

Bloc 3: Parlem de l'organització penitenciària

**TAULA RODONA
TEMES D'ACTUALITAT EN L'ORGANITZACIÓ I EL *MANAGEMENT*
PENITENCIARIS**

**PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT IN THE PRISON
SYSTEM**

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I want to use this talk to examine some of the factors that influence the planning and assessment of the services we deliver. I'll use the experience of the Prison Service in England and Wales to explore the history and some changing themes.

Prior to the early 1990's there was little objective measurement of prison performance. A great deal was based around senior managers' understanding of their staff and prisoners. For some time, we had been assessed by an independent prison inspectorate, which reported on conditions and the treatment of prisoners. We also had Independent Monitoring Boards, comprising members of the community who volunteer in establishments and act as an on-site inspectorate. But both of these assessments of performance were based more on feel than any meaningful measurement.

The development of a new planning system began for us with the arrival of a new Government in 1997. Academic learning of «What Works» had begun to impact on central thinking and visits to Canada to see their approach to tackling offending behaviour resulted in the development of a new Sex Offender Treatment Programme and the importation of the Canadian Cognitive Skills Programme. In the strong belief that this could break the cycle of re-offending, the new Government provided substantial investment to support the delivery of these cognitive behavioural programmes with new money for prisoner education aimed directly at improving basic literacy and numeracy skills.

But this new agenda represented a real challenge for a Service that had always seen its principle purpose as maintaining security and up to that point had not acknowledged any significant responsibility for prisoners after release. The need to communicate this new purpose throughout the organisation led to the development of two very clear objectives for the Prison Service as part of a wholesale change programme.

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The first objective recognised that security remained the bedrock of any further work. We had earned the confidence of Ministers by improving our security record and that had to be maintained. We also had a responsibility to keep prisoners safe and to treat them well. The second objective reinforced the Government's very clear expectation that time in prison should be constructive and that prisons had a crucial part to play in preventing re-offending.

Having established the objectives, we needed to attach measurable indicators to know whether we had arrived at where we wanted to be – or even to know if we were heading in the right direction. The objectives served as a basis for building a comprehensive performance and planning system to ensure we could plan and deliver the new activities. The approach we took was a very simple one, involving operational staff in workshops to explain the new objectives with them discussing the outcomes and breaking them down into measurable outputs. From there, they were involved in identifying the right inputs or processes that prisons needed to deliver to generate the desired outputs. The first objective serves as a simple illustration.

SLIDE 3

The objective is to protect the public. How do we know we have achieved that? One way is to target the number of escapes from prisons and to plan for a reduction. But to achieve a reduction in escapes, prisons needed to prioritise and sharpen their performance on certain activities, such as searching, maintenance, and staff training. So by setting clear targets and expectations in those input areas, we hoped to see the desired impact on the higher-level output target. The same consultative process through the two objectives generated a hierarchy of performance measures, covering all the main aims of the Service.

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We ended up with a focussed bundle of around 12 top-level output measures that related directly to the declared objectives. Underpinning these are around 40 lower level targets that set out the key activities that prisons deliver. Importantly, these lower level measures apply only to specific types of establishment, so for the first time we could focus on specific functional specialisms and compare prisons on a like-for-like basis. So for example, some of these targets only applied to female prisons, others only to High Security establishments. The simple graphic on the slide was extremely helpful in communicating to staff the link between the top-level objectives of the organisation and their individual contributions through job plans. Their involvement in identifying appropriate measures also helped generate a strong sense of ownership in the new processes. The aim was that all the performance measures for an establishment could be delegated to individuals or teams within the prison, setting personal accountability for delivery.

Producing such a large number of measures presents difficulties. First, it makes it difficult to get an overall picture of performance. Second, it does not differentiate between more or less important targets. And third, on a practical level, data collection is burdensome and data quality is a key constraint.

To address this, we developed an analytical tool known as the Weighted Scorecard. This was based on the Balanced Scorecard promoted by Professors Kaplan & Norton. The scorecard aggregates large volumes of management information and analyses performance of each establishment by assessing delivery against the target set, against the benchmark achieved by other similar prisons, and the rate of improvement in the previous year. It also begins to expose variances in relative performance with some establishments showing up as performing extremely well against target compared with others who struggle to deliver.

SLIDE 5

But the new system of targets was by no means complete. There was no focus on quality of delivery. We had not addressed the lack of consistency in the way services were provided in establishments and there were no systems in place to identify good practice and to embed that more widely. The measures were also criticised for ignoring the moral dimension of prison management, and undermining morale by dismissing managers' professional judgement.

This led first to the development of a process audit function and the publication of 61 separate performance standards covering key custodial activities. Each standard sets out a model way of working built up from a number of 'baselines' that define in detail the work that must be completed. For example, the Security standard sets out model procedures for management of tools, searching and supervision of prisoners, controlling keys and locks and the management of escorts. Operationally, standards have become an important tool for prison managers to ensure that the prison is doing what it is supposed to. Written in simple terms and designed for use by practitioners, they have provided a powerful mechanism for ensuring that all prisons deliver services on a consistent basis and in a way that builds on available good practice. Compliance is assessed by periodic audits completed either by an in-house team, or by a central unit that visits each establishment on a two-year cycle.

So we have volume targets and information about compliance with quality standards. But we could not ignore the opinions of external inspectors who continue to provide useful input from their own particular perspectives. Our Prison Inspectorate conducts a full inspection of each prison every five years and the process has become recognised internationally as a standard of excellence. The continued involvement of the Independent Monitoring Boards reporting annually on the welfare of staff, prisoners and the state of the buildings, also provide useful information. Although these judgements are impressionistic, their perspectives are generally well informed, detailed assessments of quality.

Finally, despite a framework of performance targets, standards and independent scrutiny, there were other crucial aspects to operating a successful prison that we had to take into account. The competence of the management team, the industrial relations climate, the strength of staff-to-prisoner relationships are all key factors in running a successful establishment that we could not measure in any objective way. For these, we rely on subjective judgement and our Area Managers were well placed to make this assessment.

Each prison is managed in a geographical area, by an Area Manager, usually an experienced former Governor. They make regular, documented visits to each of the prisons in their area. Their reports look beyond the performance information, to get a sense of what is

often described as the 'feel' of the prison. This expert scrutiny begins to get underneath numbers and takes us closer to the moral performance of our establishments.

A concept of decency was launched by the Director General in a general test that challenged prisons to consider «whether or not staff would be happy with their relatives being held there».

The decency agenda was primarily designed to improve the way we treated and cared for prisoners. The emphasis on decency was based on a moral judgement that treating prisoners properly and decently was the right thing to do. Forget targets and standards, this agenda aimed to break the culture amongst some staff that prisoners were somehow lesser people, not worthy of care and concern. It has been a powerful drive which has helped balance the focus on numeric targets and reinvigorated the moral dimension in prison performance.

We commissioned research from academics from the University of Cambridge led by Dr Alison Liebling, to explore the possibility of a single quality measure for prisons. The challenge was to develop a basis for measuring the 'feel' of the establishment that all experienced operational staff claim to be able to recognise intuitively. That research, looking at the values of both staff and prisoners, led to the development of a tool to Measure the Quality of Prison Life or MQPL, as it has become known.

This is ground breaking work and an exciting development for us. The process uses prisoner questionnaires and focus groups to assess prisoner perceptions of concepts such as relationships, safety, respect and well-being. The results can be aggregated to produce a score for each of 16 dimensions with an overall normalised score. The process has now been launched into establishments and takes audit beyond its previous process-driven basis into a more quality-based approach. It also gives prisoners a direct stake in the measurement of prisons, increasing their importance in service delivery.

The tool is undoubtedly important, both for bringing a moral dimension into the measurement of performance, and for improving our capacity to measure factors affecting social values. It is early days for the initiative and the first results from initial studies are only just emerging but these are already raising some interesting issues. First, the results are internally consistent with our other assessments of how individual prisons are performing. But there is a concern that the process does not take sufficient account of security. The risk, of course, is that by focussing on the moral aspects of imprisonment and quality of relationships, the prison moves from order and control to 'appeasement', where staff have insufficient control and scepticism. We have already seen examples where prisons have returned extremely positive perceptions from prisoners but this masked a situation where staff had become too close to prisoners in their care and this contributed later to two serious escapes.

We are describing the measure as a work in progress, and evaluation is on-going but this clearly has the potential to take performance measurement in a new direction. In general terms, the capacity to measure the quality, or the 'feel' of a prison, in a way that is comprehensible to an external audience and introduces a specifically moral element into our measurement system is an exciting prospect.

These four separate measurement systems have developed incrementally over time and are now incorporated as an overall performance measurement framework. Taken separately,

each of these four dimensions provide important assessments about performance in our prisons. But taken, together the information provided by these separate and sometimes contradictory measures provides an extremely powerful basis for making an expert judgement about overall performance.

SLIDE 6

In 2003, we introduced an internal rating system that put all of the measures together to determine a single 'performance level' for each prison. Using the most recent data from the range of sources, we rate each prison on a four box scale; where level 4 is an excellent prison and level 1 is for failing jails. The Operations Director makes the assessment in consultation with Area Managers and other Directors. This is not a mathematical or formulaic approach – rather it is an expert judgement based on a thorough knowledge of the prevailing operating environment. The rating is reviewed every quarter to recognise that the environment within an establishment is volatile and situations can often change rapidly.

Importantly, the rating is made widely available to all staff – we want the judgement to be transparent and we want them to know how the assessment has been reached. It is important that staff know exactly how they could be doing better in certain areas and we can provide specific evidence to support the conclusion reached.

The rating also serves as a gateway to a series of interventions to reward or improve prisons depending on where they are in the scale. The very best establishments at Level 4 gain recognition as a High Performing Prison. This gives them some financial reward, wide recognition across the Service and earns them additional freedoms and flexibilities.

Prisons at Level 1 that have consistently under-performed may be required to submit a remedial plan to address the identified deficits. There is additional support and funding for them and their improvement plans are subject to a formal evaluation. If the plan is not accepted, the prison may be handed over to private sector competitors for them to manage. This is a tough process and the stakes are high. We have used this process eight times now with dramatic results. The possibility that a failing establishment might be privatised and staff transferred to a new private sector employer has served to engage staff and unions in a way that surprised even those of us that developed the mechanism. The improvements in service and basic conditions for prisoners generated in each of the eight failing prisons is impressive. However, we realise that this process will only work for as long as staff perceive a realistic threat of privatisation. At some point one of the bids might have to fail to maintain its credibility.

All other prisons that do not achieve Level 4 must, during a seven-year cycle, undergo a robust diagnosis of their performance and deliver targeted improvement, supported by external expertise and support.

This rating process and its relationship with targeted interventions to improve performance is important, as it links performance measurement to specific management actions. Whether that is recognising and rewarding the very best or requiring remedial work in others. In this sense we have moved from performance *measurement* to performance *management*. It also serves as a form of risk assessment, targeting attention on those establishments that need it most.

The rating addresses a number of key issues. First, it draws the assessment system into a coherent whole; all performance management information is considered in making an assessment and all of the aims of the Service are considered. It addresses criticism that we had sold out to the extremes of managerialism by balancing both quantitative and qualitative evidence with operational judgement. By using this methodology to help us understand the risk posed by each establishment and having appropriate management systems to respond to this in a proportionate way, we are confident that we can provide more effective monitoring, control and development. We are looking to see how we can further develop the approach, for example by extending the use of performance related pay for staff and relating salary increases directly to the performance of their establishment.

We are pleased with the framework we have developed but we will need this to take us into a new era in prison management.

SLIDE 7

The early evaluation of the «What Works» approach and a review of the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural programmes have prompted a re think about reducing re offending. The early optimism that reducing re offending would simply flow from doing programmes has been replaced by a wider appreciation that those who offend have complex lives; that changing their behaviour is very difficult and requires an integrated and determined approach that joins up what happens in prison with what happens outside. Prisons alone cannot deliver prisoners into jobs, ensure they maintain family links and have a home to go to on release. The new words are «partnership» and «end to end offender management».

A review of Correctional Services in England and Wales has led to the introduction of a new organisation as part of our Interior Ministry. The new National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is a commissioning body for criminal justice services, including prisons and probation. It has three clear aims. To reduce re-offending by improving the end to end management of offenders; to rebalance sentencing with effective fines and community punishments, leaving prison for the most serious offenders. And finally, to do this through a policy of competition and greater involvement of private sector providers. Two major aspects of this are relevant to prisons; the clear focus on reducing re-offending and the threat of competition for the delivery of prison services. Put bluntly, unless the public sector Prison Service can respond effectively, then the private sector, which currently accounts for around 10% of prisons in England and Wales, will grow.

In conclusion, it has been an interesting journey for us. We have gained wide commitment to a common set of objectives; we've establishment good ownership among practitioners and achieved a direct link between the top-level objectives and the responsibilities of individual staff. We've addressed the concerns of those worried about the crude deployment of targets by developing ways of measuring moral performance in an objective way. And we've arrived at overall judgements that bring together a range of potentially conflicting information into a risk-based approach for doing things better.

But is the organisation better for all that? Well, as part-Architect and Chief Salesman for these reforms, I am maybe the wrong person to judge. But on our own measures, the Service in England and Wales is performing better now that it ever has.

Escapes from prisons have fallen from 232 in 1992 – almost five every week – to just three so far this financial year. The rate of drug misuse in prisons has more than halved and we achieved all the targets set for delivering offending behaviour programmes. We've reversed an alarming upward trend in the rate of prisoners that commit suicide in our prisons and we are proud that prisoners achieved 10% of all the adult basic skills qualifications awarded last year. I could go on.

It is too early to say whether the investment in reducing re offending and our impressive delivery of outputs is having a significant impact on the overall reconviction rate. After all, for all the known drawbacks, this remains as the most appropriate outcome measure of the effectiveness of imprisonment. The evidence is that reconviction rates are barely moving but we will have to wait for the results of the survey of leavers from 2004.

For us, the introduction of NOMS as commissioner of custodial services re-enforces the view that well targeted activity, delivered efficiently in an integrated way, can make a difference and I am confident that our approach will help us deliver on that basis. I look forward to coming back with the results of the next reconviction surveys to tell you how the public Prison Service in England and Wales is thriving in the more competitive environment.

Thank you for listening.