TARGET PRACTICE IN PROBATION: TAKE AIM FOR A REAPPRAISAL

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Abstract

The probation system from 1907 to the 1980s did not operate within a framework of centrally imposed targets. By contrast since the 1990s targets have become an essential feature of modernisation and cultural change associated with performance management and accountability. This paper explores the introduction of a target culture into probation and its implications for people orientated organisations. A case can be made to retain a handful of core targets. However it must be acknowledged that in organisations where people work with people, many essential tasks cannot be reduced to measurable targets. Therefore the time has come for a reappraisal.

Keywords objectives, targets, people, culture, bureaucracy, computers

Introduction

The nature and pace of change within the probation system from its origins in late-Victorian society, legislative foothold in the Probation of Offenders Act 1907, through the Criminal Justice Act 1948, then into the 1970s, was more evolutionary than revolutionary. Notwithstanding the disruption caused by two wars, the system steadily grew and the probation idea became an established feature of the criminal justice system in England and Wales. By the 1960s it was considered by the then Labour government to be at the heart of its penal policy, when the rehabilitative ideal was at its most captivating. It should also be acknowledged that probation, from the standpoint of underpinning ideas and organisational dynamics (McWilliams 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987) has certainly not stood still. Ideologically a story can be recounted of a discernible shift from religion and moral reform carried over from the missionary period into the early years of probation, to 'scientific' treatment associated with casework and rehabilitation. Organisationally from horizontal to the emergence of a vertical and hierarchical structure from the 1930s, with the appointment of senior officer grades (Whitehead and Statham, 2006, 34). All organisations are constantly changing and probation has not been exempt from such processes at different levels of operation. Yet the kind of change brought about by the introduction of targets has been much more radical.

Probation System without Targets

The Home Office had an oversight role from the start of the probation system that produced the 1907 Act which, as section 4 explained, one of the duties of the fledgling probation officer was to advise, assist and befriend the probationer. By the 1920s local justices began to form committees to oversee the supervisory work of its officers, and the 1930s witnessed the beginnings of an inspectorate which formalised the oversight provided by the Home Office. Arguably for many decades a balance was struck between central government, represented by the Home Office with its Rules giving effect to legislation; officials who kept in touch with local areas; in addition to Circulars; and evolving local dynamics reflecting the different developmental needs of area services. Importantly from the 1930s to the 1970s the hierarchical and vertical framework for organising and administering the evolving system, facilitated the probation officer's task of supervising offenders through a process of professional consultation. In other words this can be described as an enabling supervisory framework in pursuit of moral reform and rehabilitation being undertaken by probation officers with their clients (McWilliams, 1992).

Over a number of decades the nature and role of supervision and guidance, provided initially by committees and later senior officers, was important, as were numerous legislative developments, in addition to which the four departmental committees initiated change and improvements, both professionally and organisationally (Home Office 1909, 1922, 1936, 1962). Moreover within this structure the main features of probation can be adumbrated as follows: reform; the provision of a constructive community alternative to punishment associated with the Victorian prison; elements of surveillance and control on behalf of the state established on a different and more legitimate basis by the reforming Liberal government of 1906-1914 (Garland, 1985); intervening in the lives of individuals and families; significantly the personal influence of the probation officer to befriend and guide the probationer; getting offenders to take the pledge to eschew drink, accompanied by religious influences; and social work assistance in response to a range of personal and socially orientated problems. All this was undertaken, and considered of value by different governments, without much managerial influence, an imposed centralised bureaucracy, or trace of objectives and targets.

Moving Towards Targets

However because of changes associated first with the cultural revolution during the 1960s, followed by the break up of the post-war consensus over criminal justice matters (Downes and Morgan, 1997), economic decline, concerns about rising crime, and the disenchantment both theoretically and empirically with the decline of the treatment model in the 1970s (Bottoms, 1980), a new set of problems required different solutions (Garland, 2001). Particularly it was the post-1979 Conservative governments and their commitment to the application of a different political rationality that laid the foundations for a new style of politics, a different way of framing and then responding to pressing issues, resulting in different social and penal policies that of course implicated probation. Therefore at this point I turn to the lineaments and significance of these changes in a way that will set the scene for the creation of, and therefore a discussion on, what has become a target culture in probation.

Elements of a Target Culture

Previous work has attempted to analyse the implications of the new politics after 1979 and its implications for probation (Statham and Whitehead, 1992; Whitehead and Statham, 2006). However this paper draws the reader's attention to the following chronological developments. From the early 1980s, primarily to control and predict public expenditure, there was a growing emphasis on management and accompanying theme of organisational efficiency that culminated in the launch of the Financial Management Initiative (FMI) in May 1982. The rationale of the FMI was to improve the management of government departments and was associated with the language of the 3Es (economy, efficiency, effectiveness), improvements in performance and greater accountability, cash limits, but also the setting of objectives, priorities, and later targets. During the 1980s government departments were reviewed against the template of the FMI that eventually caught up with probation during 1983/84 in the Statement of National Objectives and Priorities - SNOP (Home Office, 1984). Subsequently a line can be drawn that passes through the new political priorities after 1979, FMI, SNOP; through Grimsey's report on the inspectorate in 1986/87 and developments associated with Performance Indicators (PIs), the creation of a Financial Management Information System, the translation of general objectives into specific targets; into the mid-1990s with its focus on measurable targets, outputs, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). By 1997, the final year of the fourth and last consecutive Conservative administration, KPIs and targets were established features of a probation service on the brink of further modernisation which can be illustrated by providing the following example:

> 1996-97 Targets – to achieve the following completion rates:
> Probation Orders 82% or more
> Community Service Orders 71% or more
> Supervision Order 80% or more
> Combination Order 73% or more
> (Home Office, 1997).

The political, managerial, and organisational developments just alluded to since the early 1980s are part of an iterative process of managerialism (Oldfield, 2002). In fact the service that has emerged during the last twenty years would hardly be recognisable to the religiously minded pioneers and more welfare, person-orientated probation officers of the early years after 1907. Moreover the cultural changes forced onto probation by a more interventionist central power structure forms part of the application of New Public Management (NPM) principles into probation, as well as other public sector organisations, although occurring later in probation than other organisations (Hood, 1991; Stewart and Walsh, 1992; McLaughlin et al 2001). This process in probation has produced nationally imposed targets, reinforced by an intrusive bureaucracy, which has ultimately narrowed activity and stifled local ambition.

Exploration and Critique of Targets

To have an objective is to have a goal or purpose which can be achieved by pursuing a particular course of action. For example to reduce the number of custodial sentences being imposed by the courts (which have markedly increased since 1993) would be an objective for the criminal justice system. If we take this a step further and introduce the word target, this is something much more precise. Therefore to reduce the number being committed to custody in 2007 compared to 2006 by 2% is a target that is measurable. Moreover targets have been at the heart of New Labour's approach to improvements, across the whole public sector, by the way they are deemed critical for performance management and provide focussed direction for organisations. Additionally the Audit Commission endorses the position that targets are essential for the promotion of change (2003). Next this paper turns to explore and raise a number of concerns under the following seven subheadings.

Arbitrary Nature of Targets

It should be acknowledged that there is nothing inevitable about setting targets as a prerequisite for organisational life. However it can be argued that political concerns over public expenditure and taxation, in addition to demands for accountability, created the fertile ground for their development. Nevertheless targets are not some unavoidable 'given' in probation, or any other public and private sector organisation, and for decades the probation service managed without the assumption that some essential ingredient was missing (from 1876 into the 1980s to be precise). Therefore it is more a case of the phenomenon of targets being politically and organisationally constructed than being inherently necessary or inescapable. With this preamble in mind it can be argued that there is something arbitrary about targets, once the judgement has been made to weave them into organisations. Consequently if the target to reduce the proportionate use of custodial sentences is set at 2%, why should this in fact be the case? Why not 2.7%, 5% or even 10%? Furthermore should there be 6, 8, or 12 contacts with offenders subject to a community order with a supervision requirement during the first few weeks? Should there be target 'x' or 'y' for accredited programmes or any other probation activity currently subject to the discipline of targets? The language of objectives and priorities clarify the direction for organisations; targets are more specific because they are measurable; but the process of target setting is arbitrary, a matter of opinion, and subject to human judgement and therefore the possibility of unintended consequences, particularly within an organisation that primarily works with people.

Objectives or Targets in a People-based Organisation

If targets are not, nor need they be, an inevitable feature of organisational life, but rather arbitrarily constructed by political processes, thus manifesting one out of many possible ways of thinking about performance and accountability, one question that should be posed is: Are they desirable within a people-based organisation? It can be argued that within the probation service and other organisations where people work with people (social work, education, health service etc…) rather than making and selling inanimate objects for profit, it is as legitimate to establish a culture in which professionally trained staff aspire to do the right thing, in pursuit of clear objectives, rather than reaching for numerical

targets. Therefore doing the right thing would initially depend upon the organisation's primary task being clearly specified, including the inculcation of corresponding knowledge and skills, ideals and values amongst staff which, when translated into action, would mean doing what is appropriate with different individuals in different circumstances. So what is right for one person may not be right for another on a probation officer's caseload.

To proceed on this basis would require more imagination, the exercise of discretion, and professional judgement than currently allowed. This way of working is arguably as legitimate as pursuing targets, but both reflect different political priorities, historical circumstances, organisational dynamics and cultures. One allows for professional trust and accountability (O'Neill, 2002), insightful leadership, therapeutic imagination, underpinned by the moral dimension of social work values and an understanding of people as unique individuals; the other is much more bureaucratic, mechanised, routinised, and reflects a one size fits all approach as the net of centrally imposed targets is cast over all areas services. Both approaches are concerned to be effective in terms of working with offenders to reduce the likelihood of reconviction and protect the public, but the modus operandi is noticeably different. It should be acknowledged that the imposition of a target culture onto probation by central government constitutes a challenge to a public service that was dominated by 'the traditions of administration, hierarchy and professionalism' (Stewart and Walsh, 1992, 504).

Absence of Total Control over Target Achievement

Even if a cogent case is established for targets, the probation service does not have total control over their achievement any more than a vigneron controls the terroir. Some of the factors that could militate against target achievement can be expatiated upon as follows. If the reduction of custodial sentences, to resort to an example already cited, is a specific target then it should be acknowledged its achievement can be at the mercy of the vagaries of what is always a changing political and criminal justice climate. During the 1980s and culminating in the Criminal Justice Act of 1991, the political climate under Douglas Hurd, John Patten and David Faulkner, was conducive to taking seriously the notion of alternatives to custody (Windlesham, 1993). By contrast this approach was undermined after 1993 because of a new political climate reflected in different political priorities for probation and criminal justice system, associated with Michael Howard and John Major.

Secondly the reduction of re-offending by 5% by 2008 and then10% by 2010 is not completely within the gift of probation officers. In fact it may be said that to achieve this target has not been assisted by a more onerous approach to the enforcement of orders since the Criminal Justice Act 2003; the inimical and discriminatory benefit sanction that persists in a handful of areas. These are two factors that could militate against the achievement of this target. The first because enforcement, accompanied by more onerous requirements, could culminate in more people being committed to prison for breach, and the second could encourage offenders to re-offend in circumstances of financial hardship. Sometimes there is a lack of strategic 'fit' between imposed targets and political decision making that affects the workings of the criminal justice system at different points of its operation.

Finally the target for the number of contacts that should be achieved during the first 16 weeks must allow for problems many offenders experience who are subject to community orders (financial, addictions, accommodation). In other words life's contingencies can obstruct regular weekly attendance and therefore the successful completion of court orders and additional requirements. Consequently a range of intervening variables are often at play conspiring against target achievement over which organisations have little control – changing political priorities; decisions in relation to enforcement and benefit sanction; the personal and social circumstances of offenders - which must be factored into any discussion on the viability of establishing a target culture. In other words targets can be a blunt instrument for dealing with complex human problems of diverse origin.

Competing Targets in the Criminal Justice System

Target achievement in one organisation could be affected by target priorities in another. The following are the main organisations comprising the criminal justice system: probation, police, crown prosecution service, courts, prisons, and yet they do not share the same primary task. Of course there is some commonality between them because the aims of the criminal justice system, as a whole, are to reduce crime, reduce the impact of crime on people's lives, reduce the economic costs of crime, and dispense justice fairly and efficiently to promote confidence in the rule of law. Moreover the objectives for the system are timely justice, meet the needs of victims, respect defendants' rights and treat people fairly. Nevertheless the precise targets set for one organisation within the system could be adversely affected by the rationale and decisions made by others. Additionally target achievement within the different organisations of criminal justice can be affected by a range of variables amongst individual members of staff which include: reason for joining, level of motivation and commitment, personal values including prejudices, attitudes, approach to the job, ethics, level of understanding of offenders, training, educational background, to name but a few.

Competing Targets in Probation

Another point for discussion is the possibility of a target culture generating unhealthy and needless competition between different components of the 'business' (various community based court disposals, Unpaid Work v Think First, for example). Therefore can targets be divisive? Do they keep staff on their toes or create the wrong climate and set a negative tone within people-based organisations? Does competition culminate in one area service robbing another of some of its resources and is this morally justified when staff and offenders could suffer as a result? Do targets create unnecessary pressures for hard pressed staff and local services doing a difficult job? Are they more negative than positive and therefore carry within them the possibility of unintended consequences? This is why it can be argued that within organisations that work with people a stronger case can be made for being clear about aims and objectives, underpinned by aspirations, ideals and values, complemented by effective leadership endorsing notions of responsibility and accountability, rather than 'hard' targets as some of these questions suggest.

Threat of Sanctions for Target Failure

At the present time there are in the region of 13 high priority targets within probation, in addition to a similar number of medium priority targets. Examples of the former are victim contacts, offending behaviour programmes completions, breach action, and the completion of computerised OASys risk management plans within tight timescales. Illustrations of the latter are ethnic representation in the workforce, staff wastage, and hostel occupancy. Furthermore if certain high priority targets are not met by individual members of staff and, in turn, the organisation as a whole, a regime of sanctions applies. However rather than resorting to punitive sanctions the new language for this phenomenon is that local services who fall short of their targets will fail to earn their performance bonus (which for one local area during 2005/06 was worth £112,000). But the principle and outcome remain the same. Again the question that should be posed in relation to a people-based organisation like probation is: Can this be right and is this an appropriate way to proceed because staff and offenders could suffer as a result? Indeed there could be legitimate reasons in local areas for not achieving targets, one of which could be lack of resources rather than any lack of resolve. In fact the problem could be targets per se, not the organisation.

Furthermore a regime of cash-linked targets can create tensions between doing what is appropriate for individual offenders, and the pressure to achieve centrally imposed targets. For example s148 (2) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 specifies that the requirements of a community order must be the most suitable for the offender. However if an area service is in danger of not meeting the target for cash-linked Drug Rehabilitation Requirements, for example, then decisions to achieve the latter could be skewed at the expense of the legislation. But how is the organisation supposed to act when faced with financial penalties?

Probation Work is more than achieving Measurable Targets

The final point for exploration is telling. The language of objectives and targets which has gathered pace since the 1980s, explained earlier, should be understood as one approach to the politics of organisational life associated with the 3Es and National Standards. Furthermore these features are complemented by an approach to performance and accountability based upon the quantification and measurement of tasks. At this juncture within the history of probation services there is an obsession with measuring things, which constitutes a serious problem for the following reason. Within what I continue to refer to as people-based organisations, it may be conceded that certain features of the job are amenable to setting targets and measuring the results, primarily to maintain focus, raise standards and provide value for taxpayers' money. By contrast there are other aspects of the job which cannot be measured. The argument can be advanced that features beyond measurement are the most essential in an organisation whose primary rationale is to work with other people: insight and awareness, a feel for other people's difficulties (Smith, 2006), understanding, how to ask the right questions during interview, the ability to communicate, imagination and problem solving skills, including the ability to listen actively, artistry through reflection (Schon, 1987), and a passion for the job (Whitehead

and Thompson, 2004). These are the features that have an ineffable quality and belong to a different order of tasks to those which the service currently measures within its modernised target culture. However those aspects of the job which lie beyond quantitative measurement make a critical contribution to the assessment process of offenders (what have you done, why have you done it, what can we do about it) which in turn makes an important contribution to risk assessment and public protection. Targets draw attention to an organisation's presenting image; by contrast qualitative features constitute its underlying substance.

This point can be taken to another analytical level by saying that those features that lie beyond targets and measurement sit more easily within a social work model of organisation than the principles associated with New Public Management, endorsed by Gilpin-Black during the 1980s (Whitehead and Statham, 2006, 128) which applied private sector managerial and business solutions to the public sector, including probation. Consequently if people-orientated organisations are reduced to a set of quantifiable and measurable targets to improve performance and accountability, there is much that can be considered of meaning and value that will be omitted. Therefore the way forward is to acknowledge the case that can be made for a better balance between quantity and quality, outputs and outcomes, image and substance, broad objectives and precise targets, the obvious and more ineffable features of organisational life. Neither staff nor offenders should be reduced to working within a positivist or economic paradigm that draws attention solely to quantity, number, weight and measures, precisely because of what is left out. Probation work is about people, 'how' to do the job as well as 'what' should be done, expression of values, and sometimes being with people rather than doing things to achieve targets. Unfortunately targets have the capacity to distort what are delicate balances and competing priorities, to reveal what is obvious and conceal the vital. After considering a number of issues and implications associated with the emergence of targets in probation, the final section of this paper will raise further points of interest.

Points for Discussion
From People to Economics
The mentality of doing business within a target driven culture reflects the transition from a 'social' to 'economic' style of reasoning, cogently explicated in David Garland's Culture of Control (2001). In the 'old' probation culture, some of the elements of which were sketched during the early part of this paper, the knowledge and skills required to work with, understand, and then respond to the personal and social needs of individual offenders, were transmitted from one generation of officers to the next. There was a discernible methodology at work for thinking about and doing the job, reinforced by a predominantly social work education. This is indicative of Garland's point about a social style of reasoning that prevailed within the criminal justice system until the 1980s. He shapes the concept by saying that the 'particular problems that emerged were to be placed in their social context, traced to their social roots, and dealt with by the most appropriate social means, such as social counselling and case-work, social provision, or social reform' (2001, 188). Importantly this style of thinking required probation officers to pose the

'why' question (not simply what have you done) rooted in a concern to understand the whole person from various psycho-social perspectives (Smith, 2006). To construct the point in another way, these were features of probation work within the welfare state which was in existence for most of the twentieth century until the economic problems of the 1970s undermined its rationale.

However since the 1980s and transition from a welfare to a more neo-liberal state (Oldfield, 2002; Garland, 2001) an economic rather than social style of reasoning is reflected in the NPM and doctrine of 3Es, more concerned with efficient outputs than the most appropriate outcomes for individuals based upon a professional assessment of needs, rooted in social work values. In turn a more bureaucratic and therefore Weberian form of organisation has managed to 'skew practice to fit performance indicators, limit the discretion of field staff, and diminish an agency's real effectiveness in order to maximise the practices that are most easily measurable' (Garland, 2001, 189). But as was suggested earlier it is the tasks that often cannot and arguably should not be measured, undertaken every day by insightful probation practitioners who want to work with people through relationships (which is why they came into the job), that are amongst the most meaningful and valuable dimensions of practice. Reducing and then evaluating performance according to the notion of price mechanism, understanding best practice in terms of efficiency in pursuit of targets to avoid the sanctions of cash-linked targets, are problematic when working with people. Garland helps us further by arguing that the cultural transition which has occurred in political thinking and organisational structures represent a more scientific outlook, technological efficiency, and Weberian rationalisation. However, and in consequence of such developments, social practices and institutions 'become less emotionally compelling or meaningful for their human agents' (1990, 179). This is a process which has occurred within the probation service during the last few years, yet without fully considering the likely consequences.

Target Culture and Criminology
It should also be acknowledged there is a 'fit' between the new target culture and changing criminological context that has evolved since the 1980s (Garland, 2001; White and Haines, 2004). If crime in a more neo-liberal, compared to a welfare state frame of reference, is perceived as a normal social fact, a phenomenon that does not require a 'deep' aetiological explanation because it belongs to the normal occurrences of everyday life; if crime is something freely chosen by rational actors who calculate the costs-benefits of different behavioural routines; then the organisation of probation in this criminological context fits with NPM and its concern to manage, contain, control, and regulate human behaviour as economically and efficiently as possible. This is the transition from performance and accountability judged in terms of social work outcomes, provision of appropriate help, support and understanding to facilitate rehabilitation; to a neo-liberal and neo-classical criminological context of maximum outputs for minimum inputs, which provides a rationale for a target-driven culture. In other words, don't agonise about individuals and don't pose the 'why' question, but rather focus on controlling the presenting behaviour of aggregates. Consequently probation, according to this way of

thinking, is no longer the only organisation that can be expected to achieve objectives and targets. Within the NOMS and contestability framework, practically any organisation which can put forward a viable business plan designed to achieve government targets as efficiently, economically and effectively as possible, will be awarded the interventions contracts.

Bureaucracy v. Professionalism

The introduction, development, and current preoccupation with target setting and achievement, has created the conditions for cultural dissonance of serious proportions. On one hand it is possible to acknowledge the good intentions associated with targets enumerated as challenging the service, raising the bar of standards of performance, demonstrating accountability, linked to value for money. This is important against the background of a criminal justice system which by 1979 was considered to be 'spendthrift, idiosyncratic and unaccountable' (Raine and Willson, 1997, 82). On the other hand these are the very developments which have, according to Garland (2001) skewed organisational performance. This is because the pursuit of targets has fashioned new managerial and bureaucratic repertoires associated with the following sequential processes: initial drive to develop objectives then set targets – mechanisms required to monitor performance in relation to targets – development of recording systems – computer technology helpful to process copious amounts of data being produced – thus transforming a people based culture into a managerial and bureaucratic culture. But not solely in probation but across the entire public sector: police men and women burdened with paper work required by target driven systems instead of being on the beat in local communities and in contact with people - community wardens appointed. Teachers producing masses of data to measure educational standards linked to centrally imposed targets thus detaching them from teaching duties in the classroom with pupils - teaching assistants appointed. Nurses preoccupied with computers on wards rather than primarily providing patient care, with additional layers of managers in the health service to handle bureaucratic and target driven demands. Probation officers by April 2006 reclassified as offender managers, can now spend up to 80% of each day working as office based computer technicians and data entry operators. In fact this transformation has been facilitated by the introduction of the computerised Offender Assessment System (OASys). The modernised public sector has been placed in a headlock comprised of targets and the bureaucratic machinery required to report on accompanying performance, elements of which have been questioned by the Audit Commission (2003).

Implications for Probation Practice

The main practice implication is that responding to bureaucratic demands, within a target-driven culture, is at the expense of the development of core professional skills. To reduce re-offending, increase the confidence of the public in the criminal justice system, effect rehabilitation, protect the public, undertake insightful risk assessments, reduce harm, engage with people to get them through supervisory programmes, improve compliance and reduce breach proceedings, requires people knowledge and people skills. From initial training to learning on the job over a number of years, probation skills are

acquired, nurtured and refined. So how are requisite knowledges and skills in the modernised environment going to be acquired in circumstances where many probation officers spend a disproportionate amount of time meeting the demands of computers for data, chasing targets, rather than working with people? This issue strikes to the heart of the public sector. The old culture was by no means perfect but it was people-based and could be improved by good leadership and creative management. As the modernised culture of bureaucracy and targets continues to embed itself in the thinking of staff, there is the danger that it is the people-centred and welfare oriented officers who will disappear, which will impoverish the service and result in unintended consequences that are currently little understood.

The Future

It is naïve to imagine an immediate return to the old culture of the probation and rehabilitative ideal that would follow the collapse of the prevailing target culture. The Audit Commission has stated, but not without qualification, that 'Targets are invaluable and here to stay' (2003, paragraph 33). Therefore perhaps the best one can hope for within existing political and organisational constraints, shaped by New Labour's approach towards the public sector and the NOMS agenda, is to argue for a better balance, a new synthesis, comprising both quantitative and qualitative elements. This would more accurately capture the diverse nature of probation work.

In other words this is an argument for the *renewal from within existing structures model* that could feasibly retain a handful of core targets running alongside acknowledging that many significant tasks cannot be measured in an organisation in which people work with people. If this model is to be pursued then it is of interest to ponder where the leadership will come from to renew the organisation from within, after everything that has happened since the 1980s (Whitehead and Statham, 2006). One of the main obstacles in the way of achieving this renewal model is that the service, since 2001, has been devoid of strong local leadership (local leadership is being contrasted with centrally imposed decisions that must be implemented by senior managers. In fact local leaders have not been allowed to exercise leadership due to centrally imposed constraints). The creation of the National Probation Service decimated the rank of chief probation officer that has been replaced by chief officers, as civil servants, whose primary loyalty is to the prevailing political agenda. Renewal from within will depend upon chief officers being allowed to shed the role of weathervane and become signposts, which means being allowed to provide effective leadership rather than being captured by the political zeitgeist.

Alternatively is the *rebirth from without existing structures model,* in the way the probation system of 1907 was something new that burst through the old skins of Victorian liberal forms of justice and punishment. One hundred years ago, of course, the probation system was created and supported by the Home Office located within a reforming Liberal government. Now it has not simply been modernised but fundamentally re-shaped according to prevailing political priorities, more for political than penological reasons, so much so that the probation ideal that was considered an important feature of penal policy

for many years has been seriously weakened. Therefore the time may have come, as the centenary year is reached, to imagine what lies beyond the prevailing politicised target culture within, for example, the voluntary sector comprising various groups and organisations, including the church and other diverse religious influences, for the leadership, moral vision, and structures that will challenge the place where probation currently finds itself located.

Conclusion

The probation service of 2007, compared to 1907, is in the grip of a centralised bureaucracy, one significant feature of which is targets. In fact it is currently sinking under the weight of targets imposed by the National Probation Directorate, Regional Offender Managers, and local criminal justice boards. Whilst it can be conceded that a limited number of core targets focus the mind and help to demonstrate accountability within organisations, unfortunately they are not problem-neutral in their effects, as this paper has suggested. Target practice has been an important feature of probation for a number of years, but the time has come for a reappraisal of their rationale and implications for this type of organisation.

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