MQPL+
Exploring the Moral Quality of Prisons through Ethnography-led Measurement

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Outline

- **Defining MQPL+**
  - Development and field sites

- **MQPL+ as a Model for Doing Prisons Research Differently**
  - Humanizing the survey and ‘going deep’

- **MQPL+ and Prisons in Transition**
  - ‘Slow science’ and understanding change trajectories

- **Conclusion**
‘Quality of Life’ Staff and Prisoner Surveys

- Workshops and Appreciative Inquiry interviews to identify ‘what matters’ most to staff and prisoners
- Identification of dimensions (e.g. respect/courtesy and relationships)
- Creation of 100+ item questionnaires
- Prisoner questionnaire has now been modified and is administered regularly to all prisons by NOMS’ internal auditors
- Staff quality of life survey now being used by HM Prison Service selectively, and by the PRC in ongoing research projects
Exploring the Moral Quality of Prisons with Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

- What kind of moral climate does this prison have? Why does it operate in the way that it does? What are the effects of this climate, and what are its justifications?

- Careful identification of ‘what is’, what is experienced as ‘best’, and what is lacking: an important supplement to the usual social science preoccupation with ‘problem-identification’

- Inquiry into what gives the research participants life and energy, which often leads to energetic (otherwise silenced) narratives about what ‘the best practice’, or ‘better days or experiences in prison’ look and feel like

- Powerful resonance between these ‘important values that matter’ and the values embodied in statements of minimum standards in prison
MQPL – Prisoner Survey

- 21 dimensions
- 5 dimension categories:
  - Harmony (relational)
  - Professionalism
  - Security
  - Conditions and Family Contact
  - Wellbeing and Development

SQL – Staff Survey

- 18 dimensions
- 4 dimension categories:
  - Management
  - Job Satisfaction
  - Authority
  - Prisoner Orientation

- Additional dimensions:
  - Traditional Culture
  - Punitiveness
MQPL Around the World

Canada           United States
Australia        Chile
Ireland          France
Germany          New Zealand
India            Estonia
Philippines      Sierra Leone
Spain            Scotland
5-7 days spent in the prison

Team of 5-7 researchers

Staff surveys distributed at an all staff meeting

Random sampling for prisoner participation – surveys completed in focus groups with a discussion

Time spent observing every area of the prison: on the wings, in offices, healthcare, education, segregation, SMT/morning meetings, workshops, chaplaincy, gym…

Interviews and ‘purposeful conversations’ with prisoners, officers, management, and other prison personnel

Final report with synthesized quantitative and qualitative data, along with a feedback session
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<th>MQPL+ Field Sites</th>
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<td>HMYOI Brinsford</td>
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<td>HMYOI Aylesbury</td>
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<td>HMP Oakwood</td>
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<td>HMP YOI Grampian</td>
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<td>HMP Brixton</td>
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<td>HMP Durham</td>
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<td>HMP Humber</td>
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MQPL+ as a Model for Doing Prisons Research Differently

Humanizing the survey and ‘going deep’
MQPL+: Doing Prisons Research Differently

‘One of the leading problems of social science is achieving good enough measurement of complex human phenomena – this problem is not just a question of how to analyse data but, more importantly, how to conceptualize and collect it.’ –Liebling 2014: 481

The process: collaborative, respectful, appreciative, creative - ‘affirmative social science’

The purpose of the MQPL+ is to produce grounded, accurate, meaningful/authentic description while increasing diagnostic accuracy and conceptual clarity (cumulative, sociological knowledge) rather than measurement. Although measurement is often what senior managers desire…
Evolving the MQPL...

Conceptualizing the survey and the MQPL+ exercise as a ‘living instrument’

Maintenance of the core reliability and validity (internal and face), but with the flexibility to be implemented as a purpose-oriented approach in order to assist prisons in understanding strengths, weaknesses, and overall quality

Commitment to continue identifying ‘what matters most’ to staff and prisoners as their prisons and the national context changes over time
MQPL+ and Prisons in Transition: Slow(er) Science for Understanding Change Trajectories

‘Cultural diagnosis’ through ethnography-led measurement
‘Slow Science’ and Understanding Change Trajectories

‘We do need time to think. We do need time to digest … We cannot continuously tell you what our science means; what it will be good for; because we simply don’t know yet. Science needs time.’  –Slow Science Manifesto, Scientific American, July 2011

‘Social distance must be reduced if research scholars are to penetrate the worlds they seek to enter. This is a time-consuming and precarious process.’  –Liebling 2014: 482

‘I approach the prison as an organization in action, in dynamic relationship with its political, moral, and institutional environments.’  –Jacobs 1977: 11
Exploring the Quality of Life in Guantanamo Bay’s ‘Camp 7’

- Holds 15 ‘high-value’ detainees
- Opened in 2006
- U.S. government denied the existence of Camp 7 until 2008
- ‘Super-max’ conditions
- ‘The idea that we would still maintain forever a group of individuals who have not been tried - that is contrary to who we are, it is contrary to our interests, and it needs to stop.’
NI’s only high security prison
- Capacity: 745
- In 2003, the Steele report recommended options to make the jail safe - including ‘a degree of separation’ for republican and loyalist inmates
- ‘The most complicated prison in the UK’
Brisbane Correctional Centre

MQPL+ with Griffith University
October 19 - 30, 2015

- Reception prison
- Capacity: 558
- Special unit for 17-year-olds
- 18-cell unit for ‘extra dangerous offenders’
- As of May, Queensland jails now hold a record number of Indigenous people, after the state’s prison population rose 21% in just two years
- The rising total population in the state’s jails has also coincided with a doubling in the rate of serious assaults on prisoners by fellow inmates
- 4 prisoner suicides in last 18 months
Brisbane Correctional Centre: All Staff Scores (SQL)

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<tr>
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<th>HMP Pentonville</th>
<th>BCC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014 N = 198</td>
<td>2015 N = 72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority Dimensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety, control, and security</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>3.49 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punishment and discipline</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dynamic authority</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.84 **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prisoner Orientation Dimensions</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional support for prisoners</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.33 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitudes to prisoners</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.38 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust, compassion, and commitment to prisoners</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.11 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with prisoners</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.34 **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall quality of working life score (1-10) mean</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>6.53 ***</td>
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Suicide Prevention Effectiveness: Disciplinary Staff
Combined results from 12 English prisons

Relationships with Senior Management

Role and Responsibility

Work culture

Communication

Suicide Prevention Effectiveness

R² = .24
R² = .28

.63
.65

.46
.45

.42
.42

.55
.57

.24
.25
Brisbane Correctional Centre: Prisoner Scores (MQPL)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BCC</th>
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<td>N = 124</td>
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### Harmony (relational) Dimensions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Entry into custody</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect/courtesy</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-prisoner relationships</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>2.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decency</td>
<td>2.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care for the vulnerable</td>
<td>2.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help and assistance</td>
<td>2.68</td>
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**Overall quality of life score (1-10) mean** 4.75
HMP YOI Grampian
Peterhead, Scotland

MQPL+ March 2015, 2016

- New-for-old establishment – replaced HMPs Peterhead and Aberdeen
- Opened in 2014
- Capacity: 552
- UK’s first ‘community facing’ prison
- Purpose-built to hold men, men, and young offenders
- Aims to offer ‘a range of innovative practices … in order to stimulate, promote and sustain cultural change’ within a custodial environment that is ‘more humane, civilised and amenable’
Unlocking Organisational Potential: MQPL+ in Scotland

Under certain conditions social science has a ‘generative capacity’; that is, it can challenge assumptions, foster reconsideration of the taken-for-granted, discover and work with what is life-generating, or with individual and organisational potential.

A generative social science, appreciatively conceived and conducted, and with strong qualitative foundations, can become a springboard for normative dialogue. It could, at its best, advance our deliberations on better forms that power and justice might take.
HMP Oakwood: Prisoner results – 1 and 2 years after opening
Concluding Thoughts

- Political, social, and economic climates, along with local, national, and international contexts, continue to create dynamic prisons and distinct institutional cultures (some more survivable and less damaging than others).

- Shifts in prison management and criminal justice priorities need a steady narration to understand change trajectories in people and places, and their implications for outcomes.

- MQPL and the universality of core dimensions: intelligently distributed power, decency, dignity, and the importance of relationships.