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Managing prisons in an age of austerity

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The financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 has left in its wake what David Cameron has described ‘the age of austerity’.² This has a wide ranging impact in public services such as prisons. This article is concerned with the effects upon prison managers. This is based upon a research study conducted in two category C prisons in 2007 and 2008, as well as additional fieldwork conducted in one of the original research sites in 2014 and 2015.

The focus of this article is on the working lives of prison managers, particularly since 2010, but will start by outlining the developments in prisons that preceded the financial crash. Following this, the changes from 2010 will be summarised and two particular aspects elaborated. The first is the alteration to the structures of management, in particular the shift in focus from performance management to change management. The second aspect is the everyday experience of work and in particular how far this has come to replicate what has been described as ‘new capitalism’.³ The article then closes by drawing some conclusions regarding the relationship that prison managers have with their work in the ‘age of austerity’.

Before austerity: Prisons in the age of managerialism

From the 1980s onwards, the erosion of the post-War welfare society became more acute, being replaced by the emergence of what has been termed ‘neoliberalism’. This is primarily concerned with a return to laissez faire economics including facilitating the mechanisms of production and exchange, enabling mass consumption, expanding the reach and control of commercial organisations, and legitimising inequalities in wealth. This is not solely an issue of economics but has complex social,

political, legal and cultural dimensions that have permeated the life of the contemporary Western world.⁴

In organisations, it has been observed that a hegemonic form of management now dominates.⁵ This includes a movement towards larger organisations with hierarchical structures that attempt to monitor and control the behaviour of employees through target setting and the use of information technology. It also encompasses the use of Human Resource Management techniques such as recruitment, reward, appraisal, development, communication and consultation in order to shape the ways that employees think about their work, enlisting them as corporate citizens. This trend has sometimes been termed as ‘managerialism’.

These developments have influenced prison management since the late 1980s. In particular, there has been the proliferation of technologies and techniques of target setting and monitoring in a quite pronounced form over the last twenty five years. This has included the introduction of key performance targets and indicators, audits, and ratings systems. These approaches were imported directly from the commercial sector and were part of a broader trend across the public sector to promote ‘New Public Management’.⁶ A further, and not unconnected, development has been the introduction of commercial competition, with the first privately operated prison being opened in 1992. This was controversial and contested but replicated changes in other parts of the public sector and reflected the dominant ideology regarding public services reform.

It is important to recognise that such changes are not merely technical, but also have significant cultural impact. In particular, they have a role in altering professional orientations and outlooks. It has been argued that managerialism has been part of a shift from a welfare orientation amongst prison managers

1. This chapter draws upon material from the forthcoming book Bennett, J. (2015) *The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local culture and individual agency in the late modern prison* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Clarke, J. and Newman, J. (2012) *The alchemy of austerity* in *Critical Social Policy* Vol.32 No.3 p.299-319.
3. Sennett, R. (2004) *The Culture of the New Capitalism* New Haven: Yale University Press.
4. Bell, E. (2011) *Criminal justice and neoliberalism* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Parker, M. (2002) *Against Management: Organization in the age of managerialism* Cambridge: Polity Press.
6. Hood, C. (1991) *A Public Management for All Seasons* in *Public Administration* Vol. 69 p. 3-19; Pollitt, C. (1993) *Managerialism and the Public Services: Cuts or Cultural Change in the 1990s?* Oxford: Blackwell; Ferlie, E., Pettigrew, A., Ashburner, L. and Fitzgerald, L. (1996) *The New Public Management in Action* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

to greater 'economic rationality'.⁷ With such an outlook comes an altered perspective and set of priorities encompassing:

[the] introduction and promotion of short-term, cost-benefits thinking within the public sector...[and]...the language of economics, efficiency and technological solutions is...favoured at the expense of more normative, long-term...policy debates⁸.

A further aspect of the development of managerialism is the intensification of control and the erosion of professional discretion. This is partly the result of surveillance through performance monitoring and measurement. It is also the result of attempts to develop managers as corporate citizens, whose thinking is aligned with the organisation, and who exercise self-control. This attempt to draw the subjective capabilities of individuals within the sphere of organisational control has been described as 'governing the soul'.⁹ The capacity of contemporary organisations to control workers through these strategies has facilitated greater central direction or what has been described as 'management at a distance'.¹⁰

Despite these attempts to exercise power, total control is not possible. Individuals still bring their own values, beliefs and preferences into their decision-making, their relationships at work and other aspects of their professional practice.¹¹ It is also important to recognise that whilst globalised changes such as managerialism have significant influence, local practices remain commonplace.¹² In prisons, this can be particularly seen in the continuing relevance of local occupational cultures. The last quarter of a century has therefore seen the rise of

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managerialism, but this has been accommodated and adapted within the particular circumstances of the prison, forming a blend that could be described as 'prison managerialism'.¹³

Prisons in the age of austerity

In the UK and other countries, the response to the financial crisis of 2007-08, and subsequent recession, has been to control and reduce national debts. Although this has been, in part achieved through increased taxation, this also entailed reductions in spending. This strategy has garnered wide international governmental and institutional support and general public acquiescence¹⁴ but has also been controversial due to concerns about the social costs and its economic validity.¹⁵

For prisons, the impact of austerity was felt particularly following the election of the Coalition Government in 2010. As part of the plans to reduce public expenditure, the National Offender Management Service was required to deliver savings of £900million, or 24 per cent, between 2011 and 2015.¹⁶ This was achieved through a range of means such as reducing the size of headquarters. Other major changes included the 'benchmarking programme'.¹⁷ This operated by providing a framework against which the resources and service delivery expected of similar security category prisons would be standardised. However, there would be some flexibility to reflect local circumstances. Further, wholesale competition for existing public sector prisons was not proceeded with, but facilities management services including maintenance and cleaning, have been contracted out so as to 'maintain the momentum of our reform work to open up the delivery of public services'.¹⁸ In addition, the prison estate has been undergoing 'restructuring' in order 'to open new efficient places at

7. Liebling (2011) *Perrie Lecture: The cost to prison legitimacy of cuts* in *Prison Service Journal* No.198 p.3-11; see also Rutherford, A. (1993) *Criminal Justice and the Pursuit of Decency* Oxford: Oxford University Press; and, Bryans, S. (2007) *Prison Governors: Managing prisons in a time of change* Cullompton: Willan.

8. Aas, K. (2013) *Globalization & crime* Second edition London: Sage p. 156.

9. Rose, N. (1999) *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* Second Edition London: Free Association Book.

10. O'Malley, P. (2004) *Risk, uncertainty and government* London: The GlassHouse Press.

11. Bennett (2015) see n.1.

12. Kennedy, P. (2010) *Local lives and global transformations: Towards world society* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

13. Bennett (2015) see n.1.

14. Clarke and Newman (2012) see n.2.

15. Blyth, M (2013) *Austerity: The history of a dangerous idea* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

16. National Offender Management Service (2014) *Business Plan 2014-15* London: National Offender Management Service.

17. Mulholland, I. (2014) *Perrie Lecture 2013: Contraction in an age of expansion: An operational perspective* in *Prison Service Journal* No. 211 p.14-18.

18. National Offender Management Service (2014) see n. 6, p.24.

lower cost'.¹⁹ This has included the closure of 12 smaller prisons, being replaced by new larger prisons such as the 1600 place HMP Oakwood, the 900 place HMP Thameside and the 600 place HMP Isis. A number of prisons were also extended through the construction of additional houseblocks. There has additionally been a contract awarded to construct a new 2000 place prison at Wrexham. Finally, staff pay and conditions have been reformed. The *Fair and Sustainable* programme²⁰ introduced a consolidated pay structure for all staff based upon an objective job evaluation system to weight and grade posts. It also introduced revised pay levels for new staff, which reflected market rates and where therefore in some cases lower than that for existing staff. The intention of these changes was to save money in the long term (over 15 years) and 'Enable public sector prisons to remain a competitive force in an increasingly diverse market place'.²¹ The Prison Service as with other public sector organisations has been subject to public sector pay restraint, and civil service pensions were reformed including increased employee contributions, a change from final to average salary calculation and a raised retirement age.²² As a consequence, most staff experienced a reduction in the real value of take home pay since 2011 and this was having a negative impact on morale and motivation.²³

The effects of the changes have been felt amongst prison managers and the prison estate. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick, in particular has warned of the operational challenges experienced and risk faced during this period.²⁴

The years following the financial crisis can therefore be seen as ones in which neoliberal approaches have continued, expanded and intensified, albeit in altered form. Direct opportunities for the private sector have come through construction, and competition, but there has been retained and extensive core public service. However, marketisation has intensified within that core public service with practices,

techniques and approaches being imported from the private sector.

From performance management to managing change

This article now turns to the experiences of prison managers in the age of austerity, drawing upon empirical research conducted in 2014 and 2015.

As has been described, one of the central features of managerialism in prisons was the development of performance monitoring, in particular key performance targets and audits. After 2008, the structure of performance management was changed. The weighted scorecard, effectively a league table of prisons based on key performance targets, was replaced in 2010 by the

'performance hub'. This drew upon a wider range of measures including external audits for security and safer custody, HM Inspectorate of Prisons assessments and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) results, as well as a reduced number of quantitative targets.²⁵ This was used to derive an overall performance rating for each prison from the lowest (1) to the highest (4). There have also been changes to the audit system, with in-house audits being replaced by less structured management checks and assurance statements. There has also been a

change to the methodology of external audits, with a move away from a strict compliance approach towards a 'risk assessment' approach, which allowed greater qualitative judgement by auditors on the risk presented by non-compliance.

In 2014-15, managers often stated that performance management and targets had a reduced prominence, in particular key performance targets no longer dominated. During the original fieldwork in 2007-08, weekly meetings were held to monitor and manage performance, but they had now been discontinued. Instead, there was a routinisation of data reporting within meetings such as the daily operational meeting²⁶ where

It also introduced revised pay levels for new staff, which reflected market rates and where therefore in some cases lower than that for existing staff.

19. Ibid p.24.

20. National Offender Management Service (2012) *Fair and sustainable: Revision to proposals for working structures in HM Prison Service following the consultation with trade unions* London: Ministry of Justice.

21. Ibid p.8.

22. Prison Service Pay review Body (2014) *Thirteenth report on England and Wales 2014* London: The Stationary Office.

23. Ibid.

24. HMCIP (2013) *Annual report 2012-13* London: The Stationary Office; HMCIP (2014) *Annual report 2013-14* London: The Stationary Office; HMCIP (2015) *Annual report 2014-15* London: The Stationary Office.

25. See Bennett (2015) n.1 for description of each of these measures.

26. This meeting took place at nine o'clock each morning and provided a review of the previous day and identified significant events for the forthcoming day. It was attended by a wide range of managers from around the prison.

staff absenteeism and attendance at workshops or education would be reported and relevant actions identified. There was also more targeted preparation when an external inspection or audit was anticipated. Overall, performance monitoring was less prominent, to the extent that one manager stated:

You have to want to be involved in performance now...It is now becoming something that is remote and happening in the background.

There was also a sense that the alterations to performance management had also shifted focus and purpose. One manager described:

Rather than operational management, it is business management measures that are being given the weight. This feeds into how competitive we are. That is the climate we are in.

These changes in the prominence of performance measures in part reflect changes to the techniques, but they also reveal shifting dynamics of power and new priorities, in particular managing business processes.

The period since 2010 has seen significant organisational changes in order to realise cost reductions. For many managers the pace and extent of change was intense:

It feels like the most disjointed period of my career. We have changed to the point where what we do is completely different... Sometimes the change seemed relentless.

The techniques and language of change management had seeped into the work of prison managers. They described how they had to manage the process of implementing changes through the stages of 'mobilisation, transition and transformation',²⁷ using project plans, resource profiles and communication briefings provided by external, national project teams. The role of prison managers was to ensure that these processes were followed and the changes implemented in accordance with national plans. This sometimes involved reducing or recruiting staff, redeploying and retraining existing staff for new responsibilities, changing prisoner routines, and revising local policies. There was also regular

reporting upwards to the national project teams in order to monitor progress. This was therefore a structured process of co-ordinated and planned change. However, at times it could be a painful, emotional experience as described by one manager who was holding 'closed competitions' in order to select staff where there were more than were required:

I had to do the interviews with people for closed competitions and redeployment. There were a lot of people who were good at their job but didn't get it and were told that they were surplus. To them this was devastating... We are still seeing the impact of that now. I've not had to deal with situations like that before. It left a lot of people feeling unnerved and unsettled. There was massive uncertainty for people.

As well as implementing the structural change, there was an ongoing process of reviewing and smoothing the way as the changes were implemented. In some cases, this involved building a case that certain activities had been under-resourced and requesting alterations to the resources allocated through a formal process. In other cases, it meant working more informally:

It is an ongoing process of finding our feet and ironing out the problems.

Again, another manager described managing the tensions between the nationally prescribed change programme and the experiences on the ground, in particular absorbing and dispersing the emotions that it generated:

On a daily basis for the first six months we had to soak up the negativity... I felt a bit stuck in the middle, holding a line between uniform staff and senior management. Some times the change seemed relentless and it was important to be a sounding board for staff... We had to bear the brunt of it from staff and prisoners and we did feel the impact. There were times when I thought 'bloody hell, I don't know what I'm going to get today'. I felt powerless, all I could do was appease people.

Local managers had a significant role in managing people through the process of change. This included

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27. Mulholand (2014) see n.17.

having meetings and briefings with staff, guiding them through the changes so as to reduce resistance and ensure compliance. Managers at all grades described how they played a role in this communication process:

I took the corporate line: that the change is necessary, make sure they understood what was happening and how things would be changing.

I could only be sympathetic. There was not really a lot I could do with it, it was going to happen. It was like the atom bomb being dropped, I can try to push it a bit but I can't stop it from happening.

These comments reveal that the communication of changes penetrated deep into the organisation, with managers at all levels participating. However, there was some inconsistency within the narratives. For some, there was an active acceptance of corporate responsibility, for others acquiescence was a reflection of powerlessness.

The role of managers in change was centred on compliance. They had to ensure that national programmes were implemented and also had to manage the local impacts, including guiding staff. Managers had therefore become local agents of national change. This marked a shift in the power structures as managers become increasingly the objects of 'management at a distance' and enmeshed by various apparatus of control, not through performance monitoring but through change management. The next section turns to some of the effects of this upon prison managers.

Prisons as 'new capitalist' workplaces

The term 'new capitalism' is an attempt to encompass changes that have taken place in the workplace arising from the emergence of neoliberalism. It has been argued that organisations have become more flexible in which employment is more fluid and short-term, with skills changing rapidly and workers having to adapt and move.²⁸ The employment relationship envisaged by new capitalism is one characterised by 'a

more tenuous connection between employers and workers'.²⁹ It has also been argued that this has altered the character of workers, that is 'the personal traits which we value in ourselves and for which we seek to be valued in others'.³⁰

This section is concerned with the question of how far features of new capitalism have seeped into the working lives of prison managers. The section will focus on four areas. The first is the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty reported by many workers as change intensified and they were exposed to the market. The second is concerned with the feelings of some staff that they have been left behind by changes and that their experience is not valued. The third issue relates to prison management as emotional labour, that is the display of particular emotions as part of their work. Finally, there is a discussion of the effects on everyday social relations between staff and prisoners and between managers and staff.

Insecurity and uncertainty

There are at least three ways in which a greater sense of fluidity, risk and insecurity has come to characterise the experience of work.³¹ The first is that the 'job for life' may be disappearing, being replaced by casual and short-term work. The second is that exposure to markets and competition itself creates insecurity. The third way in which insecurity is manifested is through the subjective experience

of workers, in other words, they feel insecure. This section will consider how these were reflected in prison work.

Some managers felt that prisons, along with other organisations were experiencing a generation shift in which newer employees had a different orientation towards work:

The job is different now. When I joined there were older staff, ex-military and it was a job for life... Younger people don't think like that... I don't think the prison service wants to retain staff now because of the costs and the pension.

For prison managers, there was also insecurity arising from the recent changes. Whilst no one faced compulsory redundancy, some faced significant changes such as moving to different establishment, whilst almost all staff had to deal with taking on new responsibilities,

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28. Sennett (2004) see n.3.

29. Doogan, K. (2009) *New capitalism? The transformation of work* Cambridge: Polity Press, p.3.

30. Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* New York: W.W. Norton, p.10.

31. Heery, E and Salamon, J (eds) (1999) *The insecure workforce* London: Routledge.

joining new teams, changing working hours or developing new skills.

For those moving establishments, the impact could be dramatic. For example, one manager described some of the effects of the closure of a prison:

There were people working at [the prison] that lived in [the town], that had worked [there] for an awfully long time, so it did seriously affect them. It was a massive change for them... you come to a prison like this and you've got whole families in here that live just down the road. You had that [there], you had husband and wife and suddenly the husband is sent to [one prison] and the wife is sent to [another prison], they are suddenly split up, massive impact...

Others faced internal competitions for a limited number of posts with those who were not successful being identified as being 'surplus' and potentially facing moving establishment. However, managers would attempt to mitigate the impact of such changes:

There's nothing worse if there's a group of 23 people thinking 'which five of us is not going to be here?'. So I was able to... make it a bit positive and look at the... opportunities elsewhere, so I got figures from other establishments were they were short of that grade locally...so it didn't look like they'd be walking out the door on Friday with nothing to come back to on Monday. As it turned out, through natural wastage we were able to make that transition down to 18 fairly effectively. It took us a while but we got there. The staff appreciated having that understanding because they were all panicking to start with, once the figures were out, they were quite upset.

Others faced changes to personal routines such as working hours, which could be disruptive:

There were changes to their pay and their routines as they would have to work different times and shifts — it was a huge impact. But there was no other option for them, they either had to seek employment elsewhere or find another job within the establishment.

For others, there was a concern about the changing demands that would be placed upon them and new skills that they would have to develop:

I felt concerned for them because a lot of them had been doing the same job since they started...It wasn't just about the reduction in numbers, it was about having to work differently as well...There was some anxiety about capability...

All of this change and uncertainty induced in some a profound concern about themselves and their working world:

There was a lot of uncertainty. It was the worst part of my career. I found myself some days in the car park, thinking 'where are we going?'. There was so much uncertainty...It was an unhappy time. As a manager it was difficult to look forward and put it in a good light when you didn't know what was around the corner yourself. ...There was a big bulldozer coming through and you had to jump on board.

Whilst the reality was that no staff faced compulsory redundancy and very few faced having to move establishment or compete for their roles, there was nevertheless a pervasive sense of insecurity that arose from the changes and the potential for disruptive change.

Exposure to the market and the uncertainty that induced was important. Reforms in prisons were widely justified on this basis of market forces:

Everyone realised that we couldn't continue if we were going to position ourselves to compete with private prisons, we had to change...We lost some jails. It was the reality of that happening...we weren't indestructible.

However, for some, the changes were not the end of the story, and once the Pandora's box of commercial competition had been opened, it could not be closed again:

We were told 'that is what has kept you your jobs', but in the back of my head, I still think that it could be tendered out. I'm not sure of the safety of the S[upervisory] O[fficer] role.

There are more changes to come. I think there is an inevitability about privatisation. The back services will go. I also think about rehabilitation, commissioners will ask about the outcomes and

All of this change and uncertainty induced in some a profound concern about themselves and their working world.

I'm not sure whether they will think the investment is worth the outcomes. The commissioners will get more teeth.

Many also described that they felt uncertain about the successful operation of prisons under the new conditions and wondered whether resources had been reduced too far. For those, there was a concern that 'we can't just keep cutting', that already there may be a situation where the reforms had 'cut too deep and too much' and that 'it feels like we've gone to the extreme'.

Even in altered circumstances, it could not be claimed that prisons feature the flexibility and fluidity envisaged in the concept of 'new capitalism'. Indeed, compulsory redundancy was entirely avoided and managers worked hard in order to reduce and manage the anxieties of staff and minimise disruption. However, many staff were affected by changing roles, teams, working hours and skills. In addition, the exposure to the market place had become prominent in the thinking of managers and staff. The insecurity that this induced enabled significant organisational changes to be accepted and implemented.

The 'specter of uselessness'

In one of his works on 'new capitalism', Richard Sennett describes that contemporary organisations are in a constant process of change and reorganisation.³² Employees are haunted by 'the specter of uselessness' or the fear of unemployment. Sennett explains that this takes several forms, but the primary focus of this section is the fear that age and experience count for little and indeed it may be an impediment to change, as more experienced workers may be more confident in applying critical thinking to what they are being asked to do and be more willing to resist.

As has been described above, some staff have accepted the changes that have taken place in prisons without resistance, whilst others have found it more difficult. Managers attempted to ameliorate this through their actions. However, there were two groups, supervisory officers and custodial managers, where the changes had a particular impact and reflected the tensions encapsulated in Sennett's work. Under the new pay and grading systems, *Fair and Sustainable*, the two uniformed management grades, senior officer and principal officer, were abolished and two new grades, supervisory officer and custodial manager, were created. Unlike senior officers, supervisory officers did not directly

line manage staff, nor were they responsible for a specific team or area, instead they would have supervised a number of wings or part of the prison on a shift or duty basis. They therefore moved from a permanent and embedded part of the structure to a more flexible and disconnected presence. The changes also meant that they only worked as supervisors on a part-time basis, spending the other part of their role working as offender supervisors assessing prisoners, writing reports and structuring prisoners' work through their sentence and towards release. Principal officers had previously managed part of the prison, such as a number of wings or a department such as security and would act as line managers for the senior officers. Custodial managers had a range of responsibilities encompassing managing a part of the prison, including being line manager for all of the officers in that area, and they would also take operational responsibility for the prison, as orderly officer, on a shift basis, including at nights. They therefore had a wider range of responsibilities.

For many of the supervisory officers, the change was a painful experience. They had built up their skills and honed their craft over many years. For example:

Employees are haunted by 'the specter of uselessness' or the fear of unemployment.

I did feel that I had 16 years of having the skills of a senior officer, a manager and was then being told that wasn't good enough. I felt that I was being told 'you're going to be demoted'.

These feelings often reflected concerns that their skills were not being fully utilised, that they could not contribute as effectively as they could in the past and that they had to adapt to new demands:

As a senior officer I had a staff group, I had a good rapport with staff and prisoners. There was continuity so you could run things as they should be run. Now there is not sufficient time...As [supervisor] you have to cover several wings, do ACCT reviews [for those at risk of self harm] V[iolence] R[education] S[cheme], I[ncentives and] E[arned] P[rivileges], that's all you are doing, you are not getting good continuity and rapport... you get inconsistency and poor relationships...I felt frustrated as I couldn't work at the level I wanted due to the time...I felt like that was being taken away from me. I was getting down, taking it home with me.

32. Sennett (2004) see n.3.

For custodial managers, there were similar views about the effects of adapting to new roles and expectations. Many discussed the challenges of completing all of the roles in a meaningful way and this led to them questioning their own professional character:

It's a big difference. You are spread over more. We don't have enough time with staff and everything is more rushed. We have a lot of time at meetings and it is difficult to be out and about and visible. We've had to spread out our time and we can't do everything... We have to focus on daily priorities. We don't have the same handle. The role has changed so much and we are trying to do so much that we've lost our identity.

The creation of the custodial manager group also drew out a number of tensions as some of the group were comprised of those who were experienced principal officers moving into the new grade, whilst others were being promoted into it without that previous experience. The contrast between the two was widely discussed and commented upon:

There was a perception that the new C[ustodial] M[anager]s were brilliant and the old POs were dragging us down... The old P[rincipal] O[fficer]s were seen as not as good, not flexible enough. The new CMs were seen as more eager and able to do all of the paperwork that came with the role such as attendance management, but they had less experience in managing the prison operationally. The old POs saw their role as essentially operational and were stronger in this area. Others wanted them to spend more time ticking boxes. This assessment wasn't entirely fair as it looks at only one element of the job.

There was some discussion of custodial managers. They suggested that those who had not been PO's often took up the role more fully, as they did not come with pre-conceived ideas or established practices. However, some of the resistance was seen as being due to 'mind set and attitude' and their 'willingness to change'. (From field notes)

These discussions reveal how age and experience can be seen as barriers to change, in particular because of the potential for critical responses and resistance from those who have built up their craft over time. In contrast, new managers were seen as more malleable and flexible, able to adjust quickly and realise the shift in culture and practice envisaged by the reforms.

The 'specter of uselessness' loomed over the managers who were navigating change. For many their experience did not appear to be valued and they were concerned that the new expectations brought with them a dilution of their role. In contrast, bringing in new managers offered the opportunity to select those who would embody the new approaches being demanded.

Prison management as emotional labour

Emotional labour is where employees are required to display particular emotions as part of their work.³³ This is relevant to managing change as there has been an expectation about how this is presented and led, emphasising positivity. Many managers have had to deliver organisational changes despite misgivings they have about them and also despite the fact that they themselves have been affected, in sometimes profound ways.

Managers understood that they had to present a positive and optimistic representation of change and to emphasise key information which formed part of a centrally produced narrative, including that change was necessary, that this would secure the future of public sector prisons and that existing staff would be protected. Managers described their typical role in presenting this corporate image:

I met with the team and had a series of 'toolbox' talks... The content was largely taken from centrally produced narratives which we had to use. We... put a more positive spin on it saying it might not be all bad. Basically we said you have to go with it.

Managers generally saw their role as leading the change, representing the corporate perspective and attempting to role model appropriate engagement.

Privately, many managers had reservations about the changes or did not personally support them. As has been described above, many felt that resources had been reduced too far. Given these views, some felt a dissonance

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33. Hochschild, A. (1985) *The Managed Heart: The commercialisation of human feeling* Berkeley: University of California Press.

between the expectations placed upon them as a manager and their own feelings:

From a senior management level we were told we had to be positive, be corporate. I'm an honest chap, I would say that I didn't agree but let's get on with it. It was almost as if we were being asked to be dishonest.

Many managers were also personally affected by the changes. Some had to lead their teams despite the fact that they themselves might be made surplus, would have to change role or would be affected in other ways. For example, a manager who faced being displaced described how he had to compartmentalise his feelings:

If you are leading on something and you express your anxieties, you can transfer your anxieties onto others...if you are transferring your anxieties, what faith are they going to have in you in leading through that change? ... sometimes you have to swallow hard and get on with it, take a deep breath and go for it. That is what I did..

During this period of reforms, expectations had arisen not only about the activities of managers but also about their emotional presentation. They were expected to role model the new corporate citizenry, where they would either positively engage with or stoically comply with centrally directed actions identified as beneficial, be adaptable and flexible in meeting new requirements, enlist support from colleagues and demonstrate deep commitment and loyalty to the organisation. The fact that managers would do this despite their own personal interests illustrated how deeply embedded this had become in their working lives and within their own professional identity.

The remaking of everyday social relations

Many managers observed that one consequence of recent developments was that everyday social relations were remade and re-imagined in profound ways. In particular, reductions in managers along with their widening span of control would mean less opportunity to interact with staff and prisoners. This was summed up by one manager:

I used to love being out on the landing, it helped me to understand prisoners and staff. You can see any changes in mood and behaviour and you can nip problems in the bud.

It's difficult to be a good manager if you don't know your staff and prisoners. ... You're not there enough to offer support and help things run smoothly. You are flitting about, popping your head in, signing books, responding to the radio and alarm bells.

This description captures a hollowing out of everyday interactions with staff and prisoners in place of a more flexible, adaptable, portable role with shallower, more constrained and less holistic relationships.

This new form of management is highlighted in two comments which emphasise the new techniques. Firstly, one manager described management as a specific role conducting formal responsibilities such as prisoner reviews, suggesting that this marked a shift so that 'staff will have to rely on using tools rather than relationships'. The second addresses the impact of automation, in particular information technology, and also the new corporate notion of 'every contact matters, which:

...neatly encapsulated the idea that however small or fleeting, experience and desistance research shows that even the most common day-to-day interactions between everyone who works in a prison and prisoners can and do make

a difference.³⁴

This manager questions this representation:

This idea of 'every contact matters' seems like a way of saying that it matters more now because there is less opportunity...For me personally, there is less direct interaction...They don't know who I am as much these days. We put people in offices and tie them down to computers. We communicate through a machine. We get office bound. But prisoners used to see us.

From this perspective it is not only the reductions in staff and managers that impact upon the nature of interactions, but also transformations in the role through information technology and bureaucracy. In addition, the notion of 'every contact matters' acts to highlight this reduction in interactions whilst at the same time offering greater legitimacy by emphasising the productivity of sometimes limited and fleeting social contact, offering them up as a precious commodity to be consciously deployed.

34. Mulholland (2014) p.17, see n.17.

Whilst these accounts suggest a profoundly altered, even impoverished, set of social relationships, prison managers themselves were reluctant to accept and enact such a dystopian outcome. Many expressed personal commitments to the importance of meaningful interactions with staff and prisoners, ensuring that this remained a central aspect of their work. This acted to mediate and ameliorate some of the potential for new capitalist reforms to hollow out everyday social relations.

Conclusion: Prison managerialism, austerity and legitimacy

The age of austerity has undoubtedly resulted in significant changes in public sector prisons in terms of structures, cultures and individual identities. During this period, managerialism has evolved to become more concerned with achieving economy. At a structural level, this has meant that there has been a shift from performance measurement to managing change, characterised by strong central direction, managed from a distance, with those in prisons becoming local agents of change. Through this process, prisons and prison managers have become entangled to a greater extent in the values and accomplishment of neoliberalism.

Prison managers are not, however, automatons. There remains a local culture across prisons and within individual sites, and managers themselves continue to bring their own values into their work. Concerns about an over-emphasis upon economics were articulated by the Chief Executive of NOMS when he described that:

There is an understandable fear that over the next few years — not only will we be unable to tackle the deficiencies identified — but that the Service will suffer real decline — impacting adversely on the experience of imprisonment for individuals, undermining our values and reversing the progress we have made in reducing re-offending and in maintaining safe, secure and decent prisons.³⁵

This concern was apparent in the working lives of prison managers as they felt anxieties about the impact of changes but also worked hard to prevent the deterioration of relationships with staff and prisoners.

The pace, extent and nature of changes that had occurred has left many managers feeling disorientated and unsettled. Whilst they seem to have acquiesced in the

reforms, they do not wholeheartedly embrace this and experience some dissonance. This discomfort has been observed more broadly in response to austerity:

It is precisely this complex condition — the unfinished and unsettled field that Gilbert's idea of 'disaffected consent' points to so effectively. It suggests a delicate balance in which consent is (still) being given: there is only limited dissent and active counter-mobilization...But this consent is conditional and grudging, rather than enthusiastic. It may be compliant (and even calculating). But it is certainly characterized by forms of 'disaffectedness': unsatisfied, uncommitted, disgruntled and, perhaps, disengaged.³⁶

Many managers found themselves in this liminal state, not fully committed to changes taking place, but not resisting either. There was a form of estranged managerialism developing, in which managers were compliant, even active in delivering corporate change, but experiencing a sense of dissonance. They did not feel in control of the changes, which were largely driven by national policy directives, and were sometimes unsettled by having to contain their emotions and presented themselves in ways that masked their real feelings.

Inside and outside of prisons all is not yet stabilised, there is an ongoing period of flux. Many are still coming to terms with the situation that faces them and making sense of this new terrain. Indeed, prison managers appear to be seeking ways in which they can adapt and maintain important aspects of organisational culture including everyday social relations. They are acting as agents, engaged in a search for legitimacy. Yet, many questions remain unanswered and will only be fully understood in the future. Over time, will prison managers be able to find meaning and value in a changing world? Will they be able to achieve an accommodation between those new global forces, the local cultures and their own values and aspirations? Is this state of flux to be prolonged or become a more chronic feature of public services? Will they be able to accommodate the expectations of staff, prisoners and the wider organisation whilst also expressing their own values? In other words, can prison managers move beyond acquiescence in order to create a sustainable sense of legitimacy from the forces that play upon them? To a significant extent, the future of prisons over the coming years will be determined by the answers to these questions.

35. Spurr, M. (2011) *Perrie Lecture: Reducing costs and maintaining values in Prison Service Journal* No. 198 p.12-16, p.14.

36. Clarke and Newman (2012) p.315, see n.2.