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Rehabilitative Culture

Prison Officers' Perspectives on Five Minute Interventions and Rehabilitative Culture in a Local Prison

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Background

A rehabilitative prison culture has been described as 'one where all aspects of culture support rehabilitation; they contribute to the prison being safe, decent, hopeful and supportive of change, progression and to helping someone desist from crime'.¹ The Five Minute Intervention (FMI) is one of the central initiatives of HMPPS to move the organisation towards a more rehabilitative culture. FMI involves training prison staff to view everyday interactions with residents as opportunities to promote change and to encourage them in developing a range of skills such as decision-making, perspective-taking and planning more effectively. Staff are trained in a range of rehabilitative skills to help them facilitate these conversations. Examples of FMI skills include building trust, confidence and rapport, active listening, Socratic questioning and strengthening commitment to change. FMI is not seen as a 'standalone' intervention but as something which can become an integral part of the way in which staff approach their interactions with residents. Initial evaluation suggested that FMI trained officers were more focused on rehabilitative goals and made greater use of skills which supported and empowered them to address their own problems.² These authors recommended that further rollout of FMI be supported by ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness.

In this article I will describe how FMI skills were adopted by staff at a Local prison, and examine the extent to which FMI training helped staff adopt rehabilitative attitudes towards the residents with whom they work. I will also explore the challenges and

barriers which they experienced, and how these may at times have prevented effective rehabilitative conversations from occurring.

Methodology

A qualitative design³ was chosen for the evaluation because of the potential for this to yield rich, meaningful information about the perceptions of participants. Participants were nine Band 3 Prison Officers with at least two years' experience. All had received FMI training at the prison. They were selected using opportunity sampling, based on their availability to attend interviews on the scheduled days. Those who wished to participate attended an interview at an agreed time, where they were given further information and formally asked to consent to participate. Interviews were then conducted lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded. During the interviews participants were asked a number of questions about their experience of FMI training and application to practice, and about their perceptions of rehabilitative culture at the prison.

Interviewers typed up the content of their interviews using their written notes and the audio-recording and these were analysed using a Thematic Analysis approach. This involves systematically coding all the data, identifying any recurring 'themes' and then defining each 'theme' which is relevant to the evaluation topic.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the approach used. These include the nature of the retrospective design, which means that participants were asked to think back over a period of time and reflect on any changes to

1. Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F. & Tew, J. (2018). What is a rehabilitative prison culture? *Prison Service Journal* (235), 3-9.
2. Kenny, T. & Webster, S. (2015). *Experiences of prison officers delivering Five Minute Interventions at HMPIYOI Portland: Analytical Summary*. National Offender Management Service.
3. Qualitative research designs are used to gather non-numerical data, and are typically used to explore the perceptions of participants and the meanings they assign to things, rather than generating quantifiable data.

their practice. This is more likely to be affected by biases around what is recalled than if staff were interviewed before and after receiving the training.

Participants were all Band 3 operational staff, so their views cannot be assumed to represent those of other staff groups/ grades. Similarly, it is likely that the sample was less diverse than the wider staff group and so some minority groups may not have been represented within those sampled. An area of further research could be to extend evaluation to other groups, including non-operational staff who have received the training, in order to evaluate the impact of including these staff groups on FMI (or similar) training schemes.

Themes identified

Each of the themes identified below was present across several interviews. A brief description of the theme and key quotes from participants have been included to help explain the meaning of each theme. Some are divided into sub-themes where there were important distinctions between participants' views on a single topic or theme.

Theme 1: FMI training reinforced/ strengthened existing practice:

There was general consensus among participants that the training was not teaching new skills or knowledge, but some differences in terms of whether this was perceived as helpful or not. Several participants identified that FMI training acted as a 'refresher' to strengthen or reinforce existing practice. Some stated that it helped them develop existing skills or become more conscious of when they can apply these in their work.

'...Maybe not to the extent that the training went into but I did do some of it beforehand...' (P4).

'It is easy to be blasé as an experienced officer and say it is stuff you know already and it is teaching you to suck eggs but it reinforced things. I wouldn't say it was challenging but it was good to practice it' (P6).

Sub theme: FMI training is less relevant for experienced staff

Participants felt that FMI training covered skills they already use regularly in their roles, and as such did not cover significant 'new' material. Several highlighted

their extensive experience working in the service prior to undertaking the training and suggested that it is less likely to be useful for experienced staff.

'I already do all the things they highlighted. Some people's attitudes aren't the best, for softer people like that it would be useful. Useful for new people in the job too' (P3).

Sub-theme: Most valuable learning occurs in practice

Some participants referred directly to their view that learning in practice from colleagues (especially experienced ones) is particularly valuable. This was also implicit in comments made about the training by some participants, who indicated that they took little from this due to their experience of learning 'on the job'.

Some people's attitudes aren't the best, for softer people like that it would be useful.

'Watching and observing how people interact and learning from experienced staff has helped me' (P8).

Theme 2: Using interpersonal skills to support residents

Participants all described how they use existing skills to engage with residents, and most gave examples of using interpersonal skills, such as rapport building, picking up body language, using open questions and listening. Most participants did not describe any changes to their use of these skills since undertaking training, suggesting these were already being used beforehand.

'Open questions supported me to probe deeper for more information and they help to engage them [prisoners] to disclose more information' (P1).

'I'd ask what they're interested in, how they are, what jobs they did outside, what skills they have. It builds rapport' (P8).

Theme 3: Adapting practice to match individual needs

Participants discussed the need to treat residents individually and make situation-specific/ person-specific judgements about the best way to respond.

'It can be practical help about resettlement and finding somewhere to live..... For new guys coming in it is about more emotional support, waylaying their fears and emotionally prepare them' (P6).

'I use my knowledge and experience of people to change how I come across to them' (P9).

Theme 4: Supporting residents to resolve their own problems

Several participants talked about trying to encourage residents to think things through or to develop their own problem-solving skills- at times this involved drawing on interpersonal skills like Socratic questioning, or by encouraging them to do things for themselves instead of having staff do them.

'.... there's merit in those ways of working things out, using open questions so they can understand on their own without being told' (P1).

'So a prisoner came up to me and asked me to fill out a response to his complaint, to write out the app, but I said no and he looked at me a bit shocked because before then I'd always do it. I asked him 'How would you ask the question?' and then get him to write it down in the app. He went away and made a list of things and showed it to me and he'd done it. I didn't have to write anything and it makes them feel better for themselves, they're not as dependent on others....' (P2)

Theme 5: Belief in change

Participants generally articulated a belief in the capacity of all individuals to change, although in many cases this was tempered by a sense of pessimism (see below) which mainly related to whether change is supported in the prison environment. Some participants recognized their role in promoting change and modelling hopeful attitudes around this.

'.... everyone is open to change at some level; it is just about cracking your way through to getting into their way of thinking...' (P6).

'I've had 10 years of experience prior to the training, I don't believe in writing people off' (P1).

Sub-theme: Offenders are responsible for change

Several participants talked about readiness to change and about change being ultimately driven by the individual making a decision, rather than being something which can be brought about through interventions by staff.

Theme 6: Pessimism about the prison's ability to support rehabilitation

Linked to the previous theme, several participants expressed doubts about whether prison provides an environment conducive to rehabilitation. Barriers including the lack of staffing, specific lack of experienced staff, and lack of resources and opportunities for residents were cited. The influence of other residents who are not ready to change was also cited as a challenge. This theme also links to the theme below related to safety and decency in the establishment.

'Hope right now is very low, we just haven't got the staff skills and enough discipline staff to do it [build a rehabilitative culture]' (P3).

'it is difficult for someone to change when they are surrounded by people who don't want to or are bad influences...' (P4).

Sub-theme: Rehabilitation is particularly hard in a Local prison environment

Several participants discussed the particular challenges of a Local prison, including the brief stays of most residents, and expressed doubts about the potential for there to be any meaningful impact on individuals during this time. Other barriers such as the ease of obtaining substances and individuals coming in and 'detoxing' then returning to the community were cited.

'My personal view on the prison system especially the local remand prisons is you've got a massive vast mix of prisoners with

The influence of other residents who are not ready to change was also cited as a challenge.

different sentences.... It is difficult to control' (P5)

'There aren't chances in a local Cat B, they're not here long enough.... Some people have gone through a lifetime of bad luck, so how do you change someone's life around in three or four months?' (P8)

Sub-theme: Basics of rehabilitation- safety and decency- remain poor

A number of participants raised issues relating to safety and decency. This included issues with the fabric of the buildings and the poorly maintained physical environment, as well as the impact of limited staffing on officers' ability to keep offenders safe. There was recognition that inability to deliver the basics on safety and decency prevent the development of a rehabilitative culture.

'There isn't any safety, decency, or respect, not for anybody. No foundations of safety and security and order there' (P3).

'Practically I think we need the fabric of the prison to be decent and it isn't. We are working in it but when you see these guys living in it, then why would they look after anything when they are living in rubbish really' (P7).

Theme 7: Discipline and respect are important

Some participants felt that the focus of the prison system should be on instilling 'basic' values of respect and discipline. One individual articulated that they felt this had been 'lost' over time and that this had led to staff losing control of the establishment. This was also linked to resource/ staffing issues.

'There isn't discipline and that reflects onto us, they have no respect. There has got to be a balance but there isn't at a moment- it is all one way and we sort of just take it' (P7).

'We almost have to parent them and instil values before we can work on all the other things...' (P4).

Theme 8: Staff factors affect rehabilitative culture

Several distinct staff factors were identified which may affect rehabilitative culture, so these are separated into sub-themes below.

Sub-theme: Some staff have negative attitudes towards rehabilitation

One participant identified negative attitudes of staff as having an impact on the rehabilitative culture of the establishment. They specifically identified older/ more experienced staff as having more problematic attitudes on the whole, but also spoke about the following example of negative staff attitudes more generally:

'Since the training I find it cringey when I hear staff say something like 'see you next week, see you next time or see you soon' to a prisoner. Like how can you say that, how will that help?' (P5)

There isn't any safety, decency, or respect, not for anybody. No foundations of safety and security and order there.

Sub-theme: Lack of staffing prevents culture change

This is closely linked to the sub-theme below but is identified separately as it does not distinguish between more/ less experienced staff, but relates to the idea that the general short-staffing means that staff do not have time to think about working rehabilitatively.

'...it's hard for staff to change as they are under so much pressure' (P7).

Sub-theme: Prison has deteriorated following losing experienced staff

Several participants identified the impact of the loss of experienced staff, including linking this to decreased safety and decency.

'[This prison] has changed, it used to have a respectful culture, but that changed when

they got rid of a lot of the experienced staff. We lost a lot of staff that had been in the job for 10 or 20 years and you can't replace that' (P3).

Theme 9: More and better supported staff would help rehabilitation

This theme follows on from the above themes about staff factors and resource issues. Most participants identified that having more staff and/or resources to support change would help improve the rehabilitative culture. This was split into two sub-themes:

Sub-theme: Staff need more time to spend with residents

Participants recognised the value of everyday interactions and having the time to build relationships. They felt that having more time to do this type of work would be important and several spoke positively about personal officer/keyworker systems:

'The keyworker scheme is brilliant. I mean it's a rehash of the old personal officer scheme, but it changes from uniform staff being there to unlock and lock-up, to them talking and taking an interest' (P1).

'We have very little time to do a lot of the stuff we need and want to do but we can't do. Between that we have got to do all the compliance, escorting works, helping nurses, we've got little time to do the stuff we want to do for people' (P4).

Sub-theme: Staff need resources to provide practical help

Several participants spoke about resourcing and ensuring that officers know how to signpost prisoners, and that the support is actually there and referrals are followed through so that there is confidence in the system.

Theme 10: Changes to the way the regime is organised which would help

Participants identified changes to how the regime is organised which they felt would have a positive impact. These were split into two sub-themes:

Sub-theme: Increased consistency of staff would support rehabilitation

Several participants talked about the difficulties of staff being frequently detailed to different wings, meaning that they do not get to know the individuals or build relationships with prisoners or their fellow officers. This links to the theme above about the benefits of spending more time with residents and developing more effective relationships with them.

'The Personal Officer scheme worked well, you get to know your prisoners, their moods and attitudes. I'd leave staff on Units too, give them some consistency for prisoners and staff' (P8).

Sub-theme: Greater structure and purposeful activity would help rehabilitate

Some participants spoke about the benefits of structure and linked to this, purposeful activity. This links to other themes related to resourcing and providing opportunities for engagement, as well as creating a more disciplined environment.

Additional findings

In addition to the frequently occurring themes identified above, a theme was identified as salient to the evaluation topic, although it did not occur as frequently within interviews. This theme is described below:

Theme 11: Attitudes towards residents which may impact on use of FMI skills

There was a salient theme within two interviews that residents can often behave in a deceitful, manipulative way, and that this creates anger and frustration for staff. One of these individuals recognised

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that sometimes individuals are experiencing 'genuine' distress but that it is difficult to tell this apart from those who are 'attention seeking or manipulating', especially around the use of self-harming behaviour. The use of language such as this may act as a barrier to engagement in rehabilitative work and impact on staff-resident relationships.

Summary of Results

The themes identified above showed that the staff interviewed were able to identify some appropriate uses of FMI skills and were largely rehabilitative in their outlook. Some individuals felt that the FMI training was not appropriately pitched for experienced officers and that they took little from the formal training sessions.

Areas of concern raised by participants included safety, decency and resourcing, including the lack of consistent staffing on units and the difficulty in finding time to have meaningful interactions and build relationships with residents. Several individuals reflected on the difficulties they experience trying to 'make a difference' in a Local prison environment with the challenges this brings.

Discussion

Training Delivery

The results of this evaluation study suggest a somewhat mixed picture about the effectiveness of the FMI training for the individuals surveyed. Whilst a majority of participants did feel that they took at least some benefit from the training, it was seen by all of them as more of a 'refresher' for existing skills rather than covering anything 'new'. To some extent this is unsurprising and probably reflects the reality that many experienced officers will have acquired and refined a range of interpersonal skills through their work. As such, the rollout of FMI training to experienced staff can reasonably be conceptualised as a way of developing more consistency in the use of largely pre-existing interpersonal and rehabilitative skills/ behaviours.

Some of the comments made by participants suggest that they may have experienced the training as a relatively formal process which was viewed as being

quite separate from their day to day practice. If delivered as intended, FMI training should be a fairly interactive event with opportunities for participants to engage in skills practices and discussions about how they would apply learning to their roles. It is not possible to know whether the training was delivered in this way for the participants in this study. It is known that they were trained by a number of different individuals, and so most likely experienced a range of delivery styles, which may have differed in quality and in

fidelity to the FMI training manual. If some participants did not experience an interactive, engaging style of training, this may go some way towards accounting for the limited benefits they perceived. It is also possible that some participants may have felt defensive when being asked about whether the training impacted on their practice and that this influenced their responses to these questions. Given that all participants were experienced officers (some with over twenty years in the role), it may be that they felt implicitly criticised or thought that they would be admitting that their previous conduct was lacking or inadequate if they acknowledged having learned from the FMI training. An additional consideration is the possible impact of the existing culture at the establishment in shaping attitudes towards learning and openness to new initiatives.

Formally assessing the culture at the prison was beyond the remit of this evaluation. However it may be that if (as was implied by some participant comments) there is a sense of feeling let down and frustrated by decisions which have previously led to reductions in staffing and resources, this could contribute to a culture in which some frontline staff may be resistant to accepting the value in new initiatives. However, there is also some evidence of more positive attitudes towards the FMI rollout, such as the fact that some staff at the prison have made efforts to attend FMI training even when it was personally inconvenient to do so, for example rescheduling rest days.

The results of this evaluation reinforce the need to ensure that the training is delivered in a way which is multi-modal and engaging for staff. Training which is interactive and encourages learners to consider new

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information in the light of their previous knowledge and experience has been shown to help in achieving 'deep' rather than 'surface level' learning.⁴ This will be especially pertinent for delivery to groups of highly experienced staff, and it may be advisable for trainers to adjust their delivery plans to focus more explicitly on how the training content can be applied to challenging situations encountered in practice, and to allow time for learners to share examples of good practice and to learn from one another.

Rehabilitative attitudes among officers

Participants on the whole showed broadly rehabilitative attitudes and understood that part of their role is to support residents in making changes and breaking free of patterns of offending behaviour. There were some encouraging examples of how they had used everyday conversations to facilitate change, which were in keeping with the ethos of a rehabilitative culture and with the FMI approach. On the other hand, some of the findings raised questions about the possible prevalence of attitudes which may run counter to rehabilitative aims. Some participants described observing such attitudes among other officers, although there was a lack of consensus about whether it is the more experienced officers who are most likely to hold negative attitudes and be resistant to cultural change, or whether the loss of experienced staff has contributed to problems within the prison's culture. A minority of participants expressed beliefs about the 'manipulative' behaviour of residents, and this appeared to contribute to a sense of suspicion and pessimism about meaningful change. Whilst it is understandable that repeatedly engaging in often highly damaging and distressing behaviour (e.g. self-harm) can come to be seen in this light, these comments indicate that some officers may have limited understanding of the complex causes and functions of such behaviour. This could be indicative of further training and supervision needs among staff. It is possible that if they are more able to make sense of the behaviour they are expected to

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manage and are adequately supported to do so, this will help them to manage the emotional and psychological impact this inevitably has, as well as helping to create a more rehabilitative ethos.

Barriers to achieving a rehabilitative culture

Participants identified a number of practical and environmental barriers to the creation of a rehabilitative culture and to the use of FMI skills. Some of these are common across a majority of prisons; these include strains on staffing and resources, which can mean that officers do not have the time to develop meaningful relationships with residents. It has been acknowledged that building a rehabilitative culture requires a 'platform of safety and decency'⁵, and this was echoed by participants in this study, who cited the lack of safety and the poor conditions of the physical environment as barriers to rehabilitation. Participants described this being exacerbated by a lack of responsibility-taking, and attributed this in part to the fact that staff are not regularly detailed to the same unit (due to resource issues). Although this was not stated by participants in the study, it would make sense to expect that residents would not take responsibility for the maintenance of the physical environment either; partly because this is not being 'modelled' consistently by staff, and partly because, in a Local prison, many will have only a short stay and so may not be inclined to see the value in preserving and maintaining the fabric, fixtures and fittings of the prison. This creates a vicious circle, in which the environment is poor and staff and residents do not take collective ownership of driving forward improvements. This reinforces the sense of the prison as run-down and poorly maintained, and depletes motivation to take pride and ownership in it as a place to live and work. There is no easy way out of this problem and it will require long-term, sustained efforts by leadership teams to tackle both the safety/ decency agenda whilst simultaneously promoting rehabilitative values; motivating and inspiring as many staff as possible to share and work towards these ambitions.

4. Vickers, D., Morgan, E., & Moore, A. (2010). Theoretically driven training and consultancy: From Design to Evaluation. In C. Ireland & M. Fisher (Eds.) *Consultancy and Advising in Forensic Practice* (pp35-50). West Sussex: BPS Blackwell.
5. Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F. & Tew, J. (2018). What is a rehabilitative prison culture? *Prison Service Journal* (235), 3-9.

Finally, the evaluation highlighted some specific challenges to the implementation of a rehabilitative culture in a Local/ Remand prison. Rehabilitative cultures are hopeful environments in which residents are encouraged to look towards a positive, non-offending future. This clearly presents particular difficulties for working with a population who are largely either unconvicted, unsentenced, or in the early stages of their sentence (especially if this is lengthy). They are likely to be at a less advanced stage in their own thinking about change, and some will be struggling to adjust to prison life. There is a high rate of prevalence of substance misuse disorders and mental health conditions, and these may be acute following entry into custody, both because the change of circumstance may exacerbate existing problems, and because individuals may have lived chaotically in the community and not accessed services or interventions prior to imprisonment. The brevity of the typical stay was also identified by several participants in this study as a particular challenge and this is borne out by statistics; the most recent HMIP report for the prison involved in this evaluation indicates that 65 per cent of residents stayed in the establishment for under three months, and many stayed less than one month. Against this backdrop, it is easy to see why staff would feel disheartened and would feel that they witness little in the way of meaningful change. As HMPPS continues to embed the idea of a rehabilitative culture across the prison estate, it may be beneficial to develop a more nuanced understanding of what this means in different types of establishment. In Local prisons, this may be about managing expectations and encouraging staff to recognise and celebrate what may seem like small steps towards change. Helping staff to understand how their contributions fit into a 'bigger picture' might instil a greater sense of pride and achievement in the work undertaken in these prisons. For instance, an officer who lends a listening ear to someone in their first days in custody and helps them to come to terms with their

sentence is paving the way for the individual to engage positively and build trusting relationships with staff at subsequent establishments. Accordingly, effective 'Five Minute Interventions' in the Local/ Remand setting may look somewhat different to the types of FMI conversations which would benefit residents in a Training or Open prison establishment (although the core principles underpinning FMI remain the same across settings). Further research might explore the similarities and differences in FMI application across settings, and whether the skills have a differing level of impact or are perceived as more valuable by staff or residents in some settings.

Summary and Conclusion

Five Minute Interventions training is intended to equip staff with rehabilitative skills to use in their interactions with residents, thus transforming them into opportunities for learning. This evaluation explored how FMI training had impacted on the attitudes and practices of prison officers in a Category B Local prison, as well as exploring how these officers perceived rehabilitative culture at the establishment. The results give cause for optimism in some respects; officers identified ways in which they can make a difference and were broadly rehabilitative in their outlook. The findings also reinforce what is already established about the cornerstones of rehabilitative culture; safety and decency, and highlight the need for improvements in both of these, alongside a culture of responsibility-taking and collective ownership for the maintenance and care of the physical environment. Finally, this study began to explore some of the specific challenges within a Local prison environment, and this is an area which would benefit from further research so that initiatives like FMI can be rolled out in a way which is responsive to the needs of establishments and their residents and staff.