



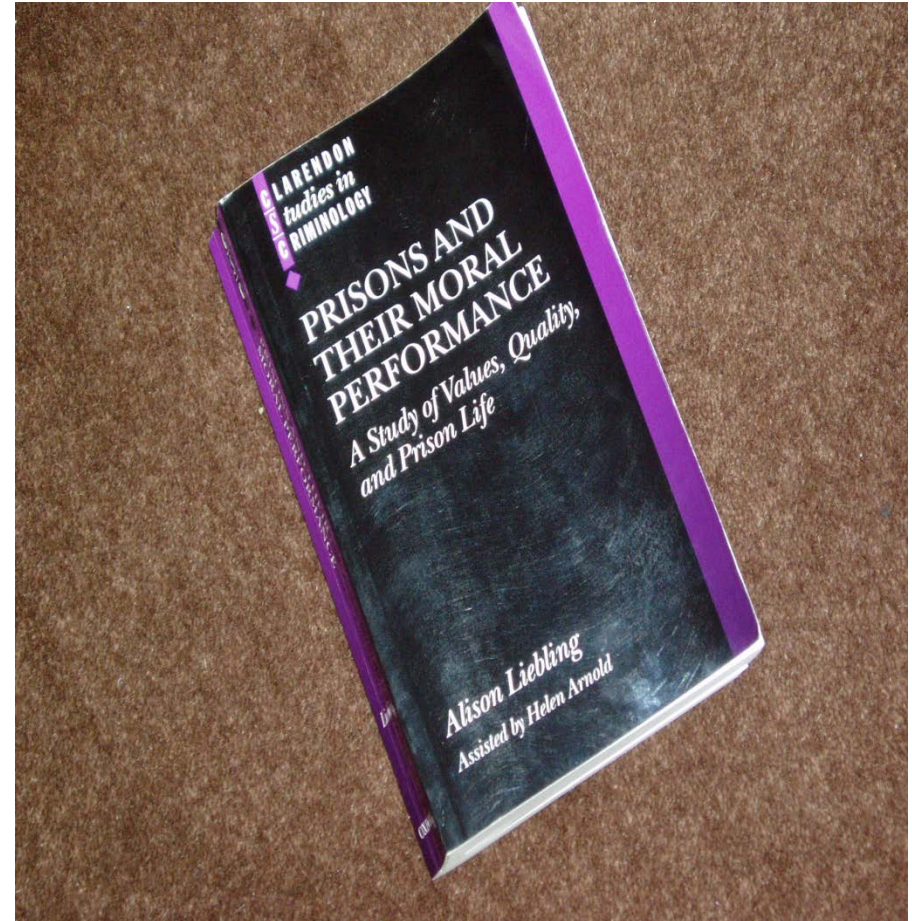
'If you don't gel with prisoners, then it affects how they use the services': A preliminary investigation of the importance of relationships in promoting engagement with prison-based resettlement interventions

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Prisoner/Prison officer relationships: Prison context

- Prison population in England & Wales more or less doubled since 1990 and Short sentenced prisoner numbers remain high.
- 1990s + = 'what works' & explosion of scale & scope of rehabilitation approaches. Although effective, reoffending rates stay stubbornly high
- Can agencies of the CJS 'force the plant' of change?
- Specifically, are relationships in prison instrumental to promoting engagement with resettlement interventions (& ultimately desistance)?



Desistance: what role for 'relationships'?

'Zig-zag' process...not an event

Reasons and Theory are contested, but...

Fostering and sustaining hope & motivation is integral (Maruna, 2012)

Thus, is it reasonable to assume that the relationship is significant (Burnett & McNeill, 2005; Dowden & Andrews, 2004)

Specifically, someone who carries 'hope' & motivation when this may be absent from the offender (Rex, 1999)



Can rehabilitation-focused relationships flourish in prison?

- Move towards fairness, decency and rehabilitation in more recent years but could be said that..
- 'Escape, riot, internal order and security' (Crawley, 2004) still prioritised
- Relationships reported as characterised by deep suspicion & hyper-vigilance (Leibling, 2008)
- OMU/Psychology staff vs wing-based staff suggestion that the message is different: resettlement is not core? (Halsey, 2008).
- Silo working is still normal practice.

'Whilst you don't know what happens, you become more critical of other departments. When you go and see what they actually do, it's not so bad. Until I went to the [psychology] department myself, I was probably more critical up until that point, purely and simply because of not having an idea of what they do. For resettlement to work we've got to be pulling together and understand that every member of staff is responsible for resettlement'



HMPs Grendon & Whatton– templates for change?

HMP Grendon:

Key aims include improving relationships

Offenders have a degree of power & influence (Bennett & Shuker, 2010)

‘Constructive and positive relationships’ (e.g. Governor Q&A, joint officer-prisoner events)

For Both Prisons:

Offenders note improved behaviour, outlook & attitude DIRECTLY attributable to feeling valued, respected & nurtured by relationships with staff and experiencing a sense of safety (e.g. Blagden, 2014)

Very different to many experiences of short-term prisoners in local prison...



Relationships and STS Prisoners

'Relationship' lacks clarity within policy & practice (Raynor et al, 2010)

But evidence = probation staff who receive training in building rapport, built better relationships & lower conviction rates (Bonta et al, 2011)

Short-term sentence (STS) was not in scope of OM and this relationship shortfall now acknowledged. But..Select Committee recognised 'the time in prison is not long enough to put in place meaningful interventions and is unlikely to contribute to offender's rehabilitation'

What can we do?

Pathfinder initiative (Lewis et al, 2007) suggests Relationships (pre and post release mentor) appeared to reduce recidivism

Structure and 'having someone to talk to'...can make difference between engagement or not

Even for STS: adherence to 4 C's (Holt, 2000) - consistency, continuity, consolidation and commitment – still important and 'Every relationship matters'

But precise dynamics how/why prisoner-officer relationships impact on engagement with rehab/resettlement programmes is patchy (Howells, 2000)

Aims and objectives of a pilot study

- Testing the relationship water – 2 x ex-PO; 2 x reformed offenders
- Explored issues of: evidence that a 'relationship' facilitated change; ability to cultivate meaningful relationships (and what does a meaningful relationship look like?); important qualities of PO (and other staff); use of discretion (esp. contradictions), control, responsibility and organisational change; and can relationships also de-motivate and engender disengagement?
- Ultimately interested in ascertaining what respondents thought about following question:

How (incl. how much) and why do you think a good relationship(s) affects the likelihood of someone engaging with resettlement opportunities and ultimately promoting desistance

Findings from pilot study

Theme 1: Impact of relationships

The general consensus from officers was that expectations cannot be set too high in terms of success stories:

'I would say that the little steps you do see being taken.. are quite motivating, as long as you set your expectations at the right sort of level (PO1)

There was a view that 'small steps' are the best officers can hope for and that anything more is a bonus:

'I think the fact that he'd been challenged consistently for so many months on various aspects [was positive in the long-run]...but you know, we weren't able to achieve the final breakthrough [there and then]...that came much later in his sentence'(PO1)

Some of the most positive data in this respect highlighted that officers may foster change by presenting opportunities, acting as role models, and treating prisoners with respect and fairness:

'it was a screw that actually got me into education, so that meant I had something to lose [...]. If you've got nowt to lose, you don't really give a damn' (RO1)

Findings from pilot study

Theme 1: Impact of relationships

- Whilst this is the case, officers acknowledged the difficulties that prisoners face once released from prison and how these problems may negate any positive work:

'So at the time.. it perhaps does have a bit of an influence.. whilst they're in prison.. but the moment they go back out and they're mixing with those people again.. the same circle of friends the same area.. I think the influences outside are far, far stronger... cos there's more of them, for a start.. and people like me.. as a prison officer.. [becomes a] distant memory so it's unimportant.. it doesn't matter.. and you only become part of the way they think again when 6 months later they're back in prison.. and they want a phone call.. or they want a bit of extra food off the hot plate.. they want to go and see the chaplain or whatever it might be you know' (PO2)

Findings from pilot study

Theme 2: The Ideal Officer

Ex-officers held the view that the ideal officer needs to possess a balance of skills to effectively form relationships and do the job well. Officers need to have a range of traits mentioned in the 'transparency' theme (5), but also a genuine, true, sincere and human persona. These traits help to spread positive, constructive messages around prisons:

It was.. depending on the individual staff. Some of the screws were there to sort of.. they were power crazy.. they were wanting to make your life a misery and, and.. err.. and some were actually.. decent human beings.. and it was a screw that actually got me into education (RO1)

[some staff] made you feel small. They were just arrogant, old school... the first time I was in, they were nearly all like ex-military (RO1)

interpersonal skills, being personable, being friendly, being fair.. all of that stuff is what makes a good officer (PO2)

Findings from pilot study

Theme 3: Discretion

- Data suggests officers understand the complexities of prisoners and offending. Officers spoke about the need to examine the 'bigger picture' when applying rules or boundaries with prisoners. There seemed an agreement that ensuring progress is being made with individuals is more important than just 'following the rule book'. It's about achieving more with prisoners in the grand scheme of things, rather than enforcing every rule mechanically:

'You need to see what the rule is trying to do and what you're trying to achieve.. all of the things they know they've done wrong, but not actually giving them any opportunities to see for themselves' (PO1)

Officers believed that strategies such as: compromise, openness, empathy, discretion were integral to facilitating relationships and would help to push those prisoners wanting to change in the right direction.

As a reformed prisoner pointed out, prison was less constructive when the environment was more militant, harsh, and rigid. There was also a sense that prisoners need opportunities to realise and facilitate change:

'[I tried to] give some people opportunities because I felt that [throughout] my life I had various opportunities and when I seized them I did better than when I let 'em slip by' (PO1)

Findings from pilot study

Theme 4: Prison Environment

All participants (reformed offenders and ex-officers) agreed that the prison environment was instrumental in determining levels of engagement (with resettlement). PO's were seen to play a key role in this.

That said, the reformed offender noted how the second time he went in, the regime was more 'lax' and how this could be detrimental:

'[When I went back in] prisoners there were more privileges and the prisoners were more volatile' (RO1)

This perhaps highlights the need for balance: a middle ground. Officers agreed:

' The regime doesn't help.. Sometimes - because if you've got a restrictive regime, or it's a restricted regime - it's about gaining that compromise. It's a fine line between being friendly and respectful and carrying out your duty' PO2)

Officers felt that relationships and giving prisoners respect and dignity were in many respects, more important than operational issues / staffing levels etc.

Although this was the case for ex-officers, the reformed offender had a number of negative experiences to share, all suggesting a big divide between staff and prisoners:

'Well it's like prison staff there's good and bad but it's still 'them and us' isn't it...you're still an ex-con to them, you're not, a work colleague (RO1)

Findings from pilot study

Theme 4: Prison Environment

Some of the best outcomes (in terms of engagement) appeared to take place when due consideration was given to equality and de-stigmatisation (RO1):

‘If I go by what I experienced, the best relationships with the screws were the work screws... [...] now and again they’d go on the landings but their main role was a work colleague. I was a plumbers mate and [the] plumber working with me was a screw. That relationship was completely different to the landing screws; they treated you [as an equal]. At tea break they would bring you tea’

The reformed offender also felt strongly about being spoken to properly, and with respect and dignity, a view shared by the ex-officers:

‘I felt really sorry for some of them [prisoners] because they were actually really nice people some of them, but they were just on the wrong side of the fence you know (PO2)

Findings from pilot study

Theme 5: Transparency

- Prisoners and officers felt strongly that transparency and all associated concepts [honesty, clarity, consistency and fairness] are key to forming effective relationships.
- The data highlighted that these factors were crucial in maintaining mutually beneficial relationships and helping with mental health.
- [Mutual] respect was a common theme in the interview transcripts.
- Ultimately, being a good prison officer seems to be about striking a balance of traits and skills that enable boundaries to be maintained, but effective relationships to be developed at the same time and 'leaving all good roads open'.

Discussion

- Prison Relationships matter in complex ways – providing a testing ground for the community & facilitating and supporting change but with poor, hostile or controlling relationships or environments creating barriers.
- Therapeutic Alliance and Motivation Theories (Miller & Rollnick, 1983) (genuineness, transparency, responsiveness, respectful but with structure /boundaries) = translates into prison officer relationships (see later presentation on Thursday for more on this....)
- Therapeutic and 'Positive Balance' Prison Climates therefore supported as key to support change through providing a safe and structured environment, 'light' relationships and maintaining and engendering hope and confidence including with 'small steps' change (supporting the work of Blagden, 2014; Crewe, 2011; Slade & Forrester, 2014)
- Transforming Rehabilitation & other initiatives– opportunity for change and development of new ways of working and organisational culture: Emphasises the importance for professionalization of prison staff

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