

Against Prison Management

Dr Jamie Bennett is a former prison governor, now a Deputy Director leading operational security for HMPPS.

It is unusual, perhaps even shocking that as a prison manger I am declaring myself to be against prison management. Over the course of this article I hope it will become clear that I am not against the people who work in prisons, including prison governors, and I am not seeking to call out senior officials. I am not against HM Prison and Probation Service or a prison abolitionist. I am not against forms of organisation or the ordering of activities. I am not seeking chaos. What I am against is a form of management that has come to dominate prisons, and has had harmful consequences. I want to clearly describe these developments and their effects. But I do not want to simply be a critic, I also want to articulate an emerging alternative and more positive approach.

Methodology

My analysis is based not only upon my work experience, of more than two decades working in prisons and over a decade as a governor, but also upon research I have been conducting and publishing on prison management for over a decade.

The research includes the book *The working lives of prison managers*¹, based upon research conducted in two category C prisons in 2007 and 2008. This included over 60 days of observations and 60 interviews with managers at various grades and roles in the prisons. I returned to one of the original sites in 2014 and 2015 to conduct a short research project to observe the impact of changes introduced as part of the austerity programme, including Fair and Sustainable and benchmarking.² This involved five days of observation and sixteen interviews. A further project conducted in 2017 focussed on one of the flagship 'reform' prisons established during Michael

Gove's tenure as Justice Secretary.³ This included ten days of observation and 16 interviews. Finally, I have reflected upon my own experiences of working in prisons, using an autoethnographic approach to explore the experience of governing a therapeutic community prison.⁴

This article is both a synthesis and evolution of this research, drawing together the themes and observations of over a decade of prison research and practice.

Against What?

The 1980 saw dramatic changes in western societies as the post-War welfare society was eroded and replaced by the emergence of neo-liberalism. This became embedded in subsequent decades. Neo-liberalism describes 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.⁵ In organisations, it has been observed that a dominant form of management has evolved⁶, which 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, a process described by Nikolas Rose as 'governing the soul'.⁷

1. Bennett, J. (2015) *The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local cultures and individual agency in the late modern prison* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
2. Bennett, J. (2015) *Managing prisons in an age of austerity* in *Prison Service Journal* no.222, p.15-24
3. Bennett, J. (2019) *Reform, Resistance and Managerial Clawback: The Evolution of 'Reform Prisons' in England* in *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* Vol 58 No 1., p. 45-64
4. Bennett, J. (2018) *Governing a therapeutic community prison in an age of managerialism in Therapeutic Communities: The International Journal of Therapeutic Communities* vol.39 issue 1, p.14-25
5. Bell, E. (2011) *Criminal justice and neoliberalism* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
6. Parker, M. (2002) *Against Management: Organization in the age of managerialism* Cambridge: Polity Press
7. Rose, N. (1999) *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* Second Edition London: Free Association Books

Together, these trends, combining tighter, centralised structures and attempts to re-engineer individual identity, have sometimes been termed as 'managerialism'.

These developments have influenced prison management. In particular, there has been the proliferation of technologies and techniques of monitoring including the introduction of performance targets and indicators, audits, and ratings systems. 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. Leonidas Cheliotis⁸ has analysed the processes that have reshaped how managers think as well as how they behave. He described three processes that have encouraged greater compliance amongst prison managers. First, there is an increasingly hierarchical division of labour so that managers become focused on service delivery rather than engaging in wider cultural, moral or strategic development. Second, there is intensive competition, fuelled by privatisation and performance targets. Third is the breeding of a new, up-and-coming generation of blasé professionals who are less concerned about moral aspects of imprisonment and see their work as a general management role. In a previous Perrie Lecture, Alison Liebling described that there had been a shift from a welfare orientation amongst prison managers to greater 'economic rationality'.⁹

The prison management that has emerged and that I am against is one that over-uses targets, audits and other measures so leaving little space for individuality, creativity and autonomy; over-emphasises compliance with measures for their own sake without meaningful connection with the social context, and; nurtures compliant behaviour and uniformity amongst prison managers with the aim of producing identikit corporate citizens

Prisons are not alone in seeing these practices evolve. They have been seen across the public sector and across different countries. My work on prison management shows that these approaches are deeply embedded in practice, culture and individual identity. They are enduring and are resistant to attempts at reform.

Why am I against prison management?

So why am I against such well-established and common place set of practices? The work I, and many others, have conducted have revealed profound problems with the managerialist approach. Here, I will describe six: meaninglessness; gaming the system; moral blindness; ineffectiveness; entrenching inequality, and: creating a toxic work environment.

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First, there are there are long-standing general criticisms of quantitative performance targets as being meaningless as a result of their technical flaws¹⁰ and because the work of complex social institutions cannot be credibly reduced to performance measures.¹¹ Prison managers I have interviewed are not slavishly uncritical of managerial measurement and indeed many were conscious of their limitations including that they do not always reflect what is important; they are inflexible, not always reflecting the context,

and; these measures did not take account of quality. More theoretically, Richard Sparks et al argued that:

*'...managerialism — with its reliance on abstract systems and categories — will typically not be too interested in the more 'dense' social relations, and the sensitivity to local historical traditions and past events, implied by the concept of 'a sense of place'.'*¹²

In other words, rigid, centrally generated measures do not meaningfully capture the lived experience and

8. Cheliotis, L. (2006) *How Iron is the Iron Cage of New Penology? The Role of Human Agency in the Implementation of Criminal Justice Policy in Punishment and Society* Vol.8 No.3, p.313-340
9. Liebling, A. (2011) *Perrie Lecture: The cost to prison legitimacy of cuts in Prison Service* *Journal* No.198 p.3-11
10. Cave, M., Kogan, M. and Smith, R (eds) (1990) *Output and Performance Measurement in Government: The State of the Art* London: Kingsley; Smith, P. and Goddard, M. (2002) *Performance Management and Operational Research: A Marriage Made in Heaven?* in *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, Vol. 53, No. 3 p.247-55
11. Hennessy, P. (1990) *The Political and Administrative Background* in Cave, M., Kogan, M. and Smith, R. (eds) *Output and Performance Measurement in Government: The State of the Art* London: Jessica Kingsley; Fioramonti, L. (2014) *How numbers rule the world: The use and abuse of statistics in global politics* London: Zed books
12. Sparks, R., Bottoms, A. and Hay, W. (1996) *Prisons and the Problem of Order* Oxford: Clarendon Press p.78

realities of life in a particular prison. It is for this reason that former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Dame Anne Owers, described the creation of 'virtual prison' that is 'the one that exists in the governor's office, at headquarters, in the minister's red boxes — as compared with the 'actual prison' being operated on the ground'.¹³ In other words, these measures are lacking in significance, value and meaning.

A second, and chronic problem of managerialism is that of gaming the system. This describes both a process whereby those subjected to a system of management resort to varying strategies and practices, including illegitimate ones, in order to meet the targets, without concern for the underlying intention of the measures. Gaming can be particularly induced by systems that incorporate a degree of self-interest either through financial rewards or the use of competitive performance tables.¹⁴ There were clearly examples in the sites I conducted research where performance information was submitted that was not accurate.¹⁵ For example, purposeful activity figures were submitted on a standardised form without reflecting the real time spent working; official start and finish times would be recorded rather than actual times and interruptions would not be captured. Other examples included offending behaviour programme completions being carried between accounting years in order to meet targets; there were criticisms of inaccurate recording of accidents and serious assaults in some prisons; it was stated that prisoners were moved around the prison at the end of each month in order to meet overcrowding targets (i.e. they were moved out of doubled cells); staff who had left one prison were still counted as part of the control and restraint team; and the dates on late complaint forms were amended so that they appeared to have

been submitted on time. These practices were widely carried out and accepted. It was generally viewed that such practices were necessary in order to ensure that the official performance of the prison as expressed in targets was maintained. This distortion and inaccuracy has been described as a chronic feature of managerial practices in prisons,¹⁶ and is a recognised feature of contemporary performance measurement across organisations.¹⁷ HMPPS also recognises this issue and has been actively taking steps in order to improve what is described as 'data integrity' (by creating a measure).

Gaming is not just a few bad apples, it is a chronic feature of the system of managerialism, a system that creates a world in which the requirement to comply and meet targets is stronger than normative values such as honesty, transparency and integrity.

The third concern is that managerial approaches create moral blindness, a term that refers to a lack of awareness or insensitivity to the moral dimensions of one's life, work and relations with others. Zygmunt Bauman has argued that the conditions of the contemporary world, including managerial practices, have promoted moral blindness by placing economic calculus above moral concern.¹⁸ In a study of criminal justice managers in the early 1990s, Andrew Rutherford described three dominant credos:

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punitive (a strongly held dislike of prisoners and desire to see them punished); liberal humanitarian (empathy for offenders and victims, desire to respect their rights and offer opportunities for rehabilitation, and; expedient managerialism (concerned with disposing of the task at hand as efficiently as possible).¹⁹ Rutherford suggested that expedient managerialism was growing in influence, and subsequent research on prison managers has confirmed its progress towards ideological domination. Liebling and Crewe²⁰ have

13. Owers, A. (2007) *Imprisonment in the twenty-first century: a view from the inspectorate* in Jewkes, Y (ed) *Handbook on Prisons* Cullompton: Willan p.1-21: p.16-17

14. Muller, J. (2018) *The tyranny of metrics* Princeton: Princeton University Press

15. See Bennett (2015) n.1

16. Carlen, P. (2002) *Governing the Governors: Telling Tales of Managers, Mandarins and Mavericks in Criminal Justice* Vol.2, No.1, p.27-49

17. See Fioramonti (2014) n.11

18. Bauman, Z. and Donskis, L. (2013) *Moral blindness: The loss of sensitivity in liquid modernity* Cambridge: Polity Press

19. Rutherford, A. (1993) *Criminal Justice and the Pursuit of Decency* Oxford: Oxford University Press

20. Liebling, A. and Crewe, B. (2013) *Prisons beyond the New Penology: The shifting moral foundations of prison management* in Simon, J. and Sparks, R. (eds) *The Sage handbook of punishment and society* London: Sage p.283-307

described that from 2007 onwards, intensified by the pressures of austerity, economy and efficiency were prioritized above any moral mission. They described this as an era of 'managerialism-minus', characterised as combining 'economic rationalism' with 'punitive minimalism' offering a no frills form of imprisonment. This shift was apparently accepted and implemented without resistance from managers, despite any personal misgivings they felt. This illustrates how managerialism can lead to moral ambivalence, a culture of corporate passivity and compliance. As Hannah Arendt has so chillingly illustrated, such everyday willingness to comply is banal and morally dangerous.²¹

Fourth, despite the claims of ideological advocates, managerialism has not proven to be a panacea. Indeed, it is possible to point to significant failures than show that it is ineffective. In his 2013 Perrie Lecture, the then Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick drew the lessons from the inquiry into the failure of Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, conducted by Robert Francis.²² In this report, Francis concluded that 'patients were routinely neglected by a Trust that was preoccupied with cost cutting, targets and processes and which lost sight of its fundamental responsibility to provide safe care'. Hardwick drew a parallel with the deteriorating conditions in prisons at that time. It is not hard to find further examples in the following years.

Evidence presented to the Justice Select Committee, in their 2017-18 inquiry into the damning inspection report at HMP Liverpool showed that monitoring and reporting systems singularly failed to highlight the problems in the prison at that time.²³ Self-reports by the prison over-estimated their progress and external management checks failed to pick up this gap. The processes of monitoring created a virtual prison distant from the reality. This is not an isolated example, it is an illustration of a chronic problem of

managerialism and compliance cultures. In his evidence to the select committee, Michael Spurr described:

*'Governors across the system have been coping with a huge amount of challenge. In one sense, they and their staff — Liverpool was the same — were in coping mode. They were saying 'we will make this work'.*²⁴

This desire to quietly comply or have the appearance of doing so, no matter what the demands, is a feature of managerialism.

The over-reliance on measurement combined with the blind faith of complaint managers creates virtual prisons, or what Onora O'Neill has described as a 'fantasy of total control'.²⁵ In fact they offer no guarantees of success instead they potentially offer a dangerous illusion.

The fifth concern is that performance measures obscure and entrench inequality. The problems of inequality in prisons, for both staff and prisoners, have been consistently highlighted.²⁶ In my research, many people argued that systems of measurement and monitoring meant that there was a level playing field in which everyone had an equal opportunity. Such a

view is, at best limited. While monitoring is an important element of any strategy for change, over-reliance upon this can obscure the deeper culture and structures of inequality. In my research on managers, many, particularly women and people from minority groups, have described the experience of resistance from others, being overlooked or being unable to access informal sponsorship from more senior colleagues. They have also described how this has made it more difficult to achieve targets, or the privilege of such support has made it easier for others to do so. From this perspective measurement did not create a level playing field, but instead obscured the reality behind the numbers.

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21. Arendt, H. (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil* New York: Viking Press

22. Hardwick, N. (2011) *Perrie Lecture: Lessons for the Prison Service from the Mid-Staffs inquiry in Prison Service Journal* No.211 p.3-13

23. Justice Select Committee of House of Commons (2018) Oral evidence: HM Inspectorate of Prisons report on HMP Liverpool, HC 751 available at <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/justice-committee/hm-inspectorate-of-prisons-report-on-hmp-liverpool/oral/77512.pdf> accessed on 02 August 2019

24. Ibid

25. O'Neill, O (2002) *A question of trust* (Reith Lectures 2002) available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/the-reith-lectures/transcripts/2000/> accessed on 19 May 2013

26. Lammy, D. (2018) *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*. London: Ministry of Justice available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf accessed on 02 August 2019

Finally, managerialism contributes towards creating a toxic work environment. In particular, some have described an individualism and decline in collaboration fostered by a target-obsessed culture. An illustration of this was provided by one manager who said of targets and measures:

'I will pursue the ones that I have an interest in because it will reflect on me, but I'm not too bothered about things like C[ontrol] and R[estraint] because I don't manage [that]...As long as I send back my correspondence when I get it, I'm not bothered whether we reach 100 per cent or 90 per cent in actual fact. I've done my bit. If it was only 75 per cent, I'd say how many letters did I get, how many have you had from me on time, 100 per cent well that's all I'm bothered about. I've got enough on my plate without worrying about everyone else's beefs'

As well as this individualism, many people described a perception that targets were backed up by a punitive mechanism that would ensnare those that failed to achieve. This was summed up in phrases such as: ' [if] we don't deliver the right numbers, I personally get a kicking', '[If they are not met] you get absolutely hammered', 'if we don't meet them, we get our arses kicked if it's our fault', '[If they are not met managers will] throw a few fucks into them', '[I will have to] face the wrath of my boss', '[they are] used as a stick'. There was a belief that harsh sanctions would arise from non-attainment. In reality, managers who did not succeed in meeting targets were not dismissed, managed as poor performers or treated in harsh ways, and indeed many would have their reasons for non-attainment which would usually be accepted as legitimate. However, managers were concerned about this and felt that the experience of accounting for non-compliance was adversarial and this caused them anxiety about the security of their position, reputation and future career.

There is a low trust environment. National and strategic communication refer to the need for what is called management or operational grip.²⁷ Such a term implies more intensive exercise of hierarchical scrutiny

and control. It assumes that those experiencing the grip cannot act to their full potential without such interventionist actions. It also assumes that those exercising such grip hold superior powers of insight and expertise. The notion also assumes that tighter control is the best means for achieving improved outcomes. As I have previously raised it cannot be taken for granted that such assumptions are tenable. At this juncture, I am highlighting the working culture this creates, which is one that was described by one manager in the term 'trusting is good but checking is better'. This is an environment characterised by a disdain for the motivations and capabilities of subordinates and an arrogance about the abilities of so-called superiors.

Another important element of this toxic work environment relates to well-being. Managers often experience an unswerving drive to comply with targets.

This can be seen in phrases such as: 'you don't miss a [target], you just don't do it'; 'I don't like to fail things'; and 'I guard them with my life'. However, sometimes this was expressed in ways that appeared extreme. For example, one manager described how he found it 'devastating' that he had failed to meet a target despite the fact that this was caused by a large increase in the prisoner population. Another manager described that the thought of not meeting a target 'makes me feel ill thinking about it', whilst a third described that they had been burned out and had become 'fraggled' as a result of chasing a target in difficult circumstances.

These intense, physiological feelings were elicited by the drive that these individuals had regarding targets. It was clear from these comments that these measures played a powerful and dominating role in how managers viewed themselves, their self-worth and it potentially affected their well-being.

It is for all of these six reasons that I am against prison management, by which I mean the over-reliance on targets, audits and other measures, the disconnection between measures and their social context, and the attempt to nurture identikit corporate managers. I am not, however, throwing up my hands in the air, giving in or having a bit of a moan. I believe that the alternative is already here and has always survived, sometimes as a guerrilla campaign, but now as a growing movement to reform prison management.

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27. E.g. HM Prison and Probation Service (2018) *Business Plan 2018-2019*. London: Ministry of Justice. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/724911/HMPPS_Business_Plan_2018-19.pdf accessed on 02 August 2019, p.6

Rethinking prison organisation

In rethinking prison management, I want to draw upon the work of Martin Parker, Professor of Organisation Studies at the University of Bristol. I owe him a great intellectual debt, particularly his book *Against Management*²⁸, which I consciously adapted for the title of this article. I see Parker's central argument being that our dominant notion of business or management reproduce a set of assumptions about hierarchy, capitalist markets and gender amongst other issues. This is an approach I have applied in my critique of prison management. But Parker is not only against management, he is for what he calls 'organising'. By this he means a 'more open-ended and generous process' that is alert to the wider social context and responsibilities.²⁹ In short, Parker is arguing that there are different, less harmful, more enriching ways of organising. I want to suggest some ways in which prisons could be organised differently, and in some cases are doing so. As Parker says, 'Human beings are fantastically imaginative and creative, so why are we teaching people that market managerialism is the solution to every problem?'.³⁰ I am not naïve about this, like Parker, who recognises that his failure is already assured as his calls for action will never be fully adopted. So, I do not suggest that I have the right prescription, or even if I do that my ideas will be adopted. I nevertheless want to participate in the debate.

Rethinking values

I described earlier that in a study of criminal justice managers in the early 1990s, Andrew Rutherford identified three dominant credos: punitive (a strongly held dislike of prisoners and desire to see them

punished); liberal humanitarian (empathy for offenders and victims, desire to respect their rights and offer opportunities for rehabilitation, and; expedient managerialism (concerned with disposing of the task at hand as efficiently as possible).³¹ Rutherford suggested that expedient managerialism was growing in influence, and subsequent research on prison managers has confirmed its progress towards ideological domination.

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I want to return to the period in which managerialism started to really take hold, around the turn of the century. In particular it was translated into prisons by people such as Phil Wheatley and Martin Narey. These were people who had a deep knowledge of prisons, their social context and practiced with a sense of moral values.

At that stage, the introduction of management tools for measurement, monitoring, improved administration and accountability was not done for its own sake, but was done with the intention of turning the liberal intentions of senior professionals into reality, and preventing abuse or major organisational failures such as the escapes of the mid-1990s. Ben Crewe and Alison Liebling described this era as 'managerialism-plus' where the use of techniques of management control were 'overtly welded to better standards for prisoners and to greater control and encouragement of staff'.³² The belief in the moral purpose was so intense that former Director General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, went as far to say:

*'...show me a prison achieving all its KPIs and I will show you a prison which is also treating prisoners with dignity'*³³

Although never entirely disappearing, this moral purpose was in eclipse for many years, submerged by

28. Parker, M. (2002) *Against Management: Organization in the age of managerialism* Cambridge: Polity Press

29. Parker, M. and Evans, M. (2019) *Shut Down The Business School* available at <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/shut-down-the-business-school/> accessed on 02 August 2019.

30. *ibid*

31. Rutherford (1993) see n.19

32. Liebling and Crewe (2013) see n.20 p.293

33. quoted in Liebling, A. assisted by Arnold, H. (2004) *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life* Oxford: Clarendon Press. p.68

the management tools as if the technology took over humanity. More recently this concern with the moral ambitions of prisons has re-emerged. Most prominently, the nurturing of rehabilitative cultures has revived and promoted professional interest in the social and cultural dimensions of prison life.³⁴ It has encouraged greater creativity and sensitivity to the experiences of those living or working in prisons.

The revival in liberal and progressive professional values offers a greater sense of meaning for many people who work in prisons. Leaders, formal and informal, at all levels throughout the organisation are being offered the opportunity to reshape the culture and express themselves. They are able to be 'entrepreneurs of identity'³⁵, crafting a vision that people can believe in, sharing aspiration and energy to make a positive difference.

This rebalancing of management technologies and a sense of mission is an important development that offers a return to the aims of those turn of the century pioneers: a desire to make prisons better not only organisationally but also morally.

Rethinking measurement and power

I want to address the issue of measurement and targets as this is so central to managerialism. It is also critical to the issue of power, where targets are centrally directed, they also reinforce hierarchical control. I am not arguing that there should not be any measures, but I am suggesting that they are both designed and deployed differently. I am suggesting that the relationship of power between central and local should be recalibrated.

Measures that are opportunistic or simplistic are of limited value and can be harmful. More meaningful measures do exist, but are complex and time consuming. I would particularly highlight the HM Inspectorate of Prisons' *Expectations*, carefully crafted from international human rights standards and assessed by a multi-disciplinary team, within a consciously

nurtured professional environment.³⁶ Their assessments are meaningful judgements that are underpinned by liberal-humane values. I would also highlight Measuring the Quality of Life and Staff Quality of Life surveys developed by Professor Alison Liebling at University of Cambridge.³⁷ These are rigorously researched and validated tools that have been deployed to assess social and occupational climates.

Many of the other measures, audits and target used though are poorly designed, inappropriately used and given greater weight than is merited. Would prisons really be less effective without the myriad of traffic-light rated measures, centrally-prescribed assurance checks and dashboards that are being generated? Many I have interviewed through my research have observed a growing assurance 'industry', by which they allude to an ever-expanding and self-absorbed machinery.

I am not arguing that there should not be any measures, but I am saying that central targets should be limited to more significant and meaningful inspections and MQPL. With a less but better quality centralised assessment, there is the opportunity for greater local creativity in identifying strategic priorities and assurance to support this. This is what happened initially in the reform prisons in the North East. These

were established by Michael Gove, in an attempt to replicate the greater professional autonomy achieved in schools and hospitals through academisation and foundation trusts respectively. The reform prisons initially withdrew from centralised target-setting and in its place there was a visionary reimagining of the relationship between the prison and the local community and the contribution of prison staff and prisoners. There was an attempt to go beyond an insular focus on internal management targets, and instead to situate the prison in a wider social context including not just the criminal justice system, but also local government and business. A vision was created taking account of wide consultations, and measures started to be crafted that would support the delivery of

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34. Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F. and Tew, J. (2018) *What is a rehabilitative prison culture?* in *Prison Service Journal* No. 235 p.3-9

35. Haslam, A., Reicher, S. D. & Platlow, M (2011) *The New Psychology of Leadership: identity, influence, and power*. London: Psychology Press.

36. Available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/our-expectations/> accessed on 02 August 2019

37. Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004) see n.33

a locally developed strategic plan. This experiment only lasted a short period before centralised targets were reintroduced. It nevertheless offered a glimpse of how prisons might play a different and wider role in local communities, how they might develop and deliver localised strategies and governance.

The appointment of Dr. Jo Farrer as Chief Executive of HMPPS may offer an opportunity to revisit some of these ideas. In her initial published comments, Dr. Farrer has discussed how prisons might play a role connecting services that contribute towards reducing reoffending, and how there might be a different balance between trust (at least earned trust) and assurance.³⁸ These signals suggest that a new path may open up, one in which, like the reform prisons in the North East, there is an opportunity for greater creativity and localisation.

Rethinking engagement and participation

Moving away from a highly centralised, prescriptive and hierarchical structure entails a rethinking of the role of those who live and work in prisons, as well as those people who have a stake including local communities.

People are individual thinking and feeling agents rather than the homogenised commodities or depersonalised organisational tools envisaged by managerialism. An alternative approach would place greater emphasis on self-determination and choice. Giving people the opportunity to participate in shaping their work environment, the goals and the methods for achieving them.

Many organisations, including prisons, have strengthened communications, consultations and rewards to nurture greater engagement by employees. This 'empowerment' approach has become increasingly favoured in both public and commercial sector management. Again, in the reform prisons of the North East, there was a concerted attempt to reimagine a whole set of relationships, engagement and participation. As has been mentioned, this started with the community, opening up to other organisations, building collaborations and connections. Internally, it also meant creating a more professionally diverse workforce, by importing senior expertise in areas such as probation, psychology, finance and HR. They were given greater prominence and authority so as to

broaden the skills of the team. This challenged the traditional professional hierarchies and gave a stronger role to a wider range of expertise.

In relation to employees more broadly, the reform prison envisaged a transformation in what they described as 'mindset' so that rather than being reliant upon a directive hierarchy, employees would take greater self-responsibility, acting as 'role models' and 'enablers'. A typical account of this role was offered by one executive team member, who described that they were trying to build a team in which people would:

'[Take] a personal responsibility to work with each other and the men who live in the prison, it's not about I do it because I'm told to, it's what the purpose of what you are doing, why are you doing it and how are you doing it? What's the objective you want to achieve at the end of the day'

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The intention was to create a more active and engaged staff group who would work creatively to realise the progressive aims of the prison. There was a desire to create a more enriching environment for its own sake, where people could self-actualise or 'achieve their potential', but it also had an organisational benefit by attempting to 'draw

out and benefit from that discretionary effort that people exercise when they are really engaged in what they do'.

To realise this goal, managers were developed through a programme aimed at moving from the hierarchical task centred approach to one in which they would become 'The kind of leader we want them to be...we want them to be able to inspire and motivate the people that work for them'.

As with employees, there was a vision to develop prisoners as role models and enablers of change. The ambition was for this to be built upon normalised interactions including the use of first names, less confrontational interpersonal exchanges and focussing on rewarding good behaviour rather than punishing bad. It was generally recognised that involving prisoners in the governance of the prison would be positive, including formal and informal consultations about policy developments, setting up representative prison

38 'Jo Farrer, HMPPS CEO – a shared purpose' HM Prison and Probation Service Intranet article published on 24 May 2019

councils and having prisoner representatives on management committees. The desire to create a stronger sense of internal 'community' can be seen as a way of giving prisoners a stake in the institution in which they live, so as to produce legitimacy.³⁹

These approaches are also adopted at HMP Grendon, a highly successful institution that operates as a series of therapeutic communities for men who have committed very serious violent and sexually violent offences.⁴⁰ Grendon has a professionally diverse workforce, including specialist officers, psychotherapists, creative therapists, psychologists and probation officers amongst others. The teams are integrated and have a shared sense of purpose. They are well trained and supported. The residents also take an active role in the therapeutic work, the resolution of conflicts and the running of the establishment. This is a long-standing example of the potential of empowered self-governance in prisons.

Although the work of the North East reform prisons were drawn to a conclusion before they had been realised, and Grendon is often marginalised as an exceptional case, these examples nevertheless offer a strategic blueprint for rethinking the role of the community, employees and prisoners.

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situations and variations in performance or delivery but a transactional leader is proactive, constantly searching for ways to develop and improve, and; transactional leaders attempts to make employees comply through the use of rewards and sanctions, and in contrast a transformational leader appeals to higher ideas and attempts to motivate and empower people to transcend individual interest in order to achieve wider benefits.

The difference can be seen in Richard Sennett's work on craftsmanship.⁴³ Leadership, particularly in human and social contexts such as prisons, is not simply about the efficient provision of predefined services. It is also about the desire to do a good job for its own sake. Craftsmanship, as Sennett describes, involves the relentless search for improvement, through the skilled use of tools, the sensitive organisation of labour and an appreciation of materials being used. And so in prisons, craftsman-like leadership involves the skilled use of management structures and resources, the sensitive organisation of those who live and work there and an appreciation of prisons as a social institution that has strong moral and emotional dimensions. A new management culture would see a shift from conformity and compliance to creativity and craftsmanship.

Rethinking leadership practice

For managers, the challenge is to escape the iron cage that has been constructed. Practice has become confined within the transactional mould. What was envisaged in the reform prisons, and in concepts such as 'rehabilitative leadership'⁴¹ is a more transformational approach. The main differences between these approaches are⁴²: transactional leaders work within the culture and constraints of the organisation, while a transformational leaders seeks to develop new ideas and practices, challenging and changing the culture; transactional leaders are reactive, responding to

Conclusion: A politics of love?

I have suggested here that I am against prison management, or at least the dominant mode that is characterised by the over-use of targets, audits and other measures so leaving little space for individuality, creativity and autonomy; the over-emphasis on compliance with measures for their own sake without meaningful connection with the social context, and; the nurturing of compliant behaviour and uniformity amongst prison managers with the aim of producing identikit corporate citizens. I have also outlined out an alternative set of practices that offer a different route.

39. Sparks, R., Bottoms, A. and Hay, W. (1996) *Prisons and the Problem of Order* Oxford: Clarendon Press

40. See Bennett, J. and Shuker, R. (2017) *The potential of prison-based democratic therapeutic communities* in International Journal of Prisoner Health, 13:1 pp. 19 - 24

41. HM Prison and Probation Service (2019) *Rehabilitative Leadership – A sourcebook for prison managers*. London: HMPPS

42. E.g. Bass, B. (1990) *From Transactional to Transformational Leadership: Learning to Share the Vision in Organizational Dynamics* Vol. 18, Iss.3, p.19-31

43. Sennett, R. (2009) *The Craftsman* London: Penguin

These approaches are characterised by: a strong concern with the moral and social context of imprisonment; more locally-rooted institutions that are connected to and engaged with the communities they are situated within and the communities that are situated within them; optimism about the creativity and self-motivation of people and their capacity to do good, and; a more craftsman-like set of management practices that imaginatively and sensitively engage with the moral, cultural and emotional dimensions or organisational life.

I see this approach as having much in common with what Max Harris and Philip McKibbin have described as a 'politics of love'.⁴⁴ They were not talking about romantic love or personal relations, instead the term was used in a way that can be contrasted with other terms that you will be familiar with such as the 'politics of hate', 'politics of division' or 'politics of power'. A 'politics of love' describes a value-based approach to politics characterised by care, concern and commitment. A politics of love is not an approach that offers a ready-made answer in every situation, indeed it recognises that the world is a complex and messy place and finding solutions requires collaboration and engagement underpinned by mutuality, respect and trust. It is more a process and a set of values that should

shape how we engage with those around us professionally and politically. The alternative approach to prison organisation I have sketched draws upon these ideas. It describes a set of relationships, organisational structures and practices that are underpinned by values and love.

I want to return to a quote I shared earlier, which characterises the culture of managerialism. It was a comment in which a manager described that 'trusting is good but checking is better'. This quote illustrates how managerialism corrodes social relations and values, it entrenches power, domination and alienation, and diminishes the skills and capacities of people at work. A politics of love would not suggest that there is no place for checking — openness, accountability and transparency are clearly important — nor would it suggest that blind trust is a substitute — responsibility and engagement are critical. A politics of love suggests a more collaborative and meaningful set of questions about prisons, the relationships between people, the environment that is created and the services that are offered. A politics of love might start by asking those who live and work in prisons, as well as those who are part of the wider community: 'what do we agree makes a 'good' prison and how do we work together to make things better'.

44. Harris, M. and McKibbin, P. (2015) *The politics of love* available at <https://theaotearoaproject.wordpress.com/2015/05/20/the-politics-of-love-max-harris-and-philip-mckibbin/> accessed on 02 August 2019