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Transforming Rehabilitation: Probation practice, architecture and the art of distributions

Abstract

This paper explores probation practice through the architecture and arrangement of a probation office led by a Community Rehabilitation Company. It presents findings from an ethnographic study of a probation office in a large city, combining observations of the research site with data derived from interviews with 20 members of staff. Drawing on Foucault's *art of distributions*, the paper highlights how the managerial dynamics of recent decades have filtered into the physicality of the office to influence probation practice. It argues that probation practice under *Transforming Rehabilitation* can be situated along a managerial continuum, as standardised, computer-based work has become further entrenched within the office.

Key Words: Probation practice; Architecture; Foucault; Transforming Rehabilitation

Word Count: 8,181

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Introduction

The concept of ‘architecture’ has both literal and metaphoric significance for criminal justice (Armstrong & McAra, 2006). The former refers to the physical sites in which punishment is delivered; the latter concerns the “architecture of penal imagination” (Armstrong & McAra, 2006: 26) – that is, the political spaces within which analytics of punishment are assembled and authenticated. Physical structures, their form and functions, are thereby significant dimensions of ongoing processes of legitimisation in penal discourse. As the (metaphoric) foundations which braced probation from public opprobrium and political interference crumbled, the (literal) architecture within which probation work occurs has been rebuilt in accordance with a managerial agenda (Phillips, 2014). Practice has been increasingly subjected to centralised control (Burke & Collett, 2015); removed from the communities probation serves (Bottoms, 2008); and reconfigured around information technologies, technicising and depersonalising “the humane face of the criminal justice system” (Phillips, 2017: 211). Accordingly, the architecture of the probation office and its “artefacts of supervision” (Burke & Collett, 2015: 83) have come to reflect a managerial emphasis on efficiency and accountability (Phillips, 2014).

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government’s (2010-2015) *Transforming Rehabilitation (TR)* reforms fundamentally restructured the delivery of probation services in England and Wales. A managerial, target-driven culture, it was argued, had been imposed upon probation, standardising practice and contributing to persistently high reoffending rates (MoJ, 2010). Competition for probation services would, instead, empower private (and voluntary) organisations to reduce reoffending whilst being more cost-effective for the taxpayer (MoJ, 2013a). As such, *TR* split the probation service into two types of organisation: the publicly-owned National Probation Service (NPS) now manages offenders who pose a high *risk of harm* to the public, while 21 privately-led Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) supervise low-to-medium risk offenders (MoJ, 2013b). CRCs are remunerated through a ‘Payment by Results’ (PbR) mechanism, the aim of which is to focus on outcomes rather than outputs (MoJ, 2013b). *TR* was thus presented as a means through which to end a top-down approach to probation, inspiring ‘innovation’ and restoring practitioner

autonomy (MoJ, 2013a). This paper uses the architecture of ‘Elizabeth Street’, a pseudonym for a probation office within a privately-owned CRC, as a springboard from which to explore these ambitions. In this sense, it extends beyond factors that are obviously architectural into the office’s “design, layout and location” (Phillips, 2014: 121).

The first part of the paper highlights the significance of architecture for criminal justice institutions, with a particular emphasis on Foucault’s (1977) discussion of the Panopticon prison. Like Phillips (2014), it argues that the punitive, managerial flows of recent decades have seeped into the design of the contemporary probation office. The second part provides an ethnographic description of the research site to show how disciplinary practices are spatially, temporally, and relationally encoded. Here, it draws upon the four facets of Foucault’s (1977) *art of distributions – enclosure, partitioning, functional sites, and rank* – to explore the architecture of office and its impact on probation work. *Enclosure* demonstrates how the probation estate has been rationalised in recent decades. *Partitioning* describes the spatial distribution of actors and artefacts within the office. *Functional sites* examines the continued importance of information technologies to contemporary practice. *Rank* discusses the surveillant role of Interchange Managers and how this impacts power relations. When the parent company (a multinational firm that leads several CRCs) assumed control of the CRC, staff job titles were changed: senior probation officers became Interchange Managers (IM), probation officers became Senior Case Managers (SCMs), and probation service officers became Case Managers (CMs). Data are presented with these semantic shifts in mind. The third part of the paper highlights the move towards an increasingly administrative, standardised model of probation practice within the office that depends less upon relationships with offenders than on signposting and referrals to other agencies.

The paper, therefore, makes an original contribution to an incipient literature on the architecture of probation (see Phillips, 2014), with particular emphasis on practice post-*TR*. The small-scale nature of the study, a six-month ethnography of a probation office, means that it is not generalisable. Rather, findings derived from observations and interviews with 20 members of staff aim to provide insight into probation work in one specific locality.

Criminological architecture: Searching for legitimacy

Prisons are the most obvious sites for architectural analyses in criminological literature, for they offer material and symbolic admonitions of the consequences of criminal infractions (Armstrong & McAra, 2006). Ignatieff (1980), for instance, describes how the shadow cast by Pentonville penitentiary over a working-class district of Victorian London alerted labourers to their fate should they slip beyond the precarious sanctity of market relations and into criminality. Similarly, the presence of stone gargoyles atop the walls of some Victorian prisons conveyed to observers the unpleasant consequences of a violation of the law, thereby affirming the legitimacy of the sovereign (Jewkes & Johnston, 2007). In this sense, architecture communicates power; it is a physical expression of ideology and influence (Foucault, 1977).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) argued that the exercise of disciplinary power was transformed from being *imposed upon* to *instated within* bodies, the result of a succession of minute adjustments across the social realm designed to familiarise individuals with the requirements of the nascent capitalist system. The ‘disciplinary institutions’ (schools, hospitals, factories, prisons) in which such training occurred were designed to enhance the productivity of their inhabitants (Foucault, 1977: 139). He presented the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s designs for a ‘Panopticon’ prison as unrelentingly disciplinary: cells encircle a central watchtower; windows permit external light and internal visibility, while walls conceal the prisoners in the adjacent cells. The person in the tower can monitor, *unseen*, both prisoners and supervisors, who are continuously disciplined by the belief that they are constantly *seen*. Foucault (1977: 205) thus emphasised the polyvalence of panopticism: the “pure architectural and optical system” symbolised new forms of power/knowledge premised on controlling populations, serving as a metaphor for the societal expansion of disciplinary practices.

In contrast to the prison, probation’s legitimacy has derived not from the symbolic messages communicated by commanding structures, but from an understated authority to do what Mawby and Worrall (2013: 7) call the *dirty work* – that is, the vital, if largely unappreciated, task of instilling change within offenders. Framed by ‘penal welfarism’, state support for the service’s knowledge and methods has historically been key to its legitimacy (Garland, 2001). However, probation’s credibility was challenged by persistent postwar increases in crime, as socio-economic, political, and cultural shifts seeped into criminal justice policy and practice (Garland, 2001). To this end,

Robinson (2008) argues that rehabilitation has been reshaped by late-modern penal narratives. The (neoconservative) hardening of socio-political attitudes towards offenders has resulted in *expressive* rehabilitation, or rehabilitation *as* punishment (Robinson, 2008: 436; Garland, 2001). A greater emphasis on public protection, combined with the pressures of an enlarged caseload, gave rise to *managerial* practices focused on monitoring offenders via information technologies (Robinson, 2008: 436), thereby conforming to neoliberal objectives of efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Garland, 2001). Community sentences thus became a means to “exert control over lower risk offenders for whom custody was judged unnecessary or too expensive” (Robinson, 2008: 433). This ‘new penology’ tempered rehabilitative ambitions (Feeley & Simon, 1992: 449; Robinson, 2008): instead, like the Panopticon, the shift to risk management proved a more efficient means by which to increase “the number of those on whom [power] is exercised” (Foucault, 1977: 206). Hence, the service’s reframing as an organisation that aims to be at once ‘punitive’ *and* ‘efficient’ is reflected in the physicality of the contemporary probation office (Phillips, 2014).

The architecture of probation offices has seldom been explored, although Phillips (2014) provides a notable exception. Based on ethnographic research, he describes in detail an office “designed specifically for the purpose of probation in the early 21st century” (Phillips, 2014: 121). He uses Goffman’s (1969) ‘front stage’/‘back stage’ dichotomy, in which social actors alter their performance to the needs of their audience, to conceptualise different zones within the building. Phillips’s (2014) use of architecture extends beyond rudimentary structure into the layout of the office, for such design also impacts inhabitants’ behaviour. The ‘front stage’ represents areas such as interviews rooms, where probation staff meet with offenders and engage in face-to-face work; the ‘back stage’ refers to the private offices from which offenders are prohibited, where the majority of probation work takes place. Probation practice, Phillips (2014) argues, has moved from being a ‘front stage’ profession to a predominantly ‘back stage’, computer-based occupation, situated in open-plan offices that service large geographic regions. Accordingly, the architecture of the probation office is a manifestation of the punitive, managerial policies of recent decades, in which information technologies occupy a central role.

Methodology

The research set out to explore how probation staff have experienced *TR*, specifically how the reforms have impacted culture and practice. The data on which this paper is based were generated via ethnographic study of Elizabeth Street, a CRC office which services *all* low-to-medium risk offenders in a large city. I observed day-to-day life at the office for three to four days per week over a period of six months (April 2018-October 2018), and was present for approximately seven hours per day. As a result, I carried out unstructured observations on a range of activities, which facilitated identification of potential informants for interview as well as refining the themes to be explored. These activities included supervision meetings with offenders (inductions, Rehabilitation Activity Requirement days, home visits, prison visits, etc.), unpaid work, team meetings, multi-agency meetings, and question and answer sessions with members of the senior management team. In total, I conducted 61 such observations, of which 47 were between a single offender and their supervising practitioner. Data were recorded by hand and typed up on a computer when I returned to the desk that I had been allocated.

Having a place from which to work when not observing ‘something’ meant that I could absorb the sights and sounds of Elizabeth Street, and converse with staff about their work. Staff of varying lengths of service in probation, from six months to four decades, were selected for a one-hour interview, and none declined. I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews, comprised of ten CMs, five SCMs, three IMs, and two Senior Managers. The sample broadly reflected the demography of the office: six interviewees were male and fourteen were female. To preserve informants’ anonymity, however, the gender composition of staff grades will not be disclosed. The names presented below are pseudonyms, all of which were selected by the researcher. All interviews were conducted in private and digitally recorded, before being transcribed verbatim. Data derived from both observations and interviews were sorted and coded for thematic content and analysed using NVivo.

The paper uses interview data and observations of supervision meetings to enhance ethnographic descriptions of the research site. A Foucauldian emphasis on architecture, including the “analytical arrangement of space” (Foucault, 1977: 203), can thus advance our understandings of probation practice before and after *TR*.

Elizabeth Street: An *art of distributions*

For Foucault (1977: 141), an *art of distributions* is the embryonic stage from which discipline evolves. This requires *enclosure* – that is, an architecture distinct from all others that facilitates collation of knowledge on its inhabitants (Foucault, 1977: 141). The ‘disciplinary institutions’, though homologous in their modes of organisation, were each designed to house a particular category of the populace – hospitals for the sick, schools for pupils, prisons for offenders, etc. – and reorient them to societal ends. But mere confinement, for Foucault (1977: 143), was insufficient; a desultory mass must be organised, via *partitioning*, so that every body has its place and each place its body. How actors and artefacts are dispersed within a given locus is crucial to instating a regimen of order. Such allocation permitted the acquisition of information and meant that individuals could be controlled, simultaneously creating the conditions for the further collection of knowledge. This perpetual “power/knowledge spiral” (Cohen 1985: 25) transforms space and movement: behaviours are catalogued and quantified to establish rhythm and repetition (Foucault, 1977). Accordingly, ‘disciplinary institutions’ were rendered *functional sites*, identifying and correcting difference to produce docile bodies (Foucault, 1977: 143). Finally, organising and arranging inhabitants by *rank* hierarchized and surveilled bodies, suffusing discipline over a web of relations (Foucault, 1977: 146). An *art of distributions*, therefore, structures “the disposition of buildings, rooms, [and] furniture” (Foucault, 1977: 148) in such a way as to influence the practices of the subjects of their power. Forms of scrutiny that are at once individualising and standardising are woven into the fabric of an institution: “Discipline is a political anatomy of detail” (Foucault, 1977: 139).

Now, of course, Foucault’s (1977) disciplinary thesis was concerned with the evolution of *modern* punishment, which he took as a metaphor for the extension of such practices into the wider social sphere. His analysis predates late-modern penalty and the emergence of managerialism and marketisation, although there are similarities. Cohen (1985), for example, conceptualised Foucault’s (1977) observations on the emergence of the prison as a ‘master shift’ in response to crime. He expanded this argument to show how attempts to decentre the prison in favour of more communitarian approaches to criminality have paradoxically resulted in a sustained growth in imprisonment rates, or a second ‘master shift’ towards “the control of whole groups, populations and environments” (Cohen, 1985: 127). This control extends not only to the supervised, but also to the *supervisors*: indeed, much probation scholarship has been devoted to managerialism as a disciplining discourse, constraining the traditional

autonomy of practitioners and tempering rehabilitative objectives and practices (e.g. Feeley & Simon, 1992; Robinson, 2008; Phillips, 2011).

TR was presented as a means to reverse such a top-down, “Whitehall knows best” (MoJ, 2010: 6) approach, to restore practitioner discretion and reconnect services with local communities. Extending a Foucauldian analytics to competition and marketisation in probation, the next section examines the *art of distributions* at Elizabeth Street to explore how practice has been, and continues to be, influenced by the environment.

Enclosure: Rationalising the probation estate

For Foucault (1977), the emergence of enclosed spaces into which those adjudged to require reformation could be concentrated negated the threats that these groups might pose, as well as providing an opportunity for their training. Probation materialised in the shadow of one such *enclosure*, as an organisation counterposed to the disciplinary effects of imprisonment: dispersed throughout communities, probation officers sought to arrest the disciplinary power of the prison through means of social enquiry (Vanstone, 2007). Late-modern penal developments have, however, removed probation practitioners from the community and consigned practice to large, open-plan offices (Bottoms, 2008; Phillips, 2014). As Bottoms (2008) notes, before the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, Probation Boards, in conjunction with local authorities, could decide where and how many probation offices were located within a particular area. In 2001, “all probation property was vested in the NPS, not in local Probation Boards, who were prohibited from owning or renting land” (Bottoms, 2008: 161). These trends were also evident within the city in which the research site is located: several local offices have since been closed, with probation work delivered from just two buildings. A wresting of provincial control was effected not only to reduce costs, but also to provide facilities suitable for contemporary practice (Bottoms, 2008). Implicit in such a directive was the view that probation practitioners are better located in administrative hubs rather than dispersed throughout communities. Rationalising the probation estate allowed for more efficient knowledge collection on offenders, as rehabilitation was reshaped in accordance with risk management and enforcement (Robinson, 2008).

Elizabeth Street is a two-storey, L-shaped building, the longer side of which runs parallel to a busy route out of the city centre. The office was intended to serve offenders in the south of the city, with another building in the centre servicing those residing in the north. *TR* was presented as a means to reconnect probation with local communities (MoJ, 2013a); after implementation, however, the NPS was moved to the city centre building, while the CRC are the sole occupants of the office in the south. Accordingly, Elizabeth Street's function as the site to which low-to-medium risk offenders serving a sentence in the community *must* report invites comparisons with a Foucauldian 'disciplinary institution' and its attendant analytics:

Because it is about a power dynamic: I think for service users to come to this office – it's my location, not their location - who might have been in custody throughout their previous life, they might have issues with authority. So, for a lot of service users, they might have difficulty coming to an institution. Because that's what I think this is: it's very much like an institution, a hospital, school, or a prison, take your pick. (Sarah, IM)

Indeed, the location of the office means that it is difficult for many offenders to access:

...service users have to get two buses to get here. There's no city centre reporting office. For some people, if they're struggling financially, if they can't drive, then they're struggling to meet their orders. (Trudy, CM)

This resonates with McDermott's (2016: 198) experiences of the move to a "new 'better' located building" by MTCNovo when they assumed control of London CRC, by whom she is employed as a practitioner. She argues that such consolidation created problems for offenders due to the distances they must travel to attend appointments. That the office is now the sole *enclosure* to which low-to-medium risk offenders must report thus mirrors a continued rationalisation of the probation estate.

Partitioning: Spheres of practice

There have been no structural changes to Elizabeth Street since *TR*; however, the manner in which staff are concentrated and distributed within its architecture

remains relevant to understanding of how probation sought to establish its legitimacy as an efficient, punitive force. The main entrance to the building is situated where the lines of the 'L' meet. Downstairs, in a small waiting room, a plaque informs visitors that the building was repurposed in 2008 for the needs of the NPS. As part of the refurbishment, protective glass was installed in front of reception and a CCTV camera was wired overhead. While these developments are hardly unique to probation, they convey to offenders a sense of 'otherness' that arguably contravenes the principles of respect and non-judgement on which the service was predicated (Mawby & Worrall, 2013; Deering & Feilzer, 2015). Upstairs, smaller, private rooms were dismantled in favour of two large, open-plan offices, thereby making room for more staff. As such, space was *partitioned* for specific means (Foucault, 1977): the face-to-face work with offenders takes place 'downstairs'; the technicised elements of practice occur 'upstairs'.

Once an offender has registered their arrival at reception, their supervising practitioner will be notified via telephone or over the public-address system and will make their way 'downstairs'. Offenders are met in the waiting room and ushered through a locked door that leads to labyrinthine corridors from which 15 interview rooms splinter. These rooms vary in size, but rarely contain more than a large table and a stack of chairs. The table is always pushed against a wall; practitioner and offender sit alongside, rather than opposite, one another, fostering a sense of reciprocal exchange over interrogation. Space can be used to compensate for unequal power relations inherent to mandatory supervisor-offender relationships and to make the latter feel at ease, particularly in sensitive circumstances:

The offender is a long-term drug user. Released from prison earlier today, he has been having suicidal thoughts and is visibly upset. Jo, who is usually jovial and jokey, is solemn and serious; she moves around the table and sits directly opposite him, a sympathetic hand on his shoulder and another on his hand. She is attempting to make eye contact, but he is fixed on the floor. She constantly reassures him of his potential: "You can do it; I need you to believe that." Still searching for eye contact, Jo reminds him of the positive relationships in his life – namely, with his brother and parents. Eventually, she manages to hold his gaze for more than a few seconds; his body language becomes gradually more relaxed and, consequently, his mood improves. They agree that he will return

to his methadone script and reengage with a drug rehabilitation charity. She ends the meeting by arranging the next and reminding him to call her if overcome by suicidal thoughts.

(observation no.17: Jo, CM)

Here, Jo used the space to her advantage; any pretence at a power dynamic was removed by demonstrating empathy for the offender's situation, making him feel safe and cared for. This type of work typifies why most practitioners want to enter the service:

Staff, generally, come into probation to work with service users - 90% plus of staff come in to work with service users. What they don't come in to do is become an administrative function...There is a clear tension between the preference...of most of our staff and the requirements of the job, which is about accountability. (Charlie, Senior Manager)

'Downstairs' work offers practitioners the opportunity to deconstruct the symbolic messages otherwise conveyed by the architecture of the institution, which greets offenders with suspicion and mistrust. The standard supervision meeting consists of questions on offenders' personal circumstances (employment, housing, substance misuse, relationships, etc.), with particular emphasis on any changes; (lack of) engagement with probation and other relevant organisations; and goals for the future. Of the 47 observed supervision meetings between a practitioner and an offender, 41 were conducted in the research site; their average length was approximately 17 minutes. Practitioners bring a notebook into meetings and attempt to record as much information as possible. Once the meeting has finished, practitioners will escort offenders back to the waiting room before returning upstairs to log their notes. Time constraints, however, hinder how long staff are able to spend with offenders:

It tends to be a check-in with service users. I don't feel I've got any time to do any sort of intervention with service users due to the nature of how the job is now. (Trudy, CM)

The 'upstairs', then, is where the majority of probation work occurs, in two open-plan offices. Most staff are allocated to one of three 'flex teams', each

corresponding to an area of the city from which their caseloads are drawn. The north-east team are located in the smaller office, along the base of the 'L'; the larger office houses the north-west and south teams, parted lengthways on opposing sides of the room. These teams are further sub-divided into 'custody' and 'community' specialisms, which dictate the complexion of offenders on practitioners' caseloads. A small, fourth 'flex team' dedicated to women offenders also shares the larger office; a fifth is ostensibly responsible for delivering accredited programmes, but, in practice, CMs fulfil this function from within a 'flex team' alongside their caseload of offenders. Six IMs share three small offices; two pairs bookend the larger office, while the other is located at the foot of the 'L'. There are, in total, 68 desks in the bigger office, approximately 40 of which are used regularly. The relative emptiness of the bigger office makes the smaller office, in which only five of 38 desks are unoccupied, seem busier by comparison. As Foucault (1977: 143) observed, "[e]ach individual has his own place; and each place its individual." To amend Foucault, then, each individual has their own place, but many places in the office are *missing* an individual. This abundance of space represents attempts to render probation more 'efficient' under *TR* and is reflective of the belief that the market can deliver better results with fewer resources (MoJ, 2013a). Indeed, with *TR*, opportunities to operate 'downstairs' have diminished, as computer-work 'upstairs' has acquired greater (financial) importance.

Functional sites: A disciplinary machine?

Foucault (1977: 144) used the example of the eighteenth-century factory, of the distribution of individuals in accordance with machinery, to emphasise how workers were at once separated and linked. The computer is, unequivocally, the machinery central to probation's contemporary functionality (Phillips, 2017); it isolates staff in their work whilst ensuring that they remain connected to the national IT systems (Offender Assessment System [OASys] and nDelius) on which risk management depends. SCMs and CMs are assigned to a desk in one of the open-plan offices. Each space is uniform and equal, screened on three sides; they consist of a desktop computer, mouse, keyboard, and an Ethernet cable which connects the computer to the local area network. Another cable links laptops purchased by the parent company to encourage "agile working" (McDermott, 2016: 198) to the desktop monitor, enabling staff to work

from two screens simultaneously. Mobile phones also replaced landlines, such that ringtones and text message alerts reverberate around the offices.

In theory, mobile technologies allow for probation work to move beyond centralised hubs and out into the community (McDermott, 2016). One of the justifications for *TR* was that probation had become overly technicised, detached from local communities (MoJ, 2013a). For example, a House of Commons Justice Committee (2011: 18) report claimed that “probation staff spend only 24% of their time in contact with offenders”. Based on the results of a survey distributed by the Committee to gain practitioners’ views on, among other things, contact time with offenders, responses highlighted OASys as a key factor in diminished face-to-face work. Many cited the repetitive and time-consuming nature of inputting data, which one respondent described as “the equivalent of e-servitude” (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2011: 119).

Despite a “critical consensus” (Hardy, 2014: 316) on risk, which alleges that rehabilitative practices have been vanquished by rational technologies, studies suggest that practitioner frustrations with risk assessment tools do not constitute a wholesale rejection of their utility (Robinson, 2003; Mair *et al.*, 2006; Fitzgibbon, 2008). For example, Mair *et al.* (2006: 21) found scant evidence of a ‘Luddite’ mentality towards OASys when it was implemented in the early 2000s. Risk assessment technologies are not a substitute for knowledge or autonomy; rather, their proficient use depends upon more ‘traditional’ casework approaches (Fitzgibbon, 2008; Hardy, 2014). In this sense, technology should not be considered “anti-professional”, not least because the diversity of offenders’ circumstances requires individualised understandings (Robinson, 2003: 607). Instead, staff have accepted risk assessment and adapted to the inescapable reality of information technologies (Phillips, 2017):

OASys is a box-ticking exercise, but it is a useful guide. I’d be loath to lose OASys; it’s a good way of guiding what you think someone’s criminogenic needs are. (Arthur, SCM)

On any given day, however, technological laments are extended to the office. Such public denouncements address everyone and no-one; the opportunity to express frustration with the systems is more important to practitioners than receiving a response:

My nDelius is down again.

Is anyone struggling to get onto OASys? I'm just getting a blue screen.

(notes from fieldwork)

These technological issues predate *TR*: for instance, an HMI Probation (2014: 4) report on the implementation of the reforms described the “predictable challenge” posed by Ministry of Justice software that was insufficiently integrated and warned of its likely impact on innovative practice. On several occasions during the fieldwork, OASys and nDelius breakdowns limited the tasks staff could perform, which resulted in the cessation of work until they were repaired. While there was other work staff could have undertaken during such interregnum, that many chose to socialise with colleagues highlights the centrality of IT to probation practice and the value of respite from the monotony of recording.

Technological difficulties, moreover, exacerbate the sheer weight of recording expected of practitioners:

Every phonecall, even if they don't answer: nDelius. Every text message: nDelius. Everything you do: nDelius. You have to back everything up. What frustrates me is that my word means nothing here. But if I put my word onto the computer, and I could put any old shite on the computer, then it counts.
(Matilda, SCM)

While these trends are by no means unique to *TR* (e.g. Phillips, 2011), Matilda's inference that information does not count if it is not recorded through the formal channels further accentuates an organisational bias towards digitised accountability over personal intuition. Here, “knowledge is reified and becomes ‘information’ through the process of being written down” (Phillips, 2017: 217-8). Practitioners are disciplined by a ceaseless and time-consuming obligation to record, and thereby generate, knowledge (Foucault, 1977). And yet, practitioners also see the value of such accountability:

Any decision-making has got to be defensible, just in case anything goes wrong – which a lot of us are quite worried about. (Trudy, CM)

The amount of administrative work that practitioners are expected to complete has been magnified by *TR*, not least because of redundancies to many administrative staff made by the parent company when they acquired control of the CRC:

I've had to pick up that admin work. It's stuff like sending letters – I do that; I send my own letters out. Previously, I would complete the breach report, but admin would prepare the breach report and admin report prior to me adding my professional part to it, you know, prior to the analysis and the rationale behind the report. And that takes up quite a lot of time, chasing documents, chasing stuff from prisons, chasing stuff from the court - admin used to do all of that. (Arthur, SCM)

Arthur's comment highlights how the clerical burden has impacted negatively upon practitioners, as time otherwise spent deploying knowledge and exercising judgement is now expended on administrative chores. Attempts to render service provision more 'efficient', a key objective of *TR* (MoJ, 2013a), have served to concentrate practitioners 'upstairs'. Matilda (SCM), however, challenged this economic understanding of 'efficiency', arguing that her time is better spent in the community:

I'm not being disrespectful, but which is cost effective: is it better that I write a letter? Or hire somebody to do all those bits, so I can get out and do what we've been trained to do?

The loss of administrative staff has thus resulted in office-based and computer-led practice becoming *further* embedded since the reforms. Mirroring the national picture (HMI Probation, 2017), extra administrative pressures have affected caseloads:

...the amount of work associated with [cases] is far greater than how the computers measure workloads...It makes it very difficult, riding by the seat of your pants trying to get everything done. (Will, CM)

For many practitioners, these trends are counterproductive to what they believe to be the essence of probation work – that is, face-to-face work conducted with offenders:

I want to be able to do more face-to-face things...I want to be able to sit down and help people, more one-to-one focused...[but] you just can't do a 60-70-odd caseload, run groups, and go out into the community. (Camilla, CM)

While practitioners accept that recording is an inevitable part of the job, there is a clear preference to engage with offenders in a compassionate capacity. A commitment to the offender thereby resonates with much probation literature on the persistence of shared values which prioritise the individual (e.g. Mawby & Worrall, 2013; Deering & Feilzer, 2015). Since *TR*, however, the time available for 'downstairs' work has been further tempered by 'upstairs' obligations to information technologies. Offenders can seem like a distraction:

I come into the office and sit [and] feed my computer, do a lot of checking and stuff. I try and see clients in between that, but a lot of it, I feel, is that the client is getting in the way of me doing my computer work: 'Okay, there's someone here', so I'll break off from my computer, go see the client and, hopefully, he won't have too many issues that he's brought for me so I can go back and finish my computer work. (Arthur, SCM)

As such, the office's functionality is geared towards accountability. Contrary to how the reforms were presented, practitioners are dispersed 'upstairs' amongst information technologies, rather than in the community, representing a continuation of managerial practice after *TR*. This distribution disciplines staff, as offenders are controlled and managed at a distance.

Rank: Flows of power

The convergence of extra administrative responsibilities, caseload pressures, and demands to record every interaction has resulted in the continued importance of the computer as a mediator of relations. Here, *rank* provides an example of an increasingly administrative mode of working, dispersing discipline over a "network of relations"

(Foucault, 1977: 176). Since the parent company assumed control of the CRC, IMs' roles have changed considerably. Just as the loss of administrative staff burdened practitioners with more clerical responsibilities, IMs have been similarly affected by redundancies, albeit at a managerial level:

Prior to the split, we had a number of people who were responsible for all different kinds of stuff – building managers, HR, finance, a training team. They were made redundant. They were the most significant losses. As a senior probation officer, those were not responsibilities that would have sat with us previously. (Louise, IM)

IMs' roles are thus constrained by new administrative duties; their work, too, is predominantly computer-based. Monitoring performance has arguably become the most important part of the IM role. They use an online tool straightforwardly entitled 'Performance Management', which permits the surveillance of individuals *and* teams against specific PbR metrics. This makes possible the identification of difference in performance between staff members and the potential for correction (Foucault, 1977):

We're very performance-led, so if there's issues, if my team were coming out with problems, that's monitored closely [and] the work is scrutinised. If there was any feedback...that someone in my team is not achieving, then [my boss] would want to know what I've got in place – whether training, capabilities – to make sure that's sorted. (Louise, IM)

While this type of scrutiny predates *TR* (e.g. Phillips, 2011), the contractual logic of PbR means that targets have accrued greater financial significance. CRCs are predominantly remunerated through 'fee for service', that is, output-based targets that comprise approximately 90% of their funding; payments are withheld if they fail to meet such metrics (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2016):

...if you don't tick the right box at the right time, then it becomes a fail; and we're paid according to that, of course. (Charlie, Senior Manager)

In this sense, PbR functions as a form of “penal accountancy” (Foucault, 1977: 180): missing targets is punishable via the withholding of (state) funding; hitting targets is rewarded, regardless of whether the service delivered is meaningful. IMs are thus the conduits between practitioners and senior management (and, by extension, the Ministry of Justice), responsible on a day-to-day basis for ensuring that performance targets are met:

If you miss a target, then you’ll be called in and asked why you’ve not completed it by managers. I think managers are aware about how staff are feeling about things like that, but they’re under pressure too. Our managers’ roles have changed, too; they’ve got a lot of extra work that’s behind the scenes, so we don’t see what’s going on. There’s lots of pressure. (Maddie, SCM)

Here, power is not embodied in a person; rather, it is dispersed *throughout* the organisation, disciplining staff and entrenching computer-based practice.

Practitioners are constantly reminded of performance targets, for which email is the dominant mode of communication:

[The IMs] know we have to meet targets, so they contact you by email or they send charts...so we know that we have a certain number of days left to meet the deadline. (Leon, CM)

Staff are thus more valuable to the CRC when ‘upstairs’ rather than ‘downstairs’. Much like Bentham’s Panopticon, practitioners are disciplined by the knowledge that their actions are constantly surveilled. IMs do not need to have a physical presence, for practitioners are aware that their performance is *seen* on information technologies:

I don’t like the pressure: it’s all targets. Email after email after email after email about targets. Where’s the time for the person? (Rhonda, CM)

The heightened financial importance of meeting targets since *TR* has also marginalised the human element of the IM role:

What I feel bad about is that...I don't feel like I give enough time, or I have enough time, for staff and helping with practice. For me, it's a constant tension because...there's no time to sit down and say, 'bring a case and we'll work through it together'. Sometimes I feel like more of a glorified administrator. (Kate, IM)

Changes to the IM role resemble Foucault's (1977) observation that anybody can fulfil the surveillant function at the centre of the tower in the Panopticon, a point evidenced by Arthur (SCM):

I wouldn't want to be a manager here, because that's now an auditing role: you just sit in the office tapping on the keyboard, checking that I've done my stuff and telling me when I haven't.

This is not to deny the skills, knowledge, qualifications, and experience IMs have exhibited to progress up the probation hierarchy; rather, to highlight how *TR* has deskilled their role. *Rank*, therefore, ensures that practitioners remain focused on performance; IMs are the interlocutors that allow for the individualisation of practitioners and the standardisation of their work, dispersing discipline throughout the organisation (Foucault, 1977).

Towards standardised practice?

An *art of distributions* (Foucault, 1977) provides insight into the managerial forces that have shaped, and continue to shape, probation practice. Since *TR*, probation work for low-to-medium offenders has been further enclosed within a single location. Within this architecture, staff are distributed 'upstairs', where they are most valuable to the functioning of the CRC; regardless of *rank*, they are disciplined by the normalising gaze of targets, reconfigured in contractual form. The pressures under which practitioners operate have resulted in an enforced reliance upon signposting to other agencies to deliver services. As a result, probation practice is at once individualised *and* standardised (Foucault, 1977): offenders are summarily assessed according to their *individual* circumstances, before being referred to the relevant agencies; but, for practitioners, such delegation has resulted in *standardised* practice

which deprives them of the opportunity to establish meaningful relationships. Ashley, a Senior Manager, made this expected change explicit:

What people have not been great at, historically, is referring people to other services, of holding them to [themselves] and then going, 'I've got too much to do'. As much as Senior Managers need to think about delegating, practitioners do too...As much as I've got sympathy for people and their workloads, they're not doing that.

A dependence upon referrals echoes the Offender Management Model implemented under the New Labour government in 2005 (Robinson, 2011). Offenders were expected to move seamlessly between agencies involved in the criminal justice infrastructure, often within the course of a single sentence (Robinson, 2011). Supervision should, therefore, "involve more than intervention from the supervising officer/offender manager" (Robinson, 2011: 29). In other words, the 'offender manager' is an *administrator* who convenes relevant practitioners from different organisations to deliver end-to-end supervision. One practitioner welcomed such change:

...what we've learnt since moving from probation to the CRC is about letting go, because we were too involved in supervision before. Clients were like babies that you didn't want to let go [of]. It's about feeling comfortable about not seeing someone so frequently, and understand[ing] that that person can still be monitored. (Leon, CM)

This comment exemplifies the Coalition government's emphasis upon CRCs' utilisation of external organisations: for example, practice under *TR* "might include signposting offenders to accommodation, education, or health services or offering a mentor. Providers will have responsibility for the day to day management of the majority of offenders" (MoJ, 2013a: 10). Nationally, though, charities involved with *TR* are struggling financially: for instance, a Clinks (2018: 24) survey of 132 voluntary organisations which provide probation services found that just 35% are funded by a CRC, which has led to a "tick-box culture" of monitoring. As such, PbR is failing to

incentivise innovation: charities are working to output-based targets because this is the most expedient way to maintain scarce funding.

At a local level, the reality of inflated caseloads means that signposting is reluctantly accepted as a means through which to lighten practitioners' workloads:

...we're encouraged to signpost...but before, there was one relationship. I found it really difficult. I thought I can just do it myself, but then caseloads get bigger and you're glad for [partner agencies] being there. I can't remember the last time I even did a benefits claim. It just becomes embedded in you and becomes embedded in what's expected: 'we don't do that, that's not our job', when it was. I feel like I'm a project manager. I feel like that's what the role is now. (Maddie, SCM)

While signposting to other agencies is not the preferred course of action, many staff are resigned to being unable to deliver the work themselves. On the one hand, a greater reliance on referrals since *TR* could be interpreted as a means through which to reconnect with local communities. On the other hand, enforced signposting further challenges 'traditional' understandings of probation practice which prioritise the importance of relationships (Robinson, 2011). Indeed, job titles were changed to better reflect how practitioners should 'project manage' cases from behind a computer, whilst services are delivered elsewhere:

It was changed to reflect that we were no longer part of the National Probation Service; that was the main driver. The view was, at the time, that a Case Manager implied more about project management, coordination of cases, and that has always been the ideal scenario: Case Managers, yes, will see the service user on whatever frequency, but would be the lynchpin for coordinating services around that. (Charlie, Senior Manager)

The symbolic importance of the parent company's removal of 'probation' from staff job titles offers a telling semantic clue as to expectations for future practice within the office, communicating to practitioners that they should seek to predominantly rely on other agencies for service provision. As a result, practitioners are further

concentrated and dispersed within an architecture in which their value is calculated constantly and quantitatively by information technologies.

Conclusions

A Foucauldian interpretation of architecture draws attention to how external dynamics are reflected in the physicality of particular environments, encouraging (and discouraging) certain behaviours (Foucault, 1977; Armstrong & McAra, 2006). The manner in which staff are distributed within the architecture of Elizabeth Street provides insight into contemporary probation practice. The cumulative effects of an *art of distributions* (Foucault, 1977) shows how the office is structurally attuned to the demands of late-modern probation work: discipline is dispersed throughout “a network of relations” (Foucault, 1977: 146), pervading space, time, and relationships. Rather than reversing managerial flows and restoring practitioners’ decision-making autonomy, *TR* offers a continuation of such practices. Situated in large, open-plan offices that service *all* low-to-medium risk offenders in the city, practice is geared towards brief excursions ‘downstairs’ to extract information from offenders before returning ‘upstairs’ to reify the ‘knowledge’ on which case management depends. Information technologies are, therefore, the key artefacts of probation supervision, the machinery that locates staff within a circuitry of discipline.

While there have been no architectural changes to Elizabeth Street since *TR*, the preponderance of empty space, of unused computers, demonstrates how workloads at all levels of the office have been exacerbated. For practitioners, the convergence of higher caseloads, additional administrative duties, and pressures to record all interactions has further diminished opportunities to build and maintain relationships with offenders:

...we don’t have the time to get to know somebody, what makes them tick; it’s a conveyor belt. It feels like I’m an auditor; I audit cases. (Maddie, SCM)

IMs, moreover, have assumed a disciplining role in a service for which monitoring the performance of teams *and* individuals has acquired greater financial importance, ensuring that practitioners generate the information required to meet PbR metrics. In this sense, PbR functions as a panoptic gaze: practitioner performance is *individualised*,

with the aim of *standardising* probation work so that it most easily conforms to targets (Foucault, 1977). Probation work at the office thus points towards an increasingly standardised modality that, like New Labour's Offender Management Model, "pushes the boundaries of probation practice" (Robinson, 2011: 29). Practitioners are increasingly constrained in their ability to address offenders' diverse needs; instead, they must rely upon delegation to other, often commercially embattled, agencies. While *TR* did not create the challenges evident at Elizabeth Street, it has nonetheless cultivated the conditions for their aggravation. In this sense, the reforms can be situated along a managerial continuum in which processes of targets, audit, and standardised practice have gradually become entrenched.

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