

CS33: G4S PRISON SYSTEM INTEGRATION

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Context

This was an evolving piece of work with a number of different elements to it (see CS25 to CS32, and CS36 to CS38) which developed out of an established informal coaching relationship with the Managing Director of GSL Offender Management Services (OMS), who, following GSL's acquisition by G4S, went on to a similar role in G4S. Prison Dialogue's work had developed into some wider team-building work with the GSL OMS Central Management Team (CMT), which in turn had evolved into facilitation of efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy for G4S OMS supported by defined plans and individual performance objectives.

It became apparent that as a relatively discrete operation, at the time involving four prisons (Altcourse, Parc, Rye Hill and Wolds), there was an opportunity for Prison Dialogue (PD) to partner with G4S in pursuit of 'whole system integration', similar to some of the work PD had already undertaken in the USA, notably with the Washington State Department of Corrections (see CS16). G4S OMS, who were trying to achieve some consistency in their operations based on good practice and define 'a G4S prison' to enhance their bids for new prison contracts, expressed support for this in principle.

Aims and Objectives

The intent of this activity was to align the various activities in OMS and develop the capacity for fluid transfer of best practice across the organisation, thereby creating the situation where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This would lead to wholesale improvements across the whole organisation, including all the prisons operated by the company. One tangible outcome would be for all four prisons to achieve a Level 4 assessment according to the Prison Rating System.

Method: Activity, Participants and Duration

The work in the G4S system had consisted of a number of different activities and interventions since 2007. The benefits of these initiatives remained largely with the individual prison with the system-wide potential of the initiatives

being only partially realised. The means of developing integration was through the following activities:

- Continuation of the coaching relationship with the Managing Director, which had proved to be on a somewhat ad hoc basis.
- Continuation of the team building work with the OMS leadership team, which went through a number of different manifestations following various re-organisations of the business.
- Individual coaching for one member of the CMT that included the use of participative system-wide forums for developing Industries work, Family work and Diversity & Inclusivity work.
- Participation in the Wolds prison Diversity and Inclusion Consultation Event (2009) with a cross-prison group on Diversity Managers.
- Activities which deliberately sought to have wider-reaching implications across all of the four prisons included:
 - Work to define more clearly and consistently the vision for a G4S prison. This was in part motivated by the tendering process under way for new prison contracts, which was a catalyst to the organisation to describe more clearly the key characteristics of a prison under G4S operation.
 - The development and introduction of a targeted development activity for high potential Middle Managers known as the 'BIG LEAP' (see CS32). The case studies produced on the BIG LEAP provided a template by means of which the other prisons could implement the same changes in a similar way, thus driving greater coherence across the G4S prison system. (Unfortunately, the programme was terminated after one successful round, due in part to a change in the sponsor and a decision by the company to prioritise other (internal) development activities.)

The overall interest was to bring these disparate activities together as an aligned developmental process that over time would lead to a common view of vision, strategy, organisational development, planning, delivery, leadership, succession and public profile. The challenges to achieving this took several forms. There was no consistent and effective leadership forum established for aligned development, and instead the ethos proposed was to treat each prison as a separate business for which its Director was accountable. In contradiction to that ethos, there was increased central control of decision-making, reduction of discretionary spend by Directors and the ongoing requirement to

use some inefficient out-sourced services. Viewed locally this appears to amount to poor leadership, but stepping back to get perspective, and taking into account the larger company of which OMS was a part, gave a different picture. The G4S Group appears driven by a dominantly short-term bottom line focus, which could be at odds with the reason people choose to work in Corrections, which includes for many a commitment to rehabilitation. There would appear to have been a clash of cultures between OMS and the G4S group that was inevitably being won by the G4S Group. Immediate commercial interests appear to have increasingly dominated over innovative and progressive work which would, in time, have built strong partnerships, secured reputation and thereby have made good profits.

Outcomes

While PD contributed to some high quality and valuable work through this period, this was increasingly having an impact at a more local level. There was a degree of disappointment that the objective of a material system-wide integration across the organisation proved beyond reach. It had been anticipated that working more closely with OMS through participating in their tendering and partnering with them in the work at HMP Birmingham and HMP Oakwood would open the door to a more systemic view, but this did not occur.

Learning

Comparing the work at G4S OMS with the attempts at participatory system-wide change in the US, notably most recently in Virginia, has helped clarify some of the critical ingredients and requirements for success in this regard. In particular, these include the following:

- The full commitment of the Chief Executive and senior leadership to lead the change, as an over-arching priority, and over a number of years.
- A sustained cycle of ongoing and structured engagement, rather than ad hoc or un-sustained interventions.
- A relationship between the client and PD which is based in partnership, rather than PD being a contractor/facilitator seen as providing local services.
- Dialogic Skill transfer throughout the client organisation, including at junior levels, so that staff are equipped to take on the full suite of tasks associated with shaping and implementing the changes needed at an operational level.