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Ariana Youmans

Georgia College & State University

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Ariana Youmans

Faculty Sponsor Lana McDowell

Effective Prison Management: An International Collaboration

Introduction

There have been universal efforts to regulate the management of prisons via the United Nations; however, it is important to be aware of cultural differences when it comes to effective prison management (Coyle, 2003; Franklin & Platt, 1994). It is not only important to recognize cultural diversity in one's own country, but it is also important to understand cultural diversity in other countries abroad. This understanding allows for greater understanding in regards to policy implementation and why certain processes and mandates are considered to be effective for these various systems. In addition, it should be realized that what works for one nation may not be applicable in another. Similarly, the goals of incarceration may differ among world nations.

This paper will focus on a compilation of effective prison management processes from various countries. It is hoped that this paper will allow readers to walk away with a greater understanding of underlying similarities among correctional systems in regards to what seems to improve prison management effectiveness. Lastly, it will enable readers to see that effective prison management can take a myriad of forms depending upon the culture and time period in which one finds himself or herself.

The following ingredients for prison effectiveness may surprise some. A sampling of these ingredients include evaluation of historical influences, training of prison employees, the

recognition and respect of cultural differences, the ability to teach and feel empathy, as well as respect for human rights.

Early American Correctional History

Though this section is about American correctional history, it is also relevant to British history and the correctional histories of many other countries that have since been influenced by the American correctional system. Additionally, the problems of the past often present themselves in current life settings—even hundreds of years later. Individuals currently working in the correctional system may find this early history uncannily similar to the operations of present-day facilities. The following sections will discuss major historical influences to the correctional system that have since been and are still often replicated by others.

Great Britain's and William Penn's Influence

America's early correctional history was largely influenced by Great Britain, William Penn, the Quakers, and William Rush (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). The British influence was harsh in comparison to that of William Penn, who planned laws for Pennsylvania's citizens in hopes that these laws would allow for a more peaceful society. Penn's criminal justice ideas were progressive and allowed for societal responsibility in addition to societal judgment of offenders via trial. It was through his set of laws that America's system for selecting jurors was created (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). Penn had laws publicly posted in hopes that it would allow for all members of society to be informed about which acts were considered to be illegal. In addition, Penn allowed for defense of the accused. Penn also decided that offenders would be financially free of responsibility for their stay in prison, including meals, lodging, and clothing (Depersis & Lewis, 2008).

Penn believed that persons who considered societal interests (the good of the whole), rather than just their own self-interest (the good of the self) would promote a more positive society. Penn expressed through his laws that society was to be responsible for its members and that societies needed some form of regulation. Depersis and Lewis (2008) express this by stating, “the laws that were set served the purpose of securing the safety of the people, but, even more than that, the laws existed to regulate the society” (p. 639).

Penn also had enough foresight to realize that “...as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined...” (Penn, 1682 as cited in Depersis & Lewis, 2008). In fact, upon Penn’s death, the colony of Pennsylvania largely reverted back to its strict, original British influence. Despite the return to British-inspired rules, Penn’s influence has had a lasting effect on the criminal justice system both in America and worldwide.

Benjamin Rush, Thomas Eddy and the Quaker Influence on Prison Reform

The next main influence on the correctional system was that of the Quakers in Pennsylvania and New York. Prior to the Quaker reformation, men and women were housed together in prisons where sex was a frequent occurrence and liquor was sold by prison officers (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). The Quakers believed that prison should improve the lives of individuals rather than making them worse. Thus the Society for Alleviating the Miseries of the Public Prisons, led primarily by a man named Caleb Lowndes, was created to revert prisons back to a system similar to that of William Penn’s design (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). The society worked to separate the housing of men and women, decrease the use of alcohol, and create a governing system for the prison (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). Perhaps even more importantly, the group worked to restore respect and human dignity among inmates in an attempt to help

rehabilitate offenders (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). Thus, the prison was to serve as more than just a tool of incapacitation.

The Quaker idea for punishment was to combine effective custody and punishment of criminals with humane treatment. The Quakers called for an end to sheer violence in dealing with criminals... The thought was that the prisoner would eventually be ready to return to society and upon release be a productive and cooperative member (Depersis & Lewis, 2008, p. 644).

What Lowndes observed was that “treating prisoners as human beings actually helped to reform their behavior, rather than driving them into greater evil” (Depersis & Lewis, 2008, p. 645).

A novel idea brought about by Benjamin Rush helped transform the Walnut Street Jail into a prison. It was Rush who thought that offenders should support their incarceration in the form of work within the prison and in providing their own food (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). This idea was improved upon by allowing offenders to have extra earnings and clothing upon their release, as a way to better assimilate in the free world. It was believed that if inmates could feel “a sense of belonging in community following release,” recidivism may be reduced (Depersis & Lewis, 2008, p. 646).

Another correctional trailblazer and influential Quarter was Thomas Eddy, who essentially ran New York City’s Newgate Prison with the help of his family. “Eddy required a planned, adequate diet with daily menu changes. He established the first prison hospital and pharmacy and hired the first full-time physician and pharmacist” (Depersis & Lewis, 2008, p. 647-648). This required incredible consideration and recognition of inmate needs. Though Rush’s and Eddy’s ideas about prison reform were effective and appeared to restore dignity to inmates, while also reducing recidivism, there was a sabotaging issue on the rise—prison

overcrowding. Both systems discovered that as prison populations grew, the effectiveness of rehabilitation at these facilities decreased. The contracting of prisons also led to decreased rehabilitation. Prison contracting was also the primary reason for Eddy eventually leaving Newgate Prison.

Incapacitation and rehabilitation are still primary purposes of incarceration (along with deterrence and retribution), and many correctional systems are facing similar issues with overcrowding. Depersis and Lewis (2008) write,

Today, the USA has one of the highest prison populations in the world.

Americans recognize the substantial cost of building, maintaining prisons, housing and caring for prisoners. Despite its high cost and the realization that incarcerating convicts is not a perfect system, America has chosen to keep this primary method of crime control and to invest heavily in prison building to keep up with the increasing number of people whom our courts so sentence (p. 650).

Though some prison systems have farmed out their inmates to other states and private prison systems within their own states, this practice alone is not enough to alleviate the issue of overcrowding. This has led correctional administrators to look at other options for effective prison management.

In an interesting view about the future transformation of incarceration in Britain, Coyle (1998) speaks of the additional need for inclusion. At length he states,

As we move towards the new millennium we are presented with a political vision of a New Britain, which will be inclusive rather than exclusive; a vision of a society in which each of us will have a part to play; a vision in which young men and women, many of whom at the moment feel excluded, will be encouraged to

participate for their own benefit and that of everyone else. ... We have to recognize that imprisonment has been built on the concept of exclusion (Coyle, 1998, p. 229).

This concept of prison being built on exclusion is very telling not only of the perception it has lain on inmates, but also the perception lain on prison staff and management. It has enabled others to feel that they are powerless in effecting and inciting positive change. As can be read below, it is this mindset that requires transformation in order to improve efficacy throughout the entire prison system.

Effective Training Implementation

According to Victor Zaharia (2009) of Moldova in Eastern Europe, “the training of penitentiary staff directly influences the efficiency of a prison system and the observance of human rights in places of detention” (p. 213). In addition, he writes, “the need for training of the penitentiary staff is more than obvious for at least two reasons: firstly, the diverse educational background of newcomers in the prison systems and secondly, permanent changes in the philosophy, tasks, and management of the prison systems” (Zaharia, 2009, p. 213).

A continuous cycle of education and training opportunities is important for prison agents so that these individuals will be able to stay up-to-date on the latest research and strategies for effective prison management. In addition, education allows for a change in mentality and attitudes toward inmates. This is extremely important in stimulating and mandating changes to more effectively treat and house offenders. Zaharia (2009) cites changing mentalities as the most difficult barrier to prison reform. Often the shifting of mindsets is not recognized as the basis of effective changes in correctional institutions. Instead, the focus often turns to security issues and the renovation of or addition of more correctional facilities. In fact, Zaharia (2009) found that

only 10-15% of trainings were “related to managerial issues, ethical context, communication skills, working in a team, human contact, how to control anger, mediation of conflicts, post-detention care” and other similar, communication-based topics (p. 220). Below, Zaharia (2009) writes of why the mindset of prison agents is incredibly instrumental in regards to effective prison management.

Detainees’ and public trust in the penitentiary system is based on the quality of performance of the tasks by the prison staff. Quality requires knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The training of penitentiary agents is directly linked with all aspects of the daily activities of the prison system. The prison staff has to work multi-dimensionally involving diverse educational, cultural, religious, legal, psychological aspects with highly vulnerable human beings, with a range of personal problems, or in some cases, dangerous persons. Every action of the penitentiary personnel could take an educational dimension and impact: respect of the individual, respect for dignity, respect for rights, etc...The success of the training is dependent on the attitudes of the staff; at least the staff should not treat detainees as enemies (Zaharia, 2009, p. 215-216).

As can be seen from Zaharia’s (2009) astuteness, prison agents have multiple opportunities to be change agents in the effort to increase prison morale, not only within themselves, but also within offenders residing in correctional facilities. However, this process can be disrupted by multiple factors. Often correctional facilities are located in areas of small population, limiting the number and type of applicants for various prison positions. Other employees may settle for correctional positions due to their inability to achieve employment elsewhere. When prison staff is comprised of individuals who were not initially interested in employment at correctional facilities, there is a

possibility for resistance in regard to positive, effective change in prison management. In addition, many military-style institutions do not require their high-ranking officials to participate in training (Zaharia, 2009). This can create an issue because many mandates often come from the top down and if high-ranking officials are not educated through training, there will be discord between staff ranks. “The best prison administrators have long recognized that the key to prison management does not lie in being excessively strict or excessively liberal as circumstances suggest. Instead, it lies in being consistent in the application of a set of professional standards” (Coyle, 2003, p. 80).

Another issue in implementing effective management occurs when prison staff members do not feel their efforts are being reciprocated. This can mean reciprocation from other staff members, administration, or inmates. An additional barrier to effective training and implementation can occur when trainees are unable to interact with other trainees or trainers (Zaharia, 2009). Also, training groups can sometimes become so large that the training’s effectiveness is reduced—a phenomenon that can also happen with inmate training and treatment. Lastly, few prison staff members and administrators are well-versed on international codes for inmate treatment and prison management.

Cultural Diversity and Sensitivity

According to Gollnick and Chinn (1990), cultural diversity is “a way of perceiving, believing, evaluating, and behaving or a shared organization of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community as well as meanings of communicative actions” (p. 6). One’s cultural background affords a sense of identity and meaning and provides rules by which one can live. In addition, Kilgore (2001) notes, “Individuals do not own the cultural systems into which they are born, rather they are socialized

into systems of behavioral norms and beliefs that ‘have their own existence, have their own life’” (p. 146; Durkheim, E., 1961, p. 25).

Confusion can occur when people of varying cultural backgrounds meet and interact. This confusion may result in one person seeing the other as inferior or uncivilized (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990). Seeing another as inferior can lead to serious problems for prison management and communication, especially in culturally diverse prison environments. After all, “culture defines the manner in which people think, feel, and behave, and provides the medium through which their members perceive the world” (Franklin & Platt, 1994, p. 87). Therefore, misunderstanding or challenging one’s culture is essentially the same as challenging one’s definition of the world and how his or her perceived world functions.

For this reason, cultural awareness and sensitivity training has received much attention in recent years. This is one strategy to improve staff and inmate relations, as well as to improve the conditions created by prison overcrowding mentioned earlier rather than simply relying on building more correctional facilities. Franklin and Platt (1994) write,

Correctional institutions are for the most part insensitive to diversity. Correctional officers are expected to apply specific standards which ensure compliance on the part of inmates. Each inmate is expected to be treated in a manner consistent with accepted perceptions of equality and provided with services designed to ensure equal safety and rehabilitation (p. 86).

Thus, a “one size fits all” application has been frequently used in correctional institutions, largely without regard to cultural differences. Cultural disparity can compromise this approach and make rehabilitative and management efforts more complicated and difficult (Franklin & Platt, 2009). One topic that appears to be deficient in regards to prison research is the cultural disparity (and

also, similarity) among staff and inmates in regards to effective communication and correctional management. Differences between staff and inmates can have severe implications for effective implementation of programming, treatment, and the overall security and management of correctional facilities.

Given an environment of captives with limited capacity to reason, in addition to an atmosphere conducive to violent behavior, knowledge of the components of cultural diversity is critical for understanding the causes of problem incidents which often occur in correctional institutions. If correctional personnel become aware of an inmate's cultural background, they can implement more effective verbal and nonverbal intercultural communication skill training which would increase understanding between the inmates and correctional staff (Franklin & Platt, 1994, p. 86).

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of cultural understanding is the legitimization of one's own culture. When a person's cultural groundings are legitimized, respect is paid to the idea that "learning and much of human development are social phenomena that cannot be understood irrespective of the context in which an individual exists" (Kilgore, 2001, p. 147; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Smith, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

While it may seem unrealistic to those working in the correctional environment, Burn (1992) suggests that correctional personnel accommodate inmates' unique cultural needs upon identifying and understanding them. As with most other policy implications, security measures must come before accommodations, which often limits the correctional personnel's ability to effectively accommodate cultural differences. However, even if personnel cannot always

accommodate, the mere awareness of cultural difference can “assist in being flexible” and can enable personnel to “replace old histories with new histories” (Franklin & Platt, 1994, p. 90).

In a closing note about cultural awareness, Franklin and Platt (1994) write, “one also has to become very familiar with his or her belief system, values, prejudices, attitudes and preferences because these have a tendency to contaminate the intercultural communication process and cause unnecessary stress for the people in the relationship” (p. 90). Similarly, Wooldredge (2003) stresses the importance of correctional personnel’s constant awareness of major changes within the prison environment (which may include cultural changes over time). This will help personnel understand changing influences which can affect and help form improved prison policy (Wooldredge, 2003).

Thus, it can be seen that diversity can drastically change the cultural dynamic of correctional facilities. For this reason, it is imperative that prison staff be trained in the areas of culturally awareness and sensitivity. This will help management effectively engage with its’ wards on a number of levels, especially in the realm of communication. It is also sure to promote a greater interpersonal understanding among inmates and staff.

Attitudes Concerning Inmates

Changing, reforming, and rehabilitating inmate behavior are prime goals of many prison systems. The state of change agents’ attitudes towards inmates can greatly affect the success or failure of behavioral change. Those with positive attitudes typically believe inmates to be valuable beings that are capable of change (Kjelsberg, Skoglund, Rustad, 2007). In contrast, negative attitudes involve the belief that inmates are incapable of positive change and will never be cured of their deviant behavior (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). This negative belief is often held by

those who see prisons as mere holding facilities, whereas those with positive beliefs are typically employed at facilities where rehabilitation is a primary goal (Kjelsberg et al., 2007).

Prison employees holding positive attitudes towards the inmates have been shown to significantly ameliorate tension, strain and conflict in the prison community.

All prisoners will eventually be released back into the community. In this context, the attitudes held toward prisoners, both among prison employees and in the general public, become important. (Jurik, 1985; Brown, 1999 as cited in Kjelsberg et al. 2007, p. 79).

Therefore, it is important to note that the attitudes of both inmates and the general public are important as well, not just the attitude of the change agent. If one does not see himself or herself as capable of change, change will be less likely to occur. When change does occur for these individuals, it will often occur at a slower pace than for those individuals who see themselves as change-capable beings. One can also make the assumption that change is more likely to happen for inmates who have a positive self image or high self-esteem. Having a sense of self-worth enables individuals to see themselves as worthy of positive change. Kurlycheck (2010) notes that according to Franke, Bierie, and MacKenzie (2010), “even in the prison environment, positive experiences increased attitudes of legitimacy, whereas negative experiences decreased attitudes of legitimacy” (p. 121).

The general public’s attitudes towards inmates are key factors in whether or not an inmate will be successful upon release. Similar to the importance of the mindset of prison change agents and the inmates themselves, the general public will either see former inmates as capable or incapable of positive change. Those who see offenders as capable of positive change will likely be more flexible in their judgments of these individuals and will also be more likely to

help this particular population (e.g. through employment, food assistance, etc.). However, those who see offenders as incapable of change will likely lack a positive view of these individuals and will be less willing to help them achieve positive change. Kurlycheck (2010) states that “the problem seems to be that whatever changes we can invoke in offenders during their confinement are met with stark contrast when they are released” (p. 121). Interestingly enough, in Kjelsberg et al.’s (2007) study of attitudes towards inmates, researchers found that college students who had selected “caring” professions “held the most positive attitudes” (p. 77). Additionally, other countries, specifically Ireland, have already been attempting to “envisage prisoners endeavoring to become valued members of society” (Warner, 2007).

Empathy

Staub (1987) defines empathy as “apprehending another’s inner world and joining the other in his or her feelings” (p. 104). Empathy involves a mixture of both cognition and affect (Kilgore, 2001; Jordan, 1991). Staub (1987) and Hoffman (1987) write of both cognitive empathy and apathetic empathy by stating,

Cognitive empathy, at the extreme, is the ability to know what another person is feeling without necessarily joining them in that feeling... Affective empathy, at the other extreme, is a vicarious emotional response to another’s feelings that does not necessarily involve significant amounts of cognitive processing (as cited in Kilgore, 2001, p. 152).

Related to both cultural sensitivity and attitudes towards inmates is the topic of empathy. Empathy is an important characteristic for both staff and inmates to possess in order to create a more caring, understanding environment that fosters reflection, growth, and personal as well as public honesty. Empathy can occur in a variety of forms and take on multiple definitions

depending on the form displayed. It should be communicated that “what may be appropriate empathetic response in one field may not be appropriate in another. The prison field demands a certain kind of empathetic practice from its inmates that is not equal to the range of empathetic practices that are commonly employed in the ‘free world’” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 152). For example, physical displays such as hugs or even handshakes are often shunned in correctional facilities. Without the option of human touch as a form of empathetic display, those within the correctional system may have to rely more heavily upon their other senses in order to connect.

In this light, prison employees are often discouraged from emotionally connecting with inmates. When emotional connections occur, eyebrows may be raised by fellow employees and the staff member may face the possibility of being reprimanded. However, Kilgore (2001) writes, “emotional connection is a key to human liberation, if only because it provides additional strategies for relating to others and to oneself in a variety of situations” (p. 161). Thus, boundaries among inmates and staff should be created, but emotional connections should not always be shunned between an inmate and staff member or between an inmate and his fellow inmates.

Conclusion

As can be seen through the review of these writings, there are multiple factors that go into forming effective prison management. Historical examination shows that problems faced by prison administrators 200 years ago are still sometimes issues faced now. Gehring and Hollingsworth (2002) write, “although correctional education has been on the scene for more than 200 years, it is still a frontier” (p. 90). The same can be applied to all positions in the correctional system, especially that of prison management. This has led to a need for innovation and change beyond the mere design and construction of new prison facilities.

Security and compliance are now not always the only feats to be accomplished by prison administrators. There are also efforts being made to communicate effectively and offer encouraging outlooks for positive inmate change. Respect for others, and especially respect for cultural backgrounds, can actually increase the security and compliance efforts mentioned earlier. When cultural understanding is achieved, inmates and staff will be able to better recognize and communicate the reasoning and purpose behind their actions.

In addition, having empathy allows both staff and inmate the ability to better understand the thoughts and emotions that the other is feeling. When the thoughts and emotions of others are recognized, it becomes easier to understand individuals' personal standpoints (and also their action choices). Though the aforementioned characteristics may not always be achieved by prison staff, administration, or inmates, the step toward them will likely lead to a more peaceful and more effectively run correctional institution/environment.

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