

The reputation of alternatives to prison

Building community and magistrate support

This briefing draws on research conducted by Henley Management College into the local reputations of two alternatives to prison: a Probation Service and a Youth Offending Team. The results are based on focus groups and surveys in the Northeast, Northwest and South of England during 2002 and 2003 and involve a sample of 474 community members and 694 magistrates. This briefing provides information about how to engage community and magistrate support and improve the reputations of these prison alternatives. This is not simply of relevance to the marketing of alternatives but has implications for the way in which community supervision is undertaken and what it is trying to achieve.

Key lessons

Community

- Community members surveyed are not positive towards prisons, but they are not positive towards alternatives to prison either.
- Most community members surveyed do not know about successful community sentences, but do know negative things about them. (Many young people don't know about community sentences at all.)
- To become supportive of prison alternatives, the public needs to see the benefits to their communities in terms of enhanced safety, rehabilitation of offenders and satisfied victims. The public also needs to see that community sentences are serious penalties for offenders.

Magistrates

- Magistrates are currently positively disposed toward prison alternatives, they are committed and will consider using new orders.

- Magistrates do not, however feel as involved with the Probation Service and Youth Offending Team as they would like to be. The majority of magistrates would like more training on community sentences, especially interactive meetings with staff who supervise them.
- Prison alternatives could further strengthen their relationships with magistrates if they did more to take on board magistrates' ideas about community sentences.

Improving relationships with both community and magistrates

- Regular reporting on performance would build support with sentencers and the public. In particular prison alternatives need to demonstrate their performance equally in three dimensions: providing value to victims, communities and offenders.

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The Context

Sentencers

With a record and rising prison population, there is considerable concern about the confidence which sentencers have in community penalties. In a recent Mori survey two thirds of magistrates agreed that community sentences have benefits over custodial sentences, but over half thought that custody is more effective for persistent offenders and only a third thought that they prevent reoffending or help protect the public (National Probation Service 2003).

Local communities

The governmental framework document “Improving Public Satisfaction and Confidence in the Criminal Justice System” argues that while there is no substitute for improving basic performance and providing high quality customer service to users, “communication and engagement with communities needs to get better too.” As far as alternatives to prison are concerned, poll evidence suggests that visibility with the public is low. Just 2% of respondents spontaneously mention that the National Probation service can affect levels of crime and half say they know hardly anything or nothing at all about probation (Mori 2002).

The CORR approach to building trust in the criminal justice system

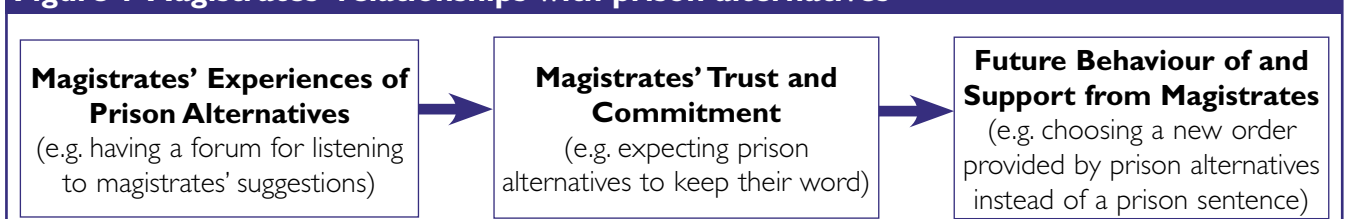
CORR (the Centre for Reputation and Relationships) is a dedicated research centre at Henley Management College with a proven track record in helping organisations to improve their reputation and relationships. The CORR Relationship Model has been developed through eight years of theoretical and empirical research, resulting in a rigorous methodology that links stakeholder experiences to trust and their consequent behaviours.



CORR uses a variety of statistical techniques to establish the causes of stakeholder behaviour and identify key actions that will have maximum impact on the reputation of organisations. The CORR Relationship Model has been successfully applied to more than 5,000 stakeholders of different types in large and small businesses, not for profit and government organisation. CORR works from the belief that organisations can only achieve long-lasting and real success through collaborative and trusting relationships with all their stakeholders.

In the project supported by RCP, CORR investigated the reputations and relationships of two prison alternatives: a Probation Service and a Youth Offending Team. The CORR Relationship Model indicates how future behaviour of stakeholders is built on how they currently feel about these prison alternatives i.e. their attitudes and feeling of trust. These are, in turn, caused by experiences of prison alternatives, as well as some contextual factors such as the media and the opinion of other people. Magistrates and local communities were identified as two important stakeholder groups; the first because they decide if an offender goes to prison or receives a community sentence, the second because prison alternatives operate in local communities and often depend on public support. The research on magistrates' relationships with prison alternatives is shown in figure 1 below. The research on communities' relationships with prison alternatives is shown in figure 2 opposite.

Figure 1 Magistrates' relationships with prison alternatives



“It is widely believed that offenders do not learn their lessons in prison and come out worse than they go in.”

Figure 2 Communities' relationships with prison alternatives



The CORR research looks at the views of community members and magistrates at a local level, drawing on a self-completion questionnaire designed to measure the strength of the relationships. The magistrates survey was sent to all magistrates in the areas identified with a response rate between 34% and 41% in the different areas. The community survey was sent to people in the vicinity of the participating prison alternatives, using distribution mechanisms such as random postal distribution, databases of victims and schools (to get young people's views). The response rate for people in communities was between 7% and 14% which is adequate for this type of survey group.

The research investigates whether prison alternatives provide the benefits magistrates and local communities want. The research also provides data that predicts future supportive or unsupportive behaviour of magistrates and communities. To help prison alternatives to achieve their strategic goals and build professional and public support, CORR details the specific benefits and values that magistrates and communities perceive and suggest how changes to these may improve future trust, commitment and supportive behaviour of stakeholders.

The community

The community research was conducted during February and June 2003. The results are based on a questionnaire survey developed after a series of focus groups and interviews. The sample contains 454 adult and young people from the Northeast, Northwest and South of England. 45% of the respondents were male and 55% were female.

Current community perceptions of prison alternatives: the stories people know and don't know

Seven out of ten respondents said that prisons do not have a positive impact on society. It is widely believed that offenders do not learn their lessons in prison and come out worse than they go in. However, the research found that most (71%) people believe that community sentences do not have a positive impact on society either. The current view in communities is that offenders get away with their crimes because their community sentences were so easy. Also, people think that victims are worried because their offenders are still 'free' in the community and that they might become victims again to the same offenders.

Analysis of the kind of stories and narratives which individuals associate with prison alternatives reveals that people know very few success stories about prison alternatives, e.g. stories about local projects that have a positive benefit for the community. Similarly, few people know stories about offenders who have become valuable citizens with the skills they learned during community sentences or stories about victims who are happy that offenders are doing appropriate community sentences. **This lack of knowledge of prison alternative success-stories causes people to be unsupportive of community sentences, even though they know prisons don't work.**

Current feelings in communities

From an emotional perspective, peoples' feelings when thinking of prison alternatives are predominantly ones of anger and sadness. People indicate these negative feelings without being given any information or details on prison alternatives. They are purely

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based on experience, preconceptions or what they have heard in the past. Exploring the drivers of people's emotions, the research shows that the “lack of punishment” greatly influences people. As stated above, it is a common view that offenders have got away with their crimes because community sentences are so easy.

Another very important aspect in people's emotions is fear: nearly half of respondents say they are scared about the future when thinking of prison alternatives. The most important driver of fear is that people think that prison alternatives do not exercise sufficient control over offenders. The public also feel that they cannot relate to prison alternatives. **To address people's fear and to change people's negative impressions, prison alternatives need to start communicating more about their organisations and need to show the positive impact of their work.** The emphasis on strengthening public communication is also supported by the fact that between a third and half of community know little or nothing about prison alternatives. These people have not made up their mind yet due to a lack of knowledge about the organisations in question. This gives prison alternatives a great opportunity to influence people positively by demonstrating good performance.

Building public trust and support in the future

Having identified people's current views and feelings on prison alternatives, the CORR Relationship Model then identifies the key drivers of these and propose actions prison alternatives can take to enhance community support. The research found that people would become more supportive and develop more positive feelings if they knew that:

- community projects have a **positive impact on the community** (e.g. improving the environment)
- community sentences **protect the community during and after the sentences** (e.g. they keep offenders off drugs and help make the community a safe place to live)
- community sentences are **punishment**, not an easy option (e.g. they make demands of offenders)
- **victims have felt better** after being allowed to confront the offenders as part of the community sentences and **have been happy** with the community sentences given to their offenders
- offenders' **experience of community sentences have warned others not to follow the same path.**

See figure 3 for an overview of the main drivers of people's emotions and future supportive behaviours.



“Magistrates believe that prison alternatives can have a positive impact on offenders.”

The research indicates that a **case study approach** would be a particularly appropriate way to communicate success stories. In particular, **real-life success-stories about victims, offenders and communities** via various forms of media would promote prison alternatives. Furthermore, the research found that there would also be considerable impact **if charismatic professionals were shown to work for prison alternatives and if the police, judges and magistrates were to say that community sentences work.**

Magistrates

The magistrates research was conducted during February and April 2003. The results are again based on a questionnaire survey, focus groups and interviews. The sample contains 694 magistrates from the Northeast, Northwest and South of England. Approximately a third of the sample had been magistrates for 1-5 years, a third for 6-15 years and a third for longer than 15 years. About half were over 60 and half under.

Current views of magistrates: a general positive picture

The research found that magistrates' relationships with prison alternatives are strong in three particular areas:

Fairness

Magistrates perceive prison alternatives as fair in the way they treat staff, magistrates and offenders. They also think they get a fair deal in their working relationship with prison alternatives and that prison alternatives put as much effort into their working relationship as magistrates do.

Impact on offenders

Magistrates believe that prison alternatives can have a positive impact on offenders, i.e. they allow offenders to make up for their crimes through work for the community and help to rehabilitate offenders. This supports findings from the National Probation Service Magistrates Survey in 2003 which showed that 84% of magistrates agreed that community sentences enable offenders to pay something back

to the community, and 70% agreed that such orders help to rehabilitate offenders. Despite this, CORR's research shows that only 19% of magistrates believe that prison alternatives provide benefits for society over and above the rehabilitation of offenders and the reduction of re-offending. Benefits such as efficient use of public money and long-term positive impact on society did not rank very highly.

Information about particular cases

Magistrates believe that prison alternatives provide reports that cover all relevant opinions including custodial sentences and relevant information on the background of offenders. Magistrates also believe that prison alternatives employ experienced probation officers who have knowledge of the law and of what orders really involve.

General feelings of magistrates

The research shows that **magistrates trust prison alternatives to a fairly high level** (mean of 5.2 on a seven point scale). The main driver of trust in relationships with magistrates is whether prison alternatives have **kept their commitments**. This includes whether prison alternatives have been open and honest in the past, have met their obligations and commitments and have not used a situation to their own advantage. Keeping focused on these areas will allow prison alternatives to maintain and improve magistrates' trust.

A result that comes across quite clearly is that **magistrates care a great deal about alternative forms of punishment**. The partnership they have with prison alternatives is something that is **very important to magistrates** and something to which **they are very sympathetic**.

The research also suggests however, that magistrates are not always excited about the quality of services. Magistrates do not think prison alternatives are very innovative, inspiring or aspirational. This might be due to the limited knowledge they have about what actually happens on a prison alternative and the generally low level of interaction. Magistrates'

“...on the whole magistrates have limited knowledge about what actually happens on a prison alternative and generally have a low level of interaction with them.”

past experiences show a **lack of communication**. Magistrates think that they do not get enough information from prison alternatives and that they are not listened to by prison alternatives.

Improving magistrates' relationships with prison alternatives in the future

CORR's research shows that magistrates would like to learn more about the work of prison alternatives and wish to attend **interactive workshops regarding community sentences**. Engaging magistrates more in the work of prison alternatives would also allow magistrates to **learn more about prison alternatives' goals and competencies**. At the moment, magistrates think prison alternatives are good in principle and fairly competent, but not necessarily fully able to do the work they wish to do and not very vibrant or progressive. Findings from the National Probation Service Magistrates Survey show that when asked what would make the probation service more effective, magistrates tended to opt for more staff and resources.

The CORR Relationship model links magistrates' experiences of prison alternatives to their future trust and support. The results indicate areas in prison

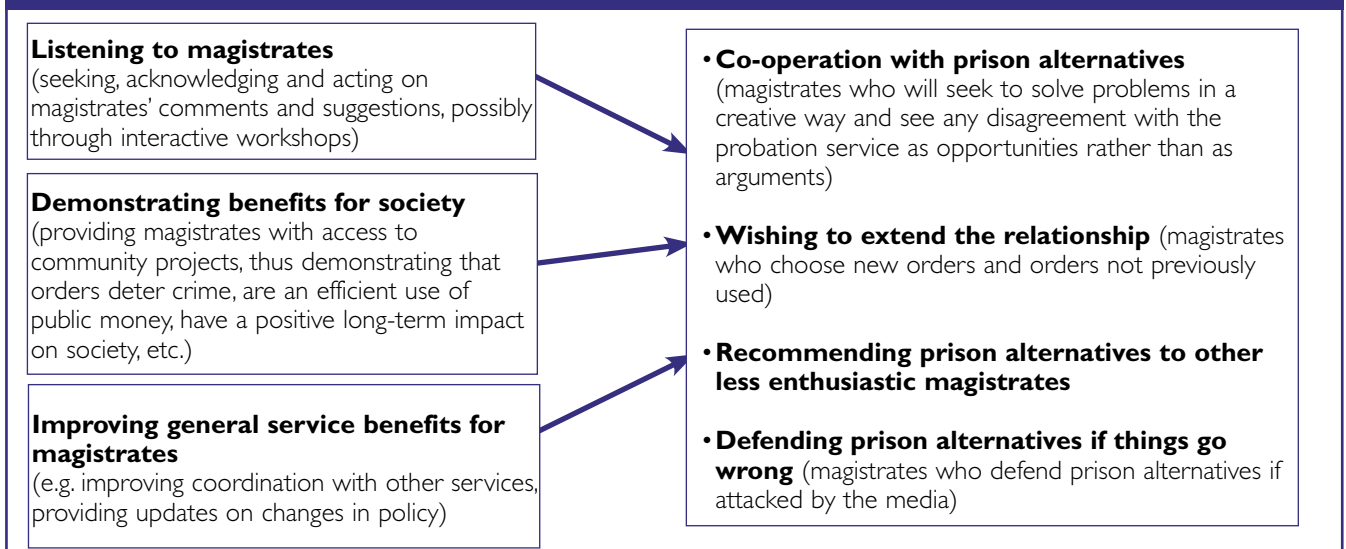
alternatives' behaviour that can be improved to strengthen magistrates' trust and support as desired by prison alternatives. These desired supportive behaviours of magistrates include **recommending and defending** prison alternatives, **cooperating** with prison alternatives (e.g. sharing information, explaining decision, working constructively together) and **extending the relationship** (e.g. extending the number and type of orders used for offenders who would otherwise go to prison).

To enhance these supportive behaviours, prison alternatives should improve in three critical areas:

1. **Listening to magistrates' concerns on a regular basis**
2. **Demonstrating more proactively the benefits of community sentences for society** (e.g. that they have a positive long-term impact, help make the community safe, and can be popular with the public)
3. **Improving coordination with other services** (e.g. with Police, NHS) **and providing updates on changes in policies**

See figure 4 for a summary of the links between areas of improvement and magistrates' future support.

Figure 4: Links between areas of improvement of prison alternatives' behaviour and magistrates' future support



“At the moment, magistrates don’t see the benefits of community sentences for society as a whole, but they would like to see these benefits.”

In summary, magistrates’ trust and intended behaviours are fairly positive. Prison alternatives need to maintain this by keeping their commitments. Listening to magistrates and clearly demonstrating the benefits of community sentences for offenders, victims and communities could further strengthen supportive behaviour of magistrates.

The research confirms that magistrates feel responsible not only towards offenders, but also towards society, vulnerable people and victims. At the moment, magistrates struggle to see the benefits of community sentences for society as a whole, but there are signs that they would like to see these benefits. This could be achieved by giving magistrates and other representatives much more access to community projects, offenders and victims of crime outside the court setting.

Conclusion

A three pronged approach to build support: reporting on victims, communities and offenders

A theme emerging from the magistrate and community research is that both groups would like information about prison alternatives’ performance on three dimensions: performance with victims, performance with communities and performance with offenders. Using an application of the business metaphor triple bottom line, this is referred to as the triple bottom line of prison alternatives. (Elkington, 2001.)

To have maximum impact in terms of building magistrate and community support for prison alternatives, the research suggests that performance on these dimension should draw on real-life examples of victims, communities and offenders. Furthermore, they need to be told in the voices of all three: victims, communities and offenders. The voice of community projects can be told in the voices of community project leaders and workers. Stories could include the positive elements of their jobs and the impact they make. Based on the research results, the three perspectives involve elements as outlined in figure 5.

Figure 5: The triple bottom line for prison alternatives: reporting on performance with victims, communities and offenders



Prison alternatives should find examples of these stories in their work. They need to identify stakeholders who are credible to tell their stories (e.g. victims, offenders, people in communities) and then use various media channels to get the message across. This will improve prison alternatives' reputation and build stakeholder trust and support.

A note on methodology

The data has been analysed using multivariate statistical techniques such as regression analysis and discriminant analysis. The data has also been tested for reliability and validity using well established methods such as Cronbach's alpha and multitrait matrices. These metrics have been tested and benchmarked against other relevant data.

References

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This research was carried out by CORR (Centre for Organisation Reputation and Relationships), Henley Management College. Keith MacMillan, Kevin Money and Carola Hillenbrand. February 2004.

Contact the above on 01491 418833
email: carola.hillenbrand@henleymc.ac.uk

Greenlands, Henley-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire RG9 3AU, UK

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Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
11 Park Place
London
SW1A 1LP

Tel 020 7297 4738
Fax 020 7297 4701

info@rethinking.org.uk
www.rethinking.org.uk