

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

November 2011 No 198



Reviews

Book Review

The power of positive deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the world's toughest problems

By Richard Pascale, Jerry Sternin and Monique Sternin

Publisher: Boston: Harvard Business Press (2010)

ISBN: 978-1-42211-066-9 (hardback)

Price: £17.99 (hardback)

This is a book that makes some bold claims. The authors assert that they provide:

'...compelling evidence of a proven remedy for overcoming intractable problems. Its success in 'impossible' situations demonstrates that we can make meaningful inroads against many of the seemingly insurmountable problems that confound the present and cast a shadow on our future...' (p.4)

On this basis, this should be a book that is required reading for every one on the planet. The book's approach has three elements: first, that solutions to problems are often latent, that is that they already exist; secondly, that these solutions have been discovered within the communities or groups that face those problems; and thirdly, that those solutions have been discovered by 'positive deviants' — that is people within those communities or groups who have found different ways of doing things and have therefore enjoyed more success.

The authors illustrate these elements by describing a range of projects in which they have been involved where this approach has been successfully used. These settings range from projects in the developing world — such as malnutrition in Vietnam, refugees in Uganda and female circumcision in Egypt — to initiatives the developed world aimed at reducing hospital-acquired infections and increasing corporate performance. This approach is one of a number that have attempted to

provide bottom-up ideas, focussing of good examples rather than problems, and which have attempted to work with existing cultures. Other similar approaches have included strength-building and appreciative inquiry, which has been widely used in prisons in England and Wales most notably in the development of the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life approach.

These approaches certainly have their place and managers are well advised to have knowledge of these in order to use them as a tool to manage change in a creative and motivational way. However, as is often the case with such books, the claims are grandiose, the tone evangelical.

There is also a question over whether this approach really is the universal management panacea that is claimed. Would the logic of the authors' approach provide solutions to, for example, the financial crisis simply by identifying traders who are doing well and by getting those who are not to copy them? Similarly, in marginalised, high crime communities would crime be reduced by encouraging offenders to follow the example of those who stay out of trouble? Of course not: such problems are linked to wider social structures and cannot be attributed to individual behaviour alone. Therefore 'positive deviants' do not have all of the answers. Another example would be whether good footballers could be created by looking at what Wayne Rooney or David Beckham do on the pitch? Of course this is not the case, and similarly good prison or police officers, teachers or nurses cannot be created just by looking at those who are good. These are professions where there is skill and craft involved which cannot easily be replicated and transferred.

This is a book that has much to recommend it and it is certainly the case that positive, bottom-up management techniques have their

place, but a little more modesty and critical faculty would not have gone amiss.

Jamie Bennett is Centre Manager of IRC Morton Hall.

Book Review

Debating for a Change: Improving prison life through prisoner/staff working groups

By Andrew Fleming-Williams and Anna Gordon

Publisher: Ministry of Justice (2011)

Available free at:

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/DebatingforaChange.PDF>

Human beings yearn to be in social environments that contain certain virtues, like fairness and respect. The experience of being in a punitive and disrespectful environment is traumatic and damaging. Without respect, dignity or fairness personal development is impossible.

Prisoners remain citizens and preserving a notion of citizenship even within a prison is vital for the maintenance of their human rights. These rights are connected to basic human needs for meaning (fairness and justice), for connectedness (belonging, a sense of community), for security (emotional as well as physical), action (empowerment, autonomy), and recognition (respect, acknowledgement and dignity). Difficult to maintain in prisons, but crucial if we seek personal development and a sense of personal responsibility.

The issue for prison regime planners is constructing a form of imprisonment whose basic structure and daily practices are more or less acceptable to those who endure it, despite their

domination and commonly low social position.

This publication looks at a process that seeks to give a voice to all parties working together to improve the context within which they have to live and work. It describes the work of Andrew Fleming-Williams and Anna Gordon in 17 prisons in the South East with a prisoner and management forum project. The experience built up by Andrew Fleming-Williams, treasurer of the Prison Reform Trust and Chairman of the Friends of Wandsworth Prison, in 39 forums in prisons using management development techniques to increase prisoner involvement in the prison's operation, was researched through the project in 17 prisons. The findings are very positive from all parties involved — prisoners, officers, senior management team members and others. The evidence is that such forums (run very differently to prison councils) are capable of delivering real benefits across a wide range of prison issues. There was strong support from all parties to the introduction of such events to be held regularly.

This publication shows what can be done within the context of a focussed dialogue between staff and prisoners to consider the quality of life issues in the prison and to have a say in aspects that need to be improved. As well as the immediate issue of developing progress on rubbing points of daily living in the prison the process is respectful and empowering for all, meeting their need to have a say, to feel they belong in the prison community and recognise the fairness of decision making. Everyone benefits.

The author of the report can be contacted on:
andrew@flemingwilliams.co.uk

Tim Newell is a retired prison governor.

Book Review

Victims and Policy Making: a comparative perspective

By Matthew Hall

Publisher: Willan Publishing (2010)

ISBN 9781843928256 (hardback)

9781843928249 (paperback)

Price £80.00 (hardback) £26.99

(paperback)

Victims and Policy Making is the product of an ambitiously wide-ranging research project comparing victim policies in nine countries. It aims to update and complement Brienen and Hoegen's (2000) analysis of victim provision in 22 European countries¹, whilst also testing Hall's own framework for conceptualising the relationships between cultural attitudes towards victimhood and justice, and international and national policy networks. The methods include documentary data gathered from policy instruments and the secondary literature, complemented by qualitative interviews with policy makers and victim support representatives.

The first substantive chapter presents a compelling narrative describing the influences international declarations and measures have had on domestic legislation and practice in the nine countries under review. It is convincingly demonstrated that seminal documents such as the 1985 *UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power* prompted and shaped the writing of national victim legislation and policies — and this despite the fact that the international measures tend not to be binding. But, Hall argues, although the international agreements have gone some way towards recognising non 'ideal' victims (that is towards recognising as victims those who do not conform to the stereotype of the innocent and respectable citizen unknown to the offender), domestic responses tend to

revert towards approaches which favour the ideal victim and overlook other forms of victimhood. A further study into the influences underpinning this asymmetry could prove a valuable contribution towards more inclusive policy and practice towards the victims of crime.

The following chapters address the roles of 'policy networks' in domestic policy making, the recognition of victims' rights, and compensation and restorative justice. These chapters lack the clarity of the first substantive chapter and it becomes difficult to follow the author's decisions about what material to present or to remain sympathetic to the series of new and distinct theoretical approaches he keeps introducing. As Hall attempts to describe the wide ranging body of data he appeals to a number of poorly defined and applied theories and models. For example he refers often to the concept of policy networks without using it to contribute to an analysis of the basic finding that a range of interest groups influence the development of victim related policies.

The three conclusions seemed like a poor reward for having laboured my way through to the end of the book. The first finding that 'wide, cultural influences [...] are a contributing factor to the development of victim policies' (p. 216) is so broad that it borders on banal. Insofar as there is specific evidence for the claim, Hall can be credited with substantiating, in an international study, aspects of Boutellier's (2000) account of the 'victimization of morality'² (the thesis that as secularisation leads to the decline of common standards of morality, a common appreciation for the suffering of others remains); however the evidence presented in this book does nothing to show secularisation is responsible for the

1. M. Brienen and H. Hoegen (2000) *Victims of Crime in 22 European Criminal Justice Systems: The Implementation of Recommendation (85)11 of the Council of Europe on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure*. Niemegen: Wolf Legal Productions.

2. H. Boutellier (2000) *Crime and Morality: The Significance of Criminal Justice in Post-modern Culture*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

change, nor to prove that 'cultural influences' are the cause, rather than the effect, of changing victim policies. Similarly, the second finding that policy networks are implicated in the development of victim reforms never fully makes the transition from theoretical assumption to constructive conclusion. And thirdly, reference to the over-used and under-defined concept of 'globalisation' contributes little to an understanding of victim-related policy. This is an ambitious and wide-ranging book, but it is an exasperating and sometimes turgid read. I closed it with a sense of frustration.

Dr. Rachel Bell is a senior officer at HMYOI Feltham.

Book Review

Offending Women: Power, Punishment, and the Regulation of Desire

By Lynne A. Haney

Publisher: University of California Press (2010)

ISBN: 978-0520261907 (hardback), 978-0803259751 (paperback)

Price: £41.95 (hardback), £16.95 (paperback)

Sociologist Lynne Haney has written an ethnography of two community-based facilities for female corrections in the United States. Her fieldwork, spanning over a decade, locates the institutions within differing social and political contexts.

The book demonstrates how the political status quo in the 1990s translated to an institution for young offenders constructed around 'dependency discourse'; whilst the adult institution observed a decade

later was framed by the 'recovery discourse' — both of which served to disentitle the women whilst claiming the path to successful reintegration. The former was concerned with limited government, and weaning women from a sense of entitlement to support from the state. The second, and perhaps more insidious, pathway aimed to refashion women's 'dangerous desires' by unravelling addictive behaviours, to result in women understanding the difference between 'needs' and 'desires'.

The underlying critique of both of these approaches, is, for Haney, the fundamental issue of programmatic approaches which do not appear to take contextual issues into account. There are several outstanding examples in the book, which explore how narratives of 'dependency' and 'recovery' are out of touch with the social realities of the women's lives, serving to flatten and eliminate the multiple ways women experience incarceration, as well as the multiple contingencies they face imagining a life after incarceration; including lack of education, few job opportunities, and social support.

For Haney, both programmes fell foul of 'alternative' narratives, as they attempted to position themselves against mainstream corrections, whilst simultaneously being dependent on the state and such discourses for funding and resource support. The result was that institutional tensions filtered through to daily uncertainties for the women incarcerated in the institutions, many of whom rallied against the system in order to feel they were getting what they deserved, rather than remain in uncertain, contingent programmes full of empty promises.

The two central exploratory lenses are those of gendered

governance and hybrid states — in the sense of decentralized state authority and the hybrid services that proliferated in the wake of federal support for programming; but also hybrid states of the women incarcerated in these institutions.

The book is divided into two parts: the first deals with Alliance, and the 'state of dependence', and the second with Visions and the 'state of recovery'. Across both, descriptions of the daily routines, stories and characters provide a rich and vigorous image of the institutions, while the concluding chapter returns to a sociological framing of the ethnographic account to critically analyse the questions raised by the stories.

The volume is compelling, clear, and concise; providing a sense of the frustration and anxieties women faced in the institutions in which motherhood and healthy lifestyles were incentivised. The shift between reporting on women's reactions and rebellions and the institutions' changes and daily rhythms is insightful. Whilst such an ethnography is firmly located within its US (and state-specific) context since it refers so directly to the resources and policy context of its milieu, the study is valuable for UK readers because many of the concerns facing incarcerated women remain the same, and the lessons to be learned from Alliance and Visions would be well worth transferring to this context.

Aylwyn Walsh is based at the University of Northampton and has previously worked as a Writer in Residence at HMP Lowdham Grange and HMP Ashwell.