarter of our workforce to the, soon to open, nearby private prison in line with their contractual requirement for an experienced workforce. Given the enormous potential of the new prison in terms of build, innovation, and contract, its imminent opening would have seen 25 per cent of the New Zealand prison population held in two private prisons with both having the potential to be high performing. From an ideological perspective, the opposition party (then Labour), trade unions, customer (Department of Corrections), and media would have found this position and private sector presence difficult to accept. Therefore, within days of the new prison opening, MECF was taken back into public sector hands through a 'step-in' process because of in-cell fighting, incidents of which were known and prevalent at numerous other prisons across the country. The complexities and issues relating to this extraordinary time are not for this paper but suffice to say that culture change within this prison and within this jurisdiction was impossible to achieve.

Handling this meant working with a multitude of cultures and subcultures against the backdrop of significant pace, prisoner churn, and volume of issues.

Prisons: looking backwards and moving forwards

Despite the extraordinary challenges, and in assessing prison and culture change, I am reminded of Māori proverb Ka mua, ka muri which expresses a simple image of a person walking backwards into the

8. A list MP is someone who has been elected from a political party's 'party list'.

future with the past clearly visible, whereas the future is not. This proverb talks of us as having imperfect information for the road ahead, but that this is a natural situation. This proverb speaks to Māori perspectives of time, where the past, the present, and the future are intertwined, with life viewed as a continuous cosmic process. Within this process, time has no restrictions in that it is both past and present. From a Western perspective, the past tends to be behind, and our goals and aspirations relate to the future, which is ahead. However, from a Māori perspective, the opposite is true in that the past and the present are knowable and so sit at the forefront of human consciousness. The proverb suggests that the future cannot be seen and is therefore conceived of as behind, and that the individual is conceptualised as travelling backwards in time to the future, with the present unfolding in front as a continuum into the past.

In terms of prisons, this conceptualisation of time does not leave the past history behind, but rather holds it at the forefront of future thinking, drawing strength from carrying its past into the future. The proverb talks of ancestors, therefore predecessors of all grades, as being ever present, existing within the spiritual realm and in the physical, alongside the living as well as within the living. This proverb resonated with me in viewing the continuity of the journey of prisons, their individual stories never ending, with future potential needing to draw from the past to better inform and fulfil future potential.

In terms of prisons, this conceptualisation of time does not leave the past history behind, but rather holds it at the forefront of future thinking, drawing strength from carrying its past into the future.

So what? Why was this important? What difference did it make?

This was an interesting chapter in the story and life of MECF as it showed what was possible against the odds. The standout achievements were the sustained high performance despite significant strains and imperfections, the delivery of a more open regime than was expected, the holding of full staff meetings which celebrated through song and stories, and the opening of the Puna Wānanga, a spiritual centre and chaplaincy space in a 1,000-bed prison where there previously wasn't one. Facilitating 600 men to vote whilst in custody was another highlight, as was engaging with Auckland Bird Rescue and seeing the men on the Case, Support, and Integration (CSI) unit care for the birds and nurse them in readiness for release to the wild. I was proud of our ability to exit long-serving corrupt staff who had operated in this environment undetected and unchallenged for years. A further highlight was navigating through the complex aftermath of a high-profile step-in and presenting a more accurate version of events to senior public servants and shining a light on the impact of systemic failings. This chapter also reminds me that resistant cultures are powerful and can remain or return at any time, that some parties prefer the cultures and subcultures they know, and that there is sometimes political resistance to change due to more strategic and wider ramifications around raised expectations and efficiencies in other establishments. Overall, this chapter briefly touches on a deeper side to public services in New Zealand in terms of truth, transparency, and integrity, but also shows that success and setbacks can often operate side by side.

HMP Full Sutton, 2019-present

My journey through culture and change in prisons brings me to HMP Full Sutton and some of the culture challenges which were different again. Full Sutton is a solid operation which performs well overall, and which has a culture which is generally harmonious and good. However, I am reminded about the risk of complacency, of the need for change, of both the strengths and vulnerabilities of a good, solid, and largely static SMT, and of the risk and opportunities a significant influx of new staff poses. In working hard to create and drive a culture of continuous improvement, the approach is that of 'good to great' and a desire to be the 'best in class', and where appropriate change is instilled, and innovation is normalised. There has been much done to further shape the culture and to future-proof the prison considering significant changes in the workforce. However, there is still much to do in terms of culture and subcultures, the size and variety of the staff group presenting wider challenges and opportunities. In terms of some of the changes, messaging and challenges, table 7 below provides a few examples as a flavour.

Table 7. *HMP Full Sutton: Culture, changes, and 'good to great'.*

- ❏ Launched improved core days (2020 and 2023) with a 2025 version planned.
- ❏ Created improved Segregation Unit conditions, regime, colour scheme, communication, signage, and facilities (including a new healthcare suite).
- ❏ Refurbished Central Detail building to create a new Staff Centre (through sponsorship).
- ❏ Designed a staff memorial garden.
- ❏ Created Business Change agenda and lead.
- ❏ Created new People Hub accommodation (more central and open plan working).
- ❏ Fitted quality signage throughout.
- ❏ Realigned SMT accommodation (to meet business needs).
- ❏ Provided year-round access to daylight hours exercise.
- ❏ Refurbished Education Department and rebranded it The College.
- ❏ Closed library and moved to The College complex.
- ❏ Converted old library to create a Community Centre.
- ❏ Introduced mobile morning meetings then moved to blended Visits Hall and Teams morning meetings (all minuted).
- ❏ Embedded diverse promotion board membership (message of fairness).
- ❏ Focused on the top 10 most vulnerable prisoners.
- ❏ Opened Café Portal (coffee cards sold to staff and prisoners and gifted as a 'thank you').
- ❏ Designed new 'Full Sutton: Safe for All' logo.
- ❏ Displayed prisoner artwork in the corridors (inspired by HMP Holme House).
- ❏ Refurbished staff mess and renamed it The Halifax (site of a former Halifax Bomber airfield).
- ❏ Delivered improvements to staff areas throughout the prison.
- ❏ Introduced 'meet and greet' events to communicate key messages to staff.
- ❏ Published annual events calendar.
- ❏ Refurbished and modernised gymnasium.
- ❏ Secured sponsorship for staff sports (football) kits.
- ❏ Fitted 16 electric vehicle charge points, launched a Greening Agenda, and secured solar panels for future fitting.
- ❏ Held Staff Family Visits evenings during the year (Friday evenings and always sold out).
- ❏ Painted and modernised the (1980s) boardroom (paint, IT, telephony, trophies, heating, blinds, and furnishings)
- ❏ Fitted car park barriers and 'values' signage on the car park fencing.
- ❏ Relaunched Full Staff Briefings (drink and food with key messages and awards and a sponsored July BBQ).
- ❏ Embedded reward and recognition culture (Colleague of the Month and Team of the Quarter).
- ❏ Introduced weekly Safety Meeting held in the Community Centre.
- ❏ Launched Full Sutton Focus for staff (regular newsletter).
- ❏ Launched Newshub (quarterly magazine) and a quality weekly Prisoner Newsletter.
- ❏ Repaired and recovered 100+ chairs (initially sent to HMP Wakefield and now repaired in-house)
- ❏ Published The Guide (prospectus for prisoners).
- ❏ Secured funding for a wood mill (after trying for 7 years and which opens in the autumn).
- ❏ Refurbished Visits Hall (through self-help inspired by a visit to HMP Lindholme with furniture made at HMP Hull).
- ❏ Introduced user-friendly directional signage.
- ❏ Refurbished or replaced faded corridor windows.
- ❏ Improved exercise spaces / yards (new equipment, outside scenes, bright paint and plant pots).
- ❏ And more……


COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
SUTTON FOCUS
THANK YOU
#HIDDENHEROES
NEWS HUB
ISSUE 7
Safe for
EST
1987


HMP Full Sutton
Where do I want to be?
Healthcare
Library
Chapel
Workshops
Gym
Visits
Reception
College
Interventions
A Wing
B Wing
The STEP
C Wing
D Wing
E Wing
F Wing
YOUR GUIDE

The test of the longstanding stability of HMP Full Sutton combined with a refreshed approach came in the form of HMIP in 2020, the last inspection before COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. HMIP found the following:

Table 8. *Extracts from HMP Full Sutton's HMIP 2020 report by Chief Inspector Peter Clarke*

- ❏ The prisoner population is complex, including prisoners convicted of a wide range of very serious offences.
- ❏ Safety improved to our highest grade of good and the prison had the lowest levels of violence in the high security estate.
- ❏ Segregation unit had improved considerably since the time of the last inspection.
- ❏ IEP was used in a way that did genuinely encourage good behaviour.
- ❏ Challenge, Support, and Intervention Plans (CSIPs) were being well used.
- ❏ Not enough work or activity places for the population, and allocation was too slow in some cases.
- ❏ Ofsted recognised that plans were in place to bring about improvements, but those had yet to materialise.
- ❏ Public protection work was generally robust.
- ❏ Psychology staff were well integrated across the prison (identified as good practice).
- ❏ Fundamentally a safe and decent establishment.
- ❏ Energetic leadership and a staff group who interact well with the prisoners in their charge.
- ❏ No reason why Full Sutton could not aspire to be one of the best performing prisons in the country.

So what? What were the big hitters?

In terms of Full Sutton, I see this as moving from 5/10 to 7/10 over four years. Some of the 'big hitters' in terms of incremental changes and improvements include appointing a Head of Business Change to oversee multiple change projects, improving the core day through two successive changes (and a third is planned), shaping the regime to allow year-round access to daylight exercise, driving high standards around written and spoken communication, embedding a tone of energy, learning, coaching, and continuous improvement on a daily basis through the morning meetings, launching a meaningful greening agenda, introducing a progressive and impactful self-help team for improvements to living and working conditions, cleaning the faded walkway windows through the 'See The Light' project, the launch of a rebranded and refurbished College and related prospectus, refurbishing what is now a wonderful visits hall, and embedding a rhythm of Colleague of the Month and Team of the Quarter. This pace, volume, and commitment to change and improvement becomes normalised, opportunities to sow the seeds of change become widespread and owned by many, and a sense of pride is evident for staff and prisoners alike.

Keep sowing seeds of change

This paper is a simple and practical overview of changes made and a record of their perceived impact. As explained, prisons are not a single homogeneous culture but instead comprise multiple cultures and subcultures which are multi-layered, each stacked with history and complexity, and are ever changing. Working in prisons, in whatever capacity, offers many opportunities to make a difference and to sow seeds of change, the fruits of which we might never personally see. Drawing from the past to inform the present and future is rich and valuable, as is referencing and connecting with predecessors where possible and appropriate. The length of stay for leaders to progress establishments has long been debated, and I have found myself altering my view on this matter. When questioned, and assuming the appropriate team-related succession planning and support, I now suggest a seven-year tenure to be optimum.

Long-term assessments

In terms of HMP/YOI New Hall's history, this is simply my story and interpretation across 15 years of reports, and I encourage similar assessments to be done at other establishments. The projects and priorities selected at this time are listed and intend only to highlight the agility, innovation, decency, safety, and care required.

Communication of the vision and ambitions was important then and remains just as important now. The vehicle of communication is also important with purpose, plans, and progress being presented in written form, via verbal briefings and meetings, and simply through 'word of mouth', allowing colleagues to be reminded about their purpose and be invited to be part of the change. Culture change requires tenacity and a relentless drive and a sense of responsibility.

Celebrating wins

With culture change, it is important to recognise the power of celebrating small wins and to bring in people who are sympathetic to the cause. I have found it helpful to highlight examples of actions I hope to see more of within the culture. Being nimble and innovative is also important in being able to deliver the desired outcomes, and examples of projects and methods can be used to help communicate ambition.

I have also discovered the significance of building strong coalitions to create a shared common purpose and spread key messages, ideas, and latest developments. I also highlight the importance of creating safe spaces to discuss ideas, hopes for the future, and what good 'looks like'. In wanting individuals to act and behave differently, it helps to change the surroundings and conditions, and create forums to share ideas. Furthermore, there is value in both public and private idea sharing of ideas, of dynamic meetings, and also the creation of roles which point to business change and innovation.

Symbols are powerful

Symbols are also important and might be as simple as language, branded signage, logos, or the rhythm and style of certain meetings. As examples, the longstanding HMP Full Sutton 'Safe for All' logo is a symbol which gives clarity and a sense of purpose, the 'Lowdie Lion' is an award and a symbol of gratitude for a job well done, and the MECF staff family day at Auckland zoo and the staff family evenings at Full Sutton and sponsored BBQs serve as symbols of gratitude.

A particular style of language, and certain words and phrases, are often helpful in shaping culture. Examples I have used in verbal and written form include a desire to be 'best in class', the need to 'maximise the footprint' in tapping into potential, encouraging 'push back' in actively inviting colleagues to challenge, 'workplace of choice' in wanting to improve working conditions, regularly 'painting a picture' so we know who we are and how we are doing, and 'looking up and out' in encouraging colleagues to visit other prisons and organisations, exploring and researching best practice.

Closing comments

And finally, leadership is stretching, exhausting, lonely, and frustrating, so find people who can support you. Understanding the context of a prison is critical within prison leadership and to the culture journey. It is important to focus your energy and invest your time upfront to understand the root cause(s) of your cultural issues and challenges. Be laser-focussed on a small number of issues but attempt to address a much larger number. Invest time, energy, and resources wisely and actively encourage, discourage, and set new standards for behaviours at every opportunity in order to create a faster change. Be a role model, work on yourself, accept your limitations, and share your failings, fears, and frustrations. Find role models and champions and leverage their energy and give them a voice, and remember people are watching what you do, what you say, and how long you stay.

We can build a system that works for everyone.

David Breakspear *is a member of the Lived Experience Team, and Peer Mentor, at the charity Revolving Doors.*

By involving people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, people like me, we can build a system that works for everyone.

Who is me? Well, as well as being a member of the Lived Experience Team (LET) at Revolving Doors, I am also a Peer Mentor there. I'll discuss more about Revolving Doors later, as I'd like to give you a brief summary of my past.

I was first arrested at the age of ten. Permanently excluded from school at 14, and at 15 I experienced my first custodial sentence, and into the school to prison pipeline, I went.

HMDC Blantyre House. Yes sir, no sir. Three bags full sir. Short, sharp, shock. It may have been short, and it may have been sharp, but it didn't shock me. Well, it didn't shock me enough to not end up back in custody several times over the following years, as I found myself trapped in the revolving doors of crisis and crime.I was released from my ninth, and final custodial sentence on the 9th of June 2017.

Since then, rather than break the law I'd like to think, and in my roles at Revolving Doors, I help shape the law, as well as help to shape the practices and policies of the criminal justice system.

Back in 2005, whilst serving in HMP Blundeston, I became a mentor in prison for the first time, for the Shannon Trust. Soon after, I'd also trained to become a Listener. The Listeners were formed in HMP Swansea following the death by suicide of a fifteen-year-old boy who was kept there as a place of safety. Ironic, huh? That was over thirty years ago. The Samaritans knew then the importance of involving people in prison. Lived experience! Since the birth of the Listeners, peer mentoring in prison has become the norm rather than the exception.

It was a shame that the wider society didn't feel the same way about people with lived experience as prisons did and do. However, I'm pleased to say that has now changed. No longer are the voices of people with lived experience of the criminal justice system being ignored, far from it. The voices of people with lived experience are being valued, and not just being valued they are also being sought; and I remember the days when COMP1s didn't exist.[1]

As you know, the criminal justice system is a complex and ever-changing system that has a profound impact on the lives of millions of people. Therefore, it is important to ensure the system is fair, just, and effective, and that it meets the needs of ALL those who come into contact with it. One way to achieve this is to involve people with lived experience in the development and implementation of policies and practices. People with lived experience have a unique perspective on the system, and our insights can be invaluable in making it more fair, just, and effective. For example:

- ❏ We can help to identify areas where the system is failing, and we can offer suggestions for how to improve it.
- ❏ We can also help to develop and implement programmes and services that are tailored to the needs of those who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

There are a few challenges to involving people with lived experience in the criminal justice system. Some of these challenges include:

- ❏ Stigma and discrimination. People with lived experience often face stigma and discrimination, which can make it difficult for them to get involved.
- ❏ Lack of resources. People with lived experience often lack the resources they need to get involved, such as transportation, childcare, and financial assistance.
- ❏ Lack of training. People with lived experience often lack the training they need to be effective in their roles, such as public speaking, conflict resolution, and advocacy.

However, by involving people with lived experience, we can, again, make the system more fair,

1. COMP1 is the name of the form that complaints are submitted on by people in HMPPS prisons.

just, and effective. People with lived experience can also help to identify the challenges that we face, and we can offer suggestions for how to overcome them:

- ❏ It can help to ensure that the system is more responsive to the needs of those who come into contact with it.
- ❏ It can help to build trust and confidence in the system. When people see that our voices are being heard, they are more likely to believe that the system is working for them.
- ❏ It can help to promote innovation and creativity. People with lived experience can bring new ideas and perspectives to the table, which can help to improve the system.

Our insights can be invaluable in identifying areas where the system is failing, and we can offer suggestions for how to improve it. Here are some specific examples of how people with lived experience can be involved in the criminal justice system:

- ❏ We can serve on advisory boards or councils that provide input on policies and practices.
- ❏ We can be employed as staff or volunteers to provide direct services to those who have been involved in the criminal justice system.
- ❏ We can educate the public about the criminal justice system.
- ❏ We can advocate for changes to the system.
- ❏ We can share our stories with policymakers and the media.

When people with lived experience are involved in the criminal justice system, it can lead to a number of positive outcomes, such as:

- ❏ Improved outcomes for people who are caught up in the system.
- ❏ Increased trust between the system and the communities it serves.
- ❏ A more effective and efficient system.
- ❏ A more just and equitable system.

So, who are Revolving Doors and the LET?

Well, Revolving Doors is a national charity working to break the cycle of crisis and crime. We advocate for a system that addresses the drivers of contact with the criminal justice system. In 1993, they were driven by the need to know why one particular group of individuals was trapped in the revolving door of homelessness, crime and mental health problems. Their goal was to transform the lives of people who were being let down by a system that was routinely failing them. By the millennium, they had become acknowledged pioneers in their field. They had a unique reputation for involving people who have suffered the effects of the revolving door in every aspect of their work. Their team had taken ownership of a national problem and was finding answers where nobody had previously thought to look.

Revolving Doors is proud to have led that change for people experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, substance use, domestic violence, repeat victimisation and offending.

In 2008, Revolving Doors launched their first national lived experience forum. From being an 'invisible' group as late as the 1990s, those suffering multiple problems had become the subject of national discussion and debate. Revolving Doors is proud to have led that change for people experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, substance use, domestic violence, repeat victimisation and offending.

At Revolving Doors:

- ❏ We work in partnership with public sector bodies, voluntary sector organisations and government departments, such as the NHSE Health and Justice teams, the MoJ, and the Probation Service, ensuring the voices of those with lived experience are heard.
- ❏ We partner with academics to research gaps in the evidence base.
- ❏ We work with professional groups to create systems and cultural change.
- ❏ We get to use our lived experience, which has often been a negative time for us, to improve the system.

- ❏ We can use our negatives for something positive.

And this is how we work:

- ❏ We have a range of regular forums and lived experience groups — this includes regional forums in the South, North, and Midlands, a women's forum, and a forum for young adults.
- ❏ We work formally and informally, in person and online.
- ❏ We tap into our lived experience expertise for improved system change.
- ❏ We co-develop and co-design practices and policies alongside organisations.

As a member of the lived experience team, I have been involved, and continued to be involved in several projects with the NHS, MoJ, and Probation, as well as other organisations linked to the criminal justice system. Far too many to list here.

However, I am proud to say I'm neurodivergent and one project I am involved in, is...since October 2021, along with five other members of our lived experience team, and as part of a working group, we have been working with a team from the MoJ on Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System. I don't expect my peers who are neurodivergent to receive special treatment or that a neurodivergent condition is an excuse to commit crime, but what I do want to see is the criminal justice system making reasonable adjustments for people who come into contact with the system, especially for people who are neurodivergent. By being neuroinclusive, not only does it include everyone but it also removes the labels.

When we listen to the voices of those who have been impacted by the policies and practices of the criminal justice system, we can build a system that works for everyone.

Can one person really make a difference?

Gill Attrill *is a Deputy Director in HMPPS, overseeing the Insights Group and prison culture programme.*

Is part of your role and responsibility to help improve the culture around you? Do you find yourself questioning 'what difference can I really, honestly make?'. If so, you are not alone.

Culture is a little like water; it surrounds you but it's hard to grip. It can lift you up, it can drag you down. You can get pulled along by the current, you can find yourself swimming against the tide. It is a force to be reckoned with.

Changing culture, knowing where to even start, can feel overwhelming. It's hard to know where to focus your efforts as an individual, to have confidence that as a 'small fish' in a 'big pond' you can make a tangible difference.

It would help if we knew the answer to 'what are the most effective things I can personally do?' In this paper I am going to suggest three things. Three things that as an individual we can control, and we can do well.

Wield the evidence

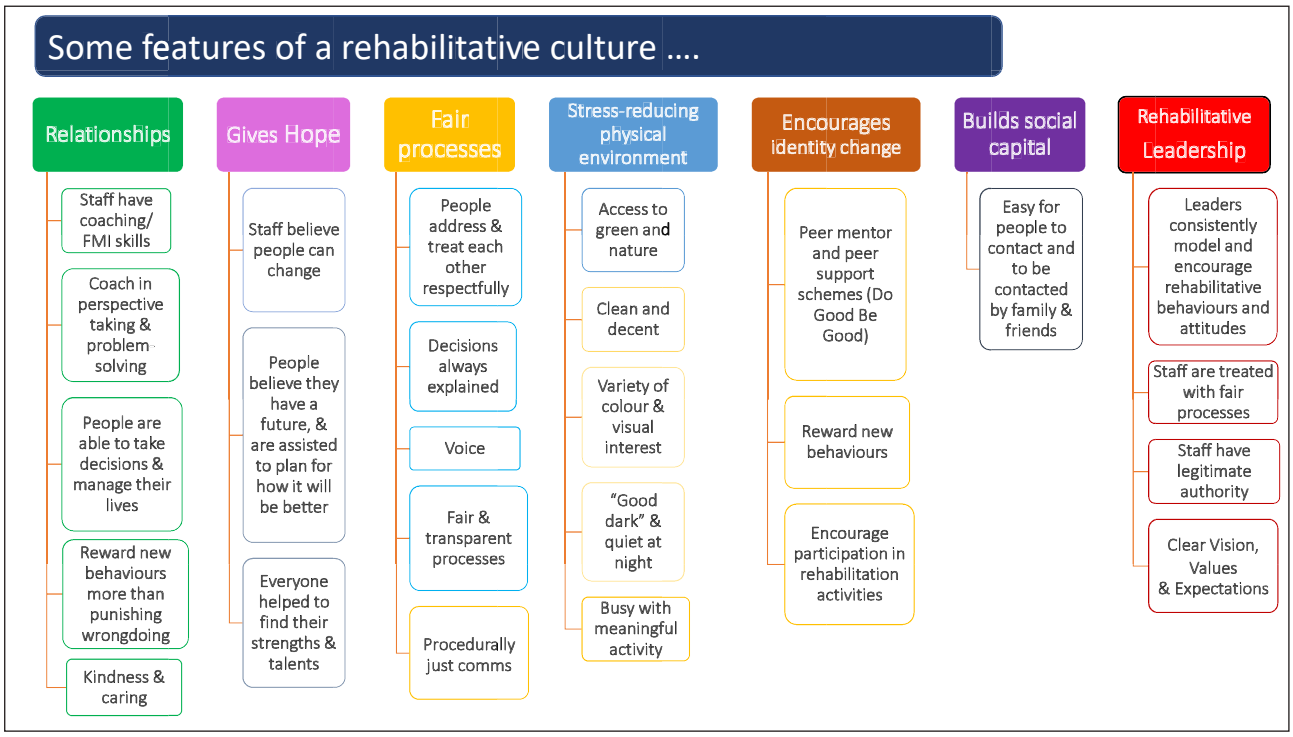
Much of my career has focused on bringing evidence and insight to help answer challenging questions. We have a wealth of excellent work setting out what makes a culture feel safer, more rehabilitative, facilitates positive change, and is a better place to work in. My colleague, the brilliant Dr Ruth Mann, helpfully translated this evidence into a simple yet powerful triangle that still points us in the right direction when we think about focusing our efforts.[1]

Figure 1. *An evidence-based model for prisons that best protect the public by reducing reoffending.*

Equally, her work on features of a prison that reduces reoffending reminds us of the behaviours, relationships and attitudes that make a difference and which we as individuals can i) model, ii) encourage, and iii) reinforce. These are outlined below in Figure 2.[2]

1. Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F., & Tew, J. (2018). What is a rehabilitative prison culture? Prison Service Journal, 235, 3-9.
2. Mann, R. (2019). Rehabilitative culture part 2: An update on evidence and practice. Prison Service Journal, 244, 3-10.

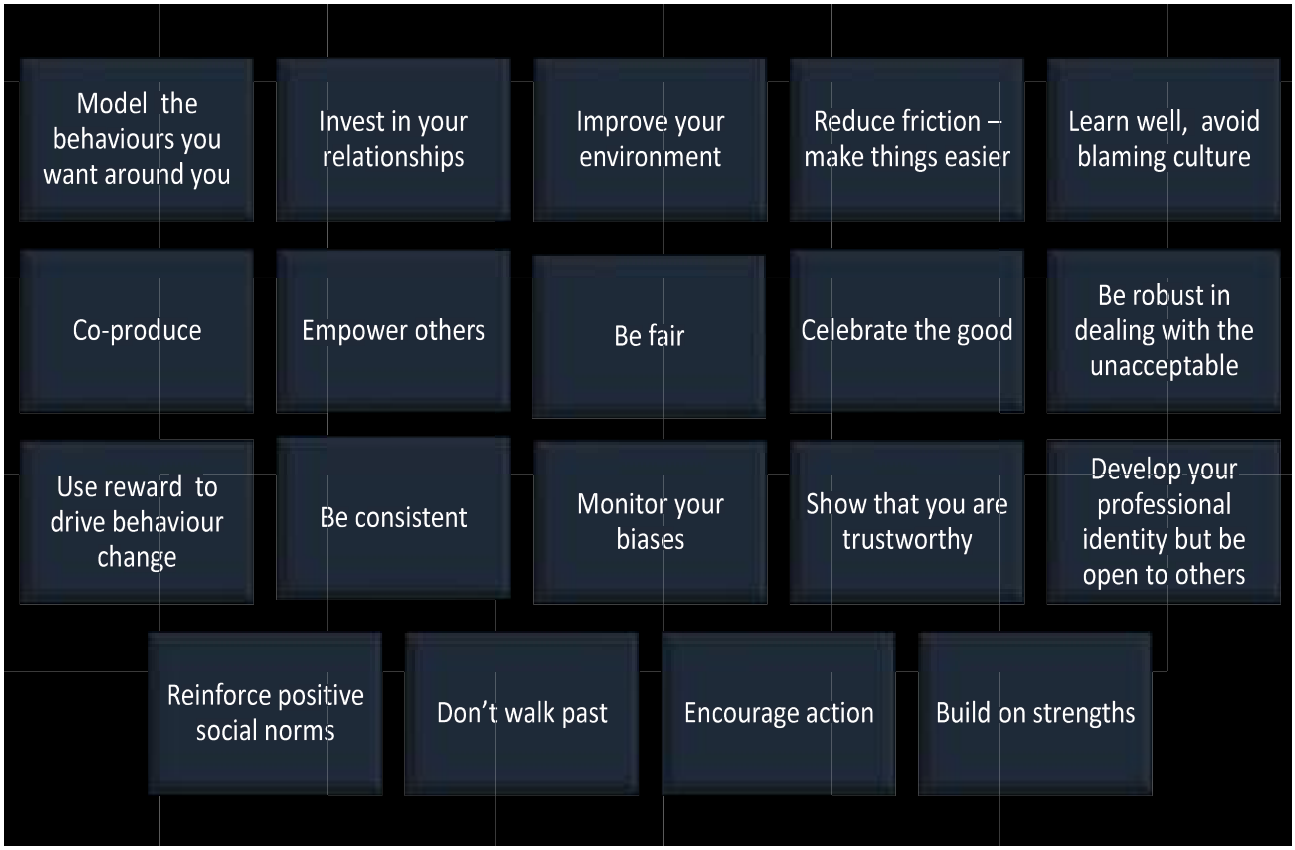
Figure 2. *Evidence-based features of a rehabilitative prison culture.*



More recently colleagues in HMPPS layered together multiple pieces of information, data, and insight into HMPPS prisons on to the evidence base regarding effective culture. This helpfully identified 10 key areas where a focus of effort is likely to deliver a tangible impact on multiple priority outcomes (such as wellbeing, and safety, as well as reoffending), and the experience of people working and living in prisons (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Evidence-informed features of an effective prison culture.*

Figure 4. *Individual actions to support a positive culture in prisons.*



One final reflection from the evidence base is a list of things we can do as individuals, on a daily basis, that can have a positive impact (Figure 4).

This does, of course, raise the tricky question of where to focus your attention. Where will your personal effort create the greatest benefit? To answer this, you need to have a grip on what the strengths and issues are within the culture you are working in. These may of course feel very different in different places, for different people, and at different times and circumstances. This is where using our understanding of risk and effective assessment can help us.

Use what you already know about good assessment

We are a sector that understands risk, we can define it, measure it, we have tools for predicting risk and methods for reducing it. We can apply these professional skills to understanding the culture around us. This is a critical step towards finding meaningful indicators of what our cultures are really like and if progress is being made and sustained. There are multiple tools for looking at your environment, culture, quality of prison life. We have a choice. We can follow a simple principle of good assessment to give us as clear as perspective as possible: use multiple methods, include multiple perspectives, look across multiple time frames.

Tell good stories

One of my first jobs was working in a therapeutic community in the Florida Keys, an under-funded residential service in an old electrical goods factory, sitting on a scruffy dock managed by a small group of international staff. We worked with about 20 people with severe mental health, addiction, and personality challenges. We all lived in the same building. I shopped with the residents, we spent Christmas day together, we shared a kitchen and bathroom. It is the closest I have ever been to living day-to-day life alongside the people in my care. This photograph (Figure 5) shows the building; my bedroom was bottom right of the image. This is the wall at which a resident, distressed at having to leave the community because of persistent alcohol use, drove his car at speed, smashing into the building before driving off. It's also where I was woken in the middle of the night by the unnerving sound of a shovel hitting the dirt as

Figure 5. *Therapeutic community building in the Florida Keys.*

a grave was being dug outside my window, for a newly deceased resident's dog.

My first day working in a prison I was sent to reception to have my staff ID produced. I stood where prisoners were asked to stand in front of the camera. Behind the camera was a full-length picture of a naked woman with a snake wrapped around her. 'That's not right' I said, when I got back my to office. 'No, it's not' came the reply, 'you can make something of it but the officers won't open the doors when you go to see the prisoners'.

Do you recall the scene in the movie Jaws, where young marine biologist Hooper (Richard Dreyfus), Police Chief Brody (Roy Scheider), and fisherman Quint (Robert Shaw) are seated around the cramped table in Quint's boat, late at night? The boat is rocking, they are drinking and telling stories. Compelling, memorable stories. You can see the shift in their relationship. By sharing stories, they are beginning to bond, to find what they have in common. It's a pivotal moment for them as a team. The atmosphere becomes more sinister as Quint tells the story of being on the USS Indianapolis, which was hit by submarine torpedoes.

> *'Eleven hundred men went into the water. Vessel went down in 12 minutes. Didn't see the first shark for about a half-hour… You know that was the time I was most frightened. Waitin' for my turn. I'll never put on a lifejacket again. So, eleven hundred men went into the water. 316 men come out, the sharks took the rest, June the 29th, 1945.'* [3]

Back to Florida for a moment. My story of the resident driving a car into my bedroom and the dead dog outside the window. Why did I choose that as a story to tell you? Why did I choose that when I could have told you about the day a resident came back from their first day at work, about helping a resident move into their first home, or about taking a man to see his family for the first time in a decade?

My first day at work. That story is thirty years old now. It is true but it doesn't reflect the prison service of today.

3. Spielberg, S., Williams, J., & Williams, J. (1975). JAWS. USA.

And back to Jaws, one of the most influential books and movies of our time, a compelling award-winning piece of storytelling. The author, Peter Benchley, has said that he wishes he never wrote the book because of the way the world then viewed sharks. The Director, Steven Spielberg, has also been reported sharing the same view: 'I truly, and to this day, regret the decimation of the shark population because of the book and the film'. Jaws changed the way the world and media view sharks. What followed was the decimation of the American shark population and a huge drop in sharks and rays around the world.

Stories matter. They have power beyond the moment they are told. Why is this? Stories engage our emotions, stories better convey meaning, stories are persuasive, stories are memorable, stories reflect your values, and stories are retold.

We have a choice over which stories we tell and pass on. We have a multitude of stories which showcase what a 'good' culture looks like and the difference it can makes to people's lives.

There are three blockers to effective, safe, rehabilitative culture; 'I don't know what it is, I don't know how to do it, I don't believe it will make a difference even if I do'.

Telling a good story, a compelling story can give the answer to all three. It can show what's possible.

Let's tell stories which create a better world around us.

Book Reviews

Prisons of the World
By Andrew Coyle
Publisher: Policy Press
ISBN: 978-1447362463
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(Paperback) 978-1447362487
(EPUB)
Price: £85.00 (Hardcover) £21.99 (Paperback) £21.99 (EPUB)

Reviewer: Darren Woodward is a Lecturer in Criminology at Arden University.

This book is a tour-de-force that examines and combines two main elements of penology. The first is the professional account of Andrew Coyle, who has spent 50 years working in criminal justice across the globe, immersed in the world of 'the prison'. The second is a critique on the many different prisons that he has visited, or worked in, whilst in this professional capacity, offering an absorbing insight throughout. He recounts his journey in interesting and sometimes mildly humorous detail; one that he calls an 'odyssey' (pg.1) from the start. I agree, this is an odyssey, and it is one that I feel privileged to have been part of, albeit from the comfort of my own home.

One of the most notable and exciting features, is how Andrew delivers the story of his professional career in a way that is engaging, whilst adding an important layer to the academic literature pertaining to prisons and the people who work in them. I cannot recall reading a book that is so detailed, and one that covers a history of prisons and penology in such a fashion. Indeed, there are large periods in time that are underrepresented in academic literature, but Andrew has lived through them (think about the impact of 'fresh start' in the late 80's for example). This is where the book has strength, as his leadership in large prisons such as Peterhead in Scotland, or Brixton in London, not only comes to the fore, but it also feels honest and genuine.

Initially, Andrew introduces his experience in Peterhead Prison. This was his first Governorship at a time when the Scottish Prison service was facing similar challenges to those in England and Wales, with large scale disturbances, a loss of staff morale and a social and political shift regarding the use of prisons in general. For those of us who have worked in large prisons, the qualities of the Governor are one of the most important aspects that can help to bring about change and development, especially during hard times. Andrew's account seems to fit this bill. An introduction like this is rare in any form, and it sets the parameters for what we can expect throughout.

This experience is also intertwined with a critical view of the nature and use of prisons in the UK and across the globe. For example, Andrew recounts the many political issues of running such large and high-profile prisons, but he also opens up to the reader about his thoughts on prisons in Latin America, Cambodia and Barbados. Indeed, his 'tour' of prisons has taken him to some fascinating places. For example, on Page 81, while he is discussing the prevention of torture in Europe, Andrew introduces the reader to a meeting he had with Mehmet Ali Aja, in a Turkish prison. In a matter-of-fact way, he adds that this man attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981. It is little additions like this that help to create a meaningful book, one which keeps the reader enthralled because they never know what they will encounter next!

His conclusions are some of the most poignant and important that I have seen in recent years, and they are based firmly on the evidence he provides, in main due to his professional knowledge and experience. He discusses how prisons need to develop in such a way that they show greater understanding towards the humans with who they manage and incarcerate. This is where his book really shines, as it is the humanisation of the prison complex that I believe Andrew is attempting to get across to the reader. Here I mean that prisons are often thought of as 'dehumanising', which is really at odds with reality, as they hold people, many of whom are vulnerable and in need of care and help. Andrew fully understands this, and this is apparent throughout.

Overall, this book will be of great importance to anyone who has an interest in 'real-life' prison stories and experiences. Usually, these accounts come from prison officers and prisoners, and they are told in a seemingly sensationalised way, often masking the truth behind the walls. Indeed, Andrew avoids this

sensational approach, choosing a more honest and academic narrative. This book will also help penology students and scholars to understand the 'lost' periods in prison history, ones which are yet to be fully discussed. For me, I have a somewhat nostalgic attachment to this book, as I grew up in a 'prison officer family', where my father, his brother, and myself all worked in large prisons. That is the beauty of this book, its appeal is far-reaching.

Criminal: How our prisons are failing us all

By Angela Kirwin

Publisher: Orion Books

ISBN (eBook) 978 1 3987 05869

Price: £3.99 (kindle edition)

Reviewer: Mike Kirby is a retired prison governor who has been in charge of prisons both in England and Wales and in the Channel Islands. He is also a member of the Perrie Lectures committee.

A conservative white paper of 1990 stated "we know that prison is an expensive way of making bad people worse".Roger Graef OBE, the renowned documentary maker, used the same phrase in a blog, in 2012 but omitted the word "Bad". The author of this work is taking this statement and exploring it in depth using individual case histories of people she has worked with in custody to fully illustrate her argument.

Angela Kirwin grew up in Manchester and has an Msc in Social Work. She won praise from HM Prison Inspectorate for her work on substance abuse and mental health and went on to secure a research fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Fund to study the criminal justice systems of America and Norway.

The initial chapter uses the story of Deano to illustrate the fact that so many low-level offenders have never learned what it means to be "a law-abiding citizen" and will be endlessly trapped in the revolving door of offending-custody-release-offending, until there is an effective intervention that will help them to break out of this cycle. The author argues that the constant throughput of short sentences, prison overcrowding, the lack of appropriate staff training and the absence of treatments for mental health and substance abuse only help to prolong the failure of prison to effectively reduce re-offending. She speculates that any organisation that had a failure rate of 50% would not last long. Recidivism is running at this level and the way we currently operate our CJS does nothing to ameliorate this trend.

Despite the title, the author is not criticising the prison service, but instead lays the blame for the current malaise in the lap of the politicians who compete with each other to be "tough on crime".

Tony Blair as Prime Minister used a similar mantra but strengthened it with the addition of "tough on the causes of crime". That annex appears to have been overlooked by politicians over recent years and the author lists some of the catastrophic interventions by the likes of Chris Grayling MP, which have done nothing to make prisons work better and have actually had the opposite effect.

This leads into a question of what the aims of a criminal justice system should be. Is it about keeping society safe? Is it about punishment? Is it a deterrent or is it about rehabilitation? The author argues "Incarceration is the least successful punishment available to us, particularly when sentences are short. It's proven to create and perpetuate more crime, costs an absolute fortune, and traumatises both staff and inmates" (pages 7-8).

The author is acutely aware that taking such an abolitionist view is only going to invite comments about murderers, child offenders and rapists and accepts that some offenders will need a custodial sentence, but in prisons that are not overcrowded where the staff are well trained and supported and where appropriate health and psychological support is available for both staff and prisoners. Like for example the prisons in Norway.

As part of her research fellowship, Angela visited some Norwegian prisons including the high security prison Halden to look at how they have managed to reduce their prison population and have a re-offending rate which is far better than England and Wales. What she found were establishments where the staff were trained up to the equivalent of a degree level, where they had good levels of health and psychological support and where prisoners were trusted to behave in an environment that was clean and tidy, healthy, and supportive towards rehabilitative aims. Staff and prisoners respected each other and in specialist areas like mental health or the drug treatment units the staff receive additional training. The author compares this to the poor quality of training and support given to officers here.

The author explores the impact that the tabloid press has on penal policy, with politicians reluctant to move away from the rhetoric of being tough on crime,

despite the waste of resources that results from this approach. For example, during the pandemic, criminal justice systems across the globe used early release to ameliorate the pressure on the prison estate. In France 10,000 prisoners were released as a result of COVID with no increase in crime or any public outcry. Even in the USA many thousands of non-violent prisoners were released early. The government here set up a similar arrangement and about 4,000 likely candidates were identified. By mid-May 2020 only 55 were actually released early and overall throughout the pandemic the total released under the scheme was only 275.

Using individual case histories the author looks at the prison experience of people with substance abuse issues, mental health problems, IPPs and a prisoners on remand. This last case is particularly disturbing as the person in question spent six months in custody on remand during which time he lost his home, his business and damaged the relationship with his family. At his trial he was found not guilty and left court innocent but ruined, without recourse to any compensation.

I would not describe the book as an enjoyable read as it frequently demonstrates the cruelty and ineffectiveness of our criminal justice system. It should however be an essential read for law makers, students of criminology and anyone interested in making our CJS fair and just. Overall the author has argued that we spend inordinate amounts on a system that is not achieving a reduction in re-offending. She maintains that if those with substance abuse issues and people with a mental health diagnosis were treated in properly funded treatment centres by appropriately trained staff, it may cost more in the short term but would pay for itself in the long run, with a significant reduction in crime and prisons freed up to work with individuals who need that level of security.

The ebook that I used for this review has extensive footnotes that have an electronic link to the article or publication that is referred to in the text. The endnotes are extensive and very informative and easy to access during reading.

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

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The *Prison Service Journal* is a peer reviewed journal published by HM Prison Service of England and Wales. Its purpose is to promote discussion on issues related to the work of the Prison Service, the wider criminal justice system and associated fields. It aims to present reliable information and a range of views about these issues.

The editors are responsible for the style and content of each edition, and for managing production and the Journal's budget. The editors are supported by an editorial board — a body of volunteers, many of whom have worked for the Prison Service in various capacities, or who are academics in the field of criminal justice. The editorial board considers all articles submitted and decides the outline and composition of each edition, although the editors retains an over-riding discretion in deciding which articles are published and their precise length and language.

From May 2011 each edition is available electronically from the website of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. This is available at http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/psj.html

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Six editions of the Journal, printed at HMP Leyhill, are published each year with a circulation of approximately 6,500 per edition. The editor welcomes articles which should be up to c.4,000 words and submitted by email to **prisonservicejournal@justice.gov.uk**.

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Charlie Taylor

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Shadd Maruna and Gillian McNaull

Changing Culture: Stories not statistics of a movement not a mandate.

Gareth Sands

We can build a system that works for everyone.

David Breakspear

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Gill Attrill