

# Lessons from the Literature

Rick Evans

*Principal Psychologist, Midland Regional Office.*

&

Peter Shapland

*Director of Psychological Services, H.Q.*

In this article, we stand back from the detail of 'A Fresh Start' and place the re-organisation of prison establishments in the context of the 'management of change'.

Most studies of major organisational change have been conducted in the commercial or industrial sphere, but they provide basic lessons about the management of change which can be applied to public sector organisations.

## Organisational Change

The style of 'A Fresh Start' may be recognised as one of five basic approaches to planned change (Lovell, 1984). Organisational change can be brought about by.

1 *Personnel development* — training staff; identifying and promoting key people in the organisation; management skills training;

2 *Organisation development*—getting the 'infrastructure' right; establishing job descriptions and teamworking; piecemeal improvement of systems, management procedures, meetings, and communications;

3 *Collective bargaining*—management and union negotiation to change organisational methods and behaviour, usually through pay and productivity agreements;

4 *Decree*—planned change by order of senior management, by instruction, or by legislation;

5 *Financial reform of ownership*—fundamental change in the control and organisation of the means of production; profit sharing, co-ownership, worker co-operatives, or nationalisation.

These five approaches represent a scale of increasing use of centralised power to create organisational change.

How far down the list does 'A Fresh Start' come? In the experience of most prison staff, the initiative has been based more on decree than on collective bargaining. Nor is the threat of financial reform without relevance. The Prison Service has been aware for some time of the possibility of 'privatisation' which most staff regard as harmful, if not to their continued employment then to their traditional ways of working.

This style of change, employing centralised power to bring about re-organisation, has also to be set in the wider context of the government's general approach to the public sector and its 'financial management initiative'.

Two points follow from this analysis of the approach employed in 'A Fresh Start' for planned change. First, the greater use of centralised power allowed faster and more radical change. Secondly, staff received a concomitant lack of consultation about the proposed changes.

## Speed of Change

For most staff, 'A Fresh Start' was heralded out of nowhere in the summer of 1986. Two task groups studying the working practices and the

management structures of prison establishments were set up and had made recommendations by Christmas 1986. With pace unprecedented in such fundamental matters, the Prison Department turned these recommendations into instructions and issued them early in 1987. Traditional modes of consultation were speeded up or avoided.

The re-organisation had, of course, a much longer history. Even without the financial management initiative and the political desire to peg budgets and reduce overtime payments, the management of Prison Service establishments had been addressed in several Home Office reviews (for example 1974 and 1983). Management and structures were also criticised in the May inquiry (1979) which prompted the Accountable Regimes projects (Chaplin, 1986) and the consultative exercise on the review of management structures (1984).

'A Fresh Start' as a specific initiative, however, had a speedy launching. The initial implementation was then accelerated from the proposed 12 month programme, partly because of pressure from staff once they knew the terms and conditions of the initiative.

The foreshortened programme also reduced the possibility of extensive consultation on specific proposals, especially with those grades of staff excluded from unification.

## Consultation

The Prison service has not undertaken major change in this way before.

Using Burns and Stalker's analysis (1961), the Department can be characterised as having mechanistic rather than organic systems: it is organised to operate in a stable situation rather than in changing conditions. Its traditional approach to improving procedures has been through committee and working party.

Traditional modes of collective bargaining were likely to progress only so far and the wider consultative review of management structures had reached virtual deadlock (Prison Department 1984). A more business-like style of consultation (essentially, pressure negotiation coupled with service-wide propaganda about broad principles) made more possible the introduction of change because impetus to launch the initiative could be maintained.

Rather than building on individual development or moving forward only through traditional consultation and negotiation, the use of centralised power did allow more radical change and the possibility of re-distributing power. On the other hand, limited consultation always brings the obvious risk of conflict and resistance (Blake and Mouton, 1976).

### Requirements for Success

It is probably only in the long term that we will be fully able to assess the success of this style of planned change.

Studies of re-organisation in other enterprises, however, suggest six pre-requisites of successful change (Butler, 1984).

1 *A shared belief in the reasons and goals for change.* Prison staff generally seem to accept the need for change in working practices, pay and allowances, overlap of managerial grades, and clarity of purpose. The overall goal, however, is not universally appreciated.

2 *An overt and committed leadership which understands the process and goals of change.* Much of this has been evident at the top of the organisation although continuity in the management of change was disrupted by the three most prominent designers of 'A Fresh Start' moving on from the Department. Responsibility for implementing the detail of re-organisation has since lain with the Deputy Director General and the Regional Directors.

3 *Tangible advantages for changing longstanding working and managerial practices.* The alterations to their pay and conditions (and the introduction of time off in lieu and rent) have brought tangible advantages for many staff, inducing them to accept unification and other organisational change. A primary aim of 'A Fresh Start' was, after all, to eliminate overtime payments and the associated work culture, as described by Charles Erickson in this edition of the Journal. While the pay and conditions of unified grades have been directly affected, however, there have been no tangible advantages for other staff who are also facing or drawn into radical changes. The disadvantages in terms of pay relativity and the general esteem of these non-unified grades are obvious.

4 *Clear goals and specific objectives for the organisation.* While considerable effort has been put into clarifying tasks and functions, staff do not share a clear vision of its goals, nor the objectives of the re-organisation. As always, the Prison Service demonstrates its practical capability but lacks the common denominator of shared purpose.

5 *Staff training and preparation for change.* Although much effort and money has been spent on training and communicating, many staff have not felt sufficiently prepared to undertake new roles or modified ways of working. This relates to the speed of launching and the foreshortened programme for implementing the re-organisation. More recently, to maintain 'A Fresh Start' despite shortfalls in complements and increases in staff sickness, local and regional training has been minimal. This, in turn, has lessened the opportunity to develop the skills, abilities and confidence of the staff undergoing change.

6 *Clear roles and expectations.* The staff directly affected and those being asked to manage the change in establishments need a clear understanding of what they are being asked to achieve. New roles and working methods evolve in practice and detailed planning (not possible in the timescale for implementing 'A Fresh Start') could have reflected old styles of working as much as a new ethos. Nevertheless it can be asserted that clarity in roles and expectations was lacking—especially for Principal Officers as Grade VI managers and for newly created

positions such as the Head of Inmate Activities. Uncertainty still exists about the eventual scope and responsibilities of doctors, administration officers, specialist managers, and even the governor who was to be 'freed up' to manage the establishment as an entity.

Most staff want to do a good job, and can be encouraged to do more; but motivation needs to be supported through participation. Staff were broadly informed before changes took place but not fully prepared for modification to their roles and working arrangements.

So what is the prognosis for 'A Fresh Start' using these criteria? Observation suggests we are about halfway down the list of these six pre-requisites of successful change.

There is no doubt that a substantial programme of change has been implemented in a short time, despite the perpetual rise in the prison population and the uncertainty of complementing establishments with sufficient staff. 'A Fresh Start' has been launched and its main elements implemented but much has still to be done in modifying and maintaining the 'infrastructure' of establishments—clarifying goals and roles, meeting individual needs.

Much has to be done, too, in examining and resolving outstanding problems of role, aspiration, structure, and accountability of grades not included in the unified structure. This has been promised as a second phase of 'A Fresh Start'.

Although consultation about detailed proposals might have been deeper, new communications techniques have been employed by management. These include 'A Fresh Start' bulletins and videotapes to reach all members of the service: they have been mixed in their appropriateness and timeliness as received by staff but have helped in maintaining a trusting climate for change.

At this stage, studies of the management of change (see Lippitt et al, 1985) suggest we should be reinforcing results and building on the practical strengths of the re-organisation. All staff (including local management) will need encouragement rather than criticism. Emerging 'best practice' should be identified, stabilised and spread to other establishments.

Finally, an essential requirement in the management of successful change is research and evaluation. As in routine management, the controlling

factor in the cycle of planning, organising and implementing is feedback. The recent appraisal of the practical outworking of 'A Fresh Start' is a vital step in a wider evaluation (despite its failure to have planned exact 'before' and 'after' measurements, particularly of the effects of re-organisation on regimes).

Some formal evaluation exercises are being conducted at the Regional tier of the organisation and include continuing comparisons of these effects. No doubt more could be made of locally held records and staff surveys to establish the benefits as well as the disadvantages associated with change.

### Sustaining Change

Personal reactions to changes in role and working practices have demonstrated that 'A Fresh Start' can provide a framework to improve job satisfaction, tackle difficulties, and demonstrate positive leadership. For some, particularly managerial grades, 'A Fresh Start' is regarded as an opportunity.

Many other staff are committed to change, have benefited in pay and conditions, but see 'A Fresh Start' as a challenge rather than an opportunity. For others again, because goals and expectations are not yet clear or because they have little investment in terms of years of service, 'A Fresh Start' is a threat: something by which the individual will be judged lacking, which he hopes will not affect him, or which—like earlier initiatives—will eventually go away.

There is an inevitable hierarchical effect. The clarity of change based on decree is greatest for those at the top but dissipates lower in the organisation. This is observed not only in the case of 'A Fresh Start' (where the sense of vision may or may not infuse local implementation) but was a finding in the evaluation of Accountable Regimes (Evans, 1985; Ager, 1986).

These projects at Featherstone and Shepton Mallet prisons, which contained many of the aims and precepts of 'A Fresh Start' (Chaplin, 1986), were essentially driven by the centre and—despite attempts to build in consultation and staff participation—failed to register in the minds or behaviour of staff providing the basic regime activities and services. In a nutshell, their effect was evident at (but not much below) the Principal Officer tier of local management.

This was in contrast to the development of the regime at Leicester

prison (Fisher, 1985) where staff at all levels had been engaged in consultation, participated in the planned changes, and understood their nature and purposes.

There are, to coin a phrase, two avenues to organisational development: the Shower approach and the Bidet approach. These may be described as 'top down' and 'bottom up'. In terms of initial participation and the design of the re-organisation, 'A Fresh Start' and Accountable Regimes may be characterised as 'top down'; and the Leicester developments as 'bottom up', with more marked staff ownership of the changes.

There may be an inevitability about how far down the hierarchy a 'top down' or centrally driven initiative can reach. In re-designing the meeting and management structures at Long Lartin prison, for example, it was evident that the spirit and effects of change again dissipated in the hierarchy by Senior Officer level (Shapland et al, 1972).

Another organisational paradox is that the most radical changes are driven from the centre but would benefit from local ownership. The most successful and long-lasting changes are found to be those in which staff participate and can help resolve difficulties: after all, people tend to solve their own problems best.

On the other hand, change can be idiosyncratic, each establishment adapting the organisational principles to local conditions. This could lead to dilemmas for those needing standardisation to regulate national, mechanistic systems. Accountable Regimes and 'A Fresh Start' show the difficulty of sustaining systematic change and local ownership in a centrally driven re-organisation (Berman, 1980).

The net result is that local management bears the brunt of creating changes: major re-organisation is without doubt 'management intensive'. It is worth observing that the local managers on whom we depend to motivate and sustain other staff are going through the process of change in their own roles and working conditions. Those who are asked to create or maintain teamwork commitment, and initiative for change will themselves require sustenance.

### Looking Ahead

It is recognised that a major re-organisation such as 'A Fresh Start'

is not an overnight or one-off change. In terms of the practical implications, let alone the managerial culture and working climate of establishments, we are embarked on a process which will take years to complete.

The Department should be acting to stabilise and spread successful change by identifying 'best practice' and by meeting individuals' training and support needs. It is already committed to a second phase of 'A Fresh Start' (no doubt underway when this edition of the Journal is published) in which grades of staff not absorbed by unification will be examined in more detail.

The guidelines on the management structures, while clarifying how operational accountabilities should flow to the governor within the establishment, failed to examine the arrangements of 'dual accountability' for such staff whose professional lines extend beyond the prison walls. Nor were they intended to inform the structure of the Regional and Headquarters tiers of the organisation which must also be affected by 'A Fresh Start'.

The immediate priorities lie in improving the 'infrastructure' of establishments: in getting into place the necessary details of management accountability charts, job descriptions, contingency plans, staff reporting procedures, management information systems, performance monitoring, meeting and communication structures, and job-specific staff training.

In this respect, organisational life has not changed. These processes and systems were always the underpinning of successful management and organisation and needed constant attention and improvement.

As a study of the most reputable British companies shows (Goldsmith and Clutterbuck, 1984)—mirroring its more well-known American predecessor (Peters and Waterman, 1982)—success is doing a lot of simple, obvious managerial actions but doing them well.

In the longer run, 'A Fresh Start' will succeed or fail on that basis. ■

### References

- Ager TJ, (1986) Evaluation of the Accountable Regimes Project at Shepton Mallet, 1982-1984. *Directorate of Psychological Services Report*, series II, number 143.
- Berman P, (1980) Thinking about Programmed and Adaptive Implementation: Matching Strategies to Situations: in Ingram HM, & Mann DE, (eds.) *Why Policies Succeed or Fail*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

- Blake RR, & Mouton JS, (1976) *Consultation*. Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Burns T, & Stalker GM, (1961) *The Management of Innovation*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Butler AJP, (1984) *Police Management*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Chaplin BG, (1986) What Happened to Accountable Regimes? *Prison Service Journal*, number 64, October, pp8-10.
- Evans RG, (1985) The Evaluation of Featherstone Prison 'Accountable Regimes' Project, 1981-1984. *Directorate of Psychological Services Report*, series II, number 141. (See also Evans RG, & Marsden D, *Prison Service Journal*, number 58, pp4-6, April 1985).
- Fisher J, (1985) A Review of Leicester Prison Regime Development, 1981-1984. *Directorate of Psychological Services Report*, series II, number 142. (See also Fisher J, *Prison Service Journal*, number 58, pp 7-9, April 1985.)
- Goldsmith W, & Clutterbuck D, (1984) *The Winning Streak*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Home Office, (1974) *Report of the Management Review Team: Prison Management Review—Third Stage*.
- Home Office, (1983) *Prison Resource Control Review Stage III*.
- Lippitt G, Langseth P, & Mossop J, (1985) *Implementing Organisational Change*. London: Jossey-Bass.
- Lovelady L, (1984) Change Strategies and the Use of OD Consultants to Facilitate Change. *Leadership & Organisation Development Journal*, volume 5, number 2, pp 3-10, and number 4, pp 2-12, 1984.
- May, (1979) *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the United Kingdom Prison Services*. London: HMSO.
- Peters TJ, & Waterman RH, (1982) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-run Companies*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Prison Department, (1984) *Report of the Review Team on Management Structure in Prison Department Establishments*.
- Shapland P, Fergus H, Marriott F, Reynolds C, Thomson M, & Widdows G, (1972) A Research into Consultative Management at Long Lartin Prison. *Directorate of Psychological Services Report*, series I, number 2.

#### WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? — continued from page 22

erning Governors to have knowledge and experience of the MSS function and it is proposed that some 10 or so HMSS posts would be reserved for the unified grades to provide the necessary career development posts for them.

So Phase II turns out to be an empty promise. The Department's commitment was to leave the problems unsolved, and yet there is recognition of the central role of MSS within the establishment and realisation of the necessity for future Governors to have a real understanding of it.

Apart from these suggestions, the Department is considering a once only opportunity for non-unified grades to seek entry into the unified grades at, probably, Grade 5 level. The criteria for selection have not yet been defined and there is no indication of the number of applicants that are expected to be successful. Why is entry likely to be restricted to Grade 5 level? Such a position is not likely to attract those of senior rank and long experience. How many successful applicants will the Department allow? There must be a very modest ceiling on the numbers that can be absorbed without massive disruption. Why must Executive grades be subject to special selection procedures when such were not necessary when the former Chief Officer grades were absorbed at Grade VI and V levels?

This scheme may provide opportunities and solutions for individuals but does nothing to address the overall discontent amongst the Executive grades.

#### The Future

The role of the MSS function and that

of its head, has changed considerably with the introduction of Fresh Start. The consultative document describing the responsibilities of the HMSS has been circulated throughout the Service and my experience is that it has been well received with little dissent from its content. Heads of MSS are keen to grasp the new tasks which are ascribed to them. There is much to be done in expanding the personnel role to provide a better service to individual members of staff and better information to management. There is the challenge to be faced in widening the traditional audit role to encompass operational assessments, the monitoring of performance against targets and the contracts agreed in accordance with CI55/84. Health & Safety at Work is an area which in most establishments has not received the attention it deserves, and in some cases, that required by statute, and which now falls within the responsibility of the HMSS. Cash limits, budgets and financial matters assume greater and greater importance and many look forward to Governors, in the not too distant future, being allocated a total budget within which to manage their establishments.

There is then much to be done and Governors are recognising the central and crucial role which MSS will play in assisting, or even allowing, them to manage their establishments effectively. Indeed, ironically, many Governors are now saying that such is the importance of the MSS function it is wrong to expect it to be managed by a non-unified grade whose position as the poor relation in the management hierarchy serves to diminish its importance in the perception of those in junior or non-managerial grades.

In general, Heads of MSS are keen to come to grips with their new

role, but are anxious about lack of resources to meet all the new tasks and the lack of training available to them in new areas of responsibility. This keenness is, on occasions, dulled by their damaged morale engendered by the Department's apparent lack of concern for them and also by the daunting task of creating or expanding into those new and important responsibilities without the necessary status in the organisation to properly effect it. After all, is it reasonable that they should embrace the additional tasks and responsibilities for no additional reward and in the knowledge that as contracted hours diminish the most senior SEO Head of MSS will be paid less than a Grade VI Group Manager for the same hours worked. The Director of Personnel, in rejecting the claim for unification, said that each should receive fair recognition and reward in return for their contribution — is that what he meant? His predecessor at the Administration Officers' conference in Scarborough said that the Department could not expect to continue to get their services on the cheap, indeed, it would be immoral to do so — where is that morality now?

The concept of Fresh Start is a good one, the new job and role of the HMSS is a challenging and fulfilling one, but the Department will not achieve its aim of unity of purpose whilst a group of staff, important to its success, is demoralised and alienated.

Through lack of courage or conviction, the Department failed to grasp the opportunity it had to create a truly unified service and until it does so Fresh Start will never be fully effective. There is still time for the Department to re-think — it should concern itself more with saving its new initiative than with saving face. ■