



CRIMINAL JUSTICE SOCIAL WORK  
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## **Managing Change in Criminal Justice Social Work**

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### ***1. Introduction***

Criminal Justice Social Work (CJSW) services in Scotland have for a long time faced the challenge of coping with change, particularly since the advent of ring-fenced funding in 1991. A key challenge in recent years has been the “what works” agenda, with its attendant need to introduce new forms of offender assessment and effective programmes of intervention. CJSW services are currently faced with meeting the expectations of the newly established Accreditation Panel for community supervision programmes. The service is also coping with the demands of new disposals and the requirements of the recent Criminal Justice Act. Additionally, many services have had to respond to the organisational changes needed to form criminal justice groupings and further change is on the horizon.

Effectively managing complex and continuous change is always difficult and can be a painful experience for all concerned. However, there are things that service managers can do to facilitate this process and this paper aims to outline those things that seem to help. Just as CJ social workers are now expected to ensure that their practice is informed by best evidence about what works, so managers need to consider evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches to managing change. Thus the next section of this paper provides a brief summary of this evidence and highlights where managers can go for further information. It concludes that the existing evidence is far from conclusive and much of it does not relate directly to CJSW services. To respond to this lack of context specific experience and advice, the paper goes on to provide an account of West Dunbartonshire Council’s experience of effecting major cultural and organisational change in its criminal justice social work service. The account is based on participant observation by two of the authors. The paper concludes with the lessons learned from this case study and how these relate to our existing knowledge about the effective management of change.

### ***2. What works in managing change***

Unfortunately there are no simple answers to this question. There is a wealth of literature on managing change but much of this is devoted to describing key ideas and offering theoretical models of the process. Empirical studies, which use rigorous methods to answer questions about what works in managing organisational change are relatively rare. Furthermore judgements about success tend to be conditional on who is doing the assessment and when the judgements are made (Pettigrew et al., 2001). Nevertheless, there are models available to assist those charged with managing change, and some of these have a body of evidence to support their effectiveness.

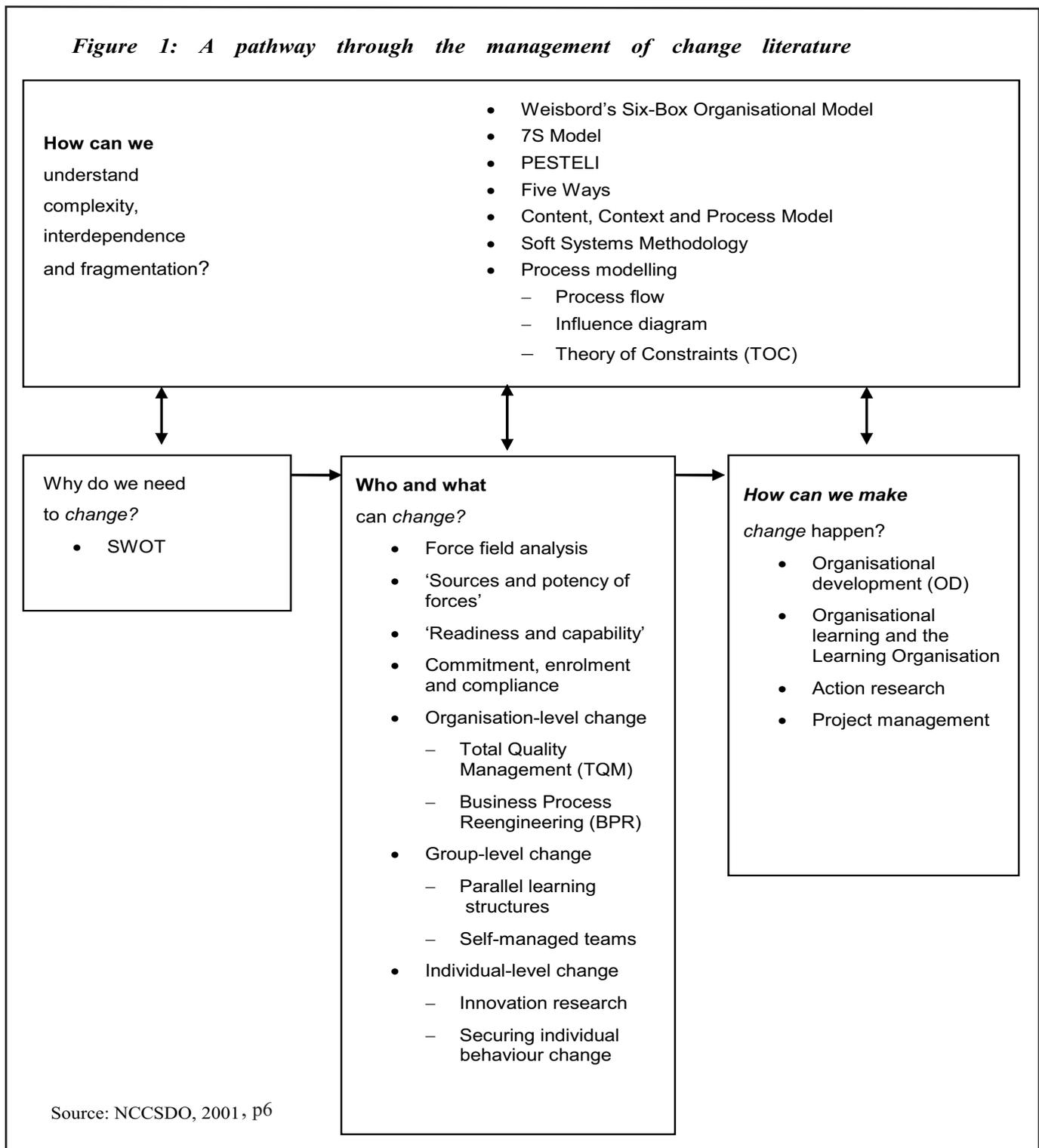
A good way for managers to find their way around the large literature on managing change is to consult two publications

from the National Co-ordinating Centre for NHS Service Delivery and Organisation R&D (NCCSDO 2001; Iles and Sutherland 2001). These publications provide a pathway through the literature by grouping models of change (see Figure 1) into four clusters focused on the following key questions:

1. How can we understand complexity, interdependence and fragmentation?
2. Why do we need to change?
3. Who and what can change?
4. How can we make change happen?

Managers will have different concerns depending upon the situation they face. For example, in one situation the need for change may be clear but there may be uncertainty about what changes should be introduced. In another situation, the concern may be less about what to change and more about how to encourage change to happen. Hence the models set out in Figure 1 will be more or less helpful under different circumstances and they should be used selectively. To help managers make the most appropriate selection, the NCCSDO publications not only describe the models but also summarise the evidence in support of the main diagnostic techniques and interventions that they propose.

**Figure 1: A pathway through the management of change literature**



As well as looking to the broader literature on organisational change, managers within CJSW services should also consider what they already know about what works in managing change in offenders. The CJSW Introductory Reader (Whyte, 2000) lists some of the principles about offenders' ability to change:

- Attitudes can be amended
- Self esteem can be boosted
- Skills for making better decisions can be acquired
- But positive motivation and a commitment to change on the part of the person is not necessarily a pre-requisite for change

Similarly, it is argued that to change offender behaviour the practitioner should:

- Establish a clear vision for work with offenders
- Not dwell on the past but look to the future
- Work with significant others in effecting change
- Tailor approaches to individual needs
- Use structured approaches which focus on behaviour change and skills development
- Focus on solving problems
- Use authority in a positive way (collaboration not coercion).

All of these principles can be readily translated to the management of organisational change, particularly when the focus is on the desire to change the behaviour of key individuals or groups of staff.

Different managers will have different images of what managing change means for them (Palmer and Dunford, 2002). These images are likely to be based on the assumptions they make about what can be achieved (intended, partially intended and unintended change outcomes) and how they think they should approach the change task (controlling activities or shaping capabilities). At least six images of change management can be identified using these two dimensions: directing, navigating, caretaking, coaching, interpreting and nurturing (see Box 1). When managers are faced with the task of implementing a change which has been decided elsewhere, they are most likely to view the task as either directing or coaching. However, where future directions are less clear and there is scope for significant local action, the image of change management may be more one of navigating or interpreting.

### **Box 1: Initial questions for those charged with managing change**

Assumptions about change outcomes	Images of managing	
	Controlling (activities)	Shaping (capabilities)
Intended	<i>Directing</i>	<i>Coaching</i>
Partially intended	<i>Navigating</i>	<i>Interpreting</i>
Unintended	<i>Caretaking</i>	<i>Nurturing</i>

No one image of change management is necessarily better than another. Contingency models of change management (Stace and Dunphy, 2001; Huy, 2001) argue that the most appropriate approach will depend on factors like: the scale of the change, the urgency of the change, and the receptivity of organisational members for engaging in the change. Given both the complexity of change and its contingent nature, there are no simple recipes for managing it effectively. However, a few over-arching, generic lessons can be drawn from the existing literature (NCCSDO 2001). These include:

- The importance of analysing the local situation and planning interventions accordingly
- The benefits of incorporating a process of constant review because every intervention will have some unplanned consequences as well as the planned ones
- The need to be flexible about timescales because achieving change is a lengthy and complicated process
- The importance of frontline staff understanding what is proposed and seeing the benefits of change. This seems to be aided if new forms of working are communicated in ways that relate to current practices.

Importantly, though, much of the existing guidance about change management is not based on the experience of introducing change in CJSW services. It is to one such experience and the lessons that emerge from it that we now turn.

### **3. The case of West Dunbartonshire Council**

West Dunbartonshire Council covers a relatively small but economically deprived urban area (pop. 92,000). Prior to 1998, its CJSW service was provided via generic social work teams. The majority of its 30 criminal justice staff were located within two local area teams. Line management of these generic teams resided with two senior social workers, who were directly responsible to generic area managers. Twelve criminal justice staff - community service, the groupwork team, court workers and headquarters support staff - were centralised and directly managed by a Principal Officer, Criminal Justice. This latter post had strategic responsibility for the CJSW service but no operational control over the majority of the workforce. A CJ Management Team existed, consisting of the Principal Officer, the two area team senior social workers, the community service organiser, and the court and groupwork senior officers.

In line with guidance to all local authority services, in 1998 the CJ Management Team conducted a *Best Value* review of its service. The review identified a number of problem areas, in particular shortcomings and inconsistencies in the way in which cases were managed. Case recordings indicated a focus on the mechanics of contact with the offender, with scant mention of its content or its impact on the individual's re-offending. Referrals to offence-focused programmes run by the groupwork team appeared to be made on an ad hoc basis, and there was little in the files to indicate that such referrals were linked to an integrated plan of work with the offender. Case records also indicated wide variations in levels of contact and inconsistencies in the way in which workers dealt with offenders' non-attendance at appointments.

Action to improve this performance was given added urgency by the launch of the *Getting Best Results* initiative by the then Scottish Office in 1998. This pointed to research on effective practice with offenders and urged CJSW services to implement the principles outlined. The way in which the CJ management team responded to this challenge is outlined below. Two phases of change, each consisting of planning, implementation and review, are highlighted.

#### **3.1 Phase 1: Planning (January – February 1999)**

In response to both the internal review and external pressure to change, the CJ Management Team worked on an action plan for consideration by the local authority senior management team. No other CJ staff were involved in these initial discussions, nor was it ever mooted that they should be. The resulting plan included proposals to:

- Introduce new tools to improve the assessment of the level of risk of re-conviction and harm presented by an offender and identify the nature and extent of need related to this offending.
- Develop a consistent and effective model of intervention, including groupwork.
- Centralise CJSW services into two teams - one focused on initial assessment and the other on delivering programmed interventions.

The plan represented the strongly held views of the majority of the CJ Management Team and their understanding of the key principles of effective practice. It is significant that four of the six CJ Management Team members had either completed or were in the process of studying for an MSc in Advanced Social Work Studies in Criminal Justice and they were steeped in the "What Works" agenda. The only area of dissent within the CJ Management Team was the proposal to centralise CJSW service – there was some deep-seated concern about this proposal, and its implications for staff and clients, certainly among area managers. This became a moot point and the proposal was removed from the plan when it failed to receive the support of the local authority senior management team, who favoured continuation of a generic area team model.

It was only at this fairly advanced stage that the question of staff involvement was raised. The CJ Management Team felt that, having laid down a framework based on political and practice imperatives, the workforce could usefully be involved in determining the details of change. Given that the approved plan now consisted of two strands - assessment and intervention - the CJ Management Team decided that two implementation groups, consisting of a cross section of staff, should be established. One team was to investigate available assessment tools and the other appropriate groupwork programmes. Staff were asked to elect representatives to serve on these implementation groups. In practice there was little competition, with those who volunteered automatically selected. They tended to be those who felt most strongly about the changes (both positively and negatively).

The Principal Officer decided that the Court senior and the Groupwork senior should chair the two implementation groups in order to ensure that they kept to both the remit and timetable set by the CJ Management Team. A tight schedule was set – within six months it was expected that assessment tools and programmes would be investigated and the most appropriate selected, staff would be trained to use the new tools/ programme, and the new methods of working would be implemented.

The implementation group meetings were fraught with tension. The concerns that were voiced by participants included:

- Deskilling of workers by imposition of standard methods of assessment/intervention
- Inability/unwillingness of offenders to cope with a groupwork programme
- Increase in workload
- Perceptions of the change as merely a cost-cutting exercise
- Perceptions that the CJ Management Team were trying to score political points with central government
- Perceptions that the Court and Groupwork senior officers were trying to “empire build”
- Potential loss of mileage and loss/increase in overtime due to changing work patterns
- A strong feeling among some implementation group participants that the consultation exercise was a sham with all decisions on the mechanics of achieving the changes already reached.

Initial discussions on these issues within the groups resulted in some of those who were originally hesitant becoming convinced both of the need for, and feasibility of, change. However, many group members became increasingly entrenched in pro/anti positions and these feelings spilled over into the wider staff group. Both the chairs of the implementation groups and the Principal Officer became increasingly impatient with the objections to the proposed change. Resistance tended to be viewed as a threat and management response was to cut short wider discussion and focus on the specific tasks set for the groups. Thus, they exerted sufficient pressure to ensure that the task of investigating appropriate assessment tools and groupwork programmes was completed on time. Proposals from the implementation groups about which assessment tools and groupwork programme to adopt were accepted by the CJ Management Team, who then set about preparing for their implementation (further details about the tools and programmes assessed are provided in Box 2).

### ***Box 2: Phase One: The investigation of assessment tools and intervention programmes***

*Assessment Tools:* Given that only the CJ Management Team had much knowledge of assessment tools at this point, they collated all the tools in use in the U.K. of which they were aware and presented these to the implementation group to consider. As assessment tools were still relatively untried in the Scottish context at that point, the CJ Management Team had no preferred choice and were happy to accept the opinion of practitioners. The group proposed marrying the then Scottish Office risk of harm tool (RA1-4), with which most were already familiar, with the Cognitive Centre’s risk of re-offending tool, LSI-R, which seemed to offer a user friendly scoring system.

*Intervention Programmes:* Given the shortage of programmes in Scotland at that time, group members experienced difficulties in identifying programmes other than those already in use by the groupwork team in West Dunbartonshire. Some area staff had traditionally volunteered to co-work these groups and those who had done so were familiar with the material. The group agreed that these should be developed into a “home grown” programme. The result was a series of short six-week, issue-based modules and singleton life skill sessions from which those supervising clients could build packages to match individual offender need and level of risk. The programme was designed to run year round on a constant “carousel”, which offenders could join as soon as they were placed on an order. (At the time of writing this paper, the programme was being revised to prepare it for the Accreditation Panel. External evaluation of its effectiveness, commissioned from Stirling University, is to be published in 2003).

### ***3.2 Phase 1: Preparation (February – May 1999)***

Following the decision about appropriate assessment tools and the groupwork programme, two key areas of preparatory work were identified as being necessary before the new methods of working could be introduced. First, the decision to adopt the “homegrown” groupwork programme resulted in intense pressure on the groupwork team (one senior officer and two groupworkers) to produce a fully documented programme within three months, while still running the groupwork service. Second, the CJ Management Team established a busy programme of training on the assessment tools and groupwork programme.

The specific training provided on the assessment tools and the Groupwork programme is outlined in Box 3. More generally, the CJ Management Team recognised that much of the resistance to the proposals had arisen from a lack of understanding of “What Works” principles and the need to change current service delivery to reflect these. They felt that a presentation on this by an external speaker might help overcome some of the suspicion that the proposed changes had emerged from personal agendas. Given that practitioners had elected to use the Cognitive Centre’s risk of reoffending assessment tool (LSI-R), a speaker from that Centre was invited to outline the research background to

the “What Works” principles. However, the speaker was not in a position to link these principles to policy directives in the Scottish context and, for some staff, lingering suspicions remained.

### ***Box 3: Phase two training***

Training was arranged for staff in the assessment tools selected. The format was determined by the nature of the tools, with LSI-R training necessarily purchased from the commercial company and RA1-4 delivered by trained local authority workers, as per the Scottish Office cascade training framework.

For the groupwork programme training in basic groupwork skills was provided. The CJ Management Team decided that an external trainer might have more credibility with staff. Similarly, external training was purchased for input on the cognitive behavioural theory on which the programme was based. Workers were also trained in delivery of the specific programme content and its integral evaluation framework. This was delivered by the groupwork team which had written the programme.

The provision of internal training on the groupwork programme proved important as it was only at this stage that many practical anxieties were voiced. Most staff seemed to have enjoyed the input of external trainers, finding it interesting on an academic level. However, when faced with the practicalities of delivery, workers expressed concern about coping with disruptive or uncommunicative clients, about the ability of those with substance misuse problems to attend and participate, about those clients who might simply refuse to attend, and about the practice of individual social workers being open to the scrutiny of both colleagues and offenders. The opportunity to have some discussion about these concerns encouraged more of those who had remained hesitant to view the changes as less frightening, even positive. It was through training, that more of the staff group were able to appreciate the nature of previous practice problems and the necessity of finding solutions. Training served to allay the fears of some and arm them with new skills. Nevertheless at the point of implementation there still remained a small but significant number of staff who were unconvinced and unwelcoming of the changes.

Training over the three months totalled an average of ten days for each CJ Social Worker, a significant proportion of time for a staff group who continued to carry a substantial workload during this period. The decision to concentrate training in such a way was deliberate. It was driven by a belief that it was essential to build up a head of steam and maintain the enthusiasm of those who were keen to implement the changes. The CJ Management Team also believed that prolonging the changes would only serve to prolong the anxieties of those who were reluctant to change.

### ***3.3 Phase 1: Implementation and review (May – November 1999)***

Having driven through changes at some speed, the CJ Management Team implemented the new assessment/ intervention arrangements on target in May 1999. From that point on all workers were expected to complete a risk assessment for each individual for whom a court report was completed or who was released on licence from custody. The level of subsequent involvement with these individuals was to be determined by this assessment, ranging from minimum contact for low risk offenders, to attendance at the full menu of the groupwork programme for highest risk offenders. For medium risk offenders, there was the opportunity to select those aspects of the groupwork programme most suited to individual criminogenic needs. There was an expectation that *all* those on orders, other than low risk offenders and sex offenders, would be referred to the groupwork programme. Exceptions were permitted only with the agreement of the worker’s immediate line manager. Thus the groupwork programme was to be viewed as the core supervision process, largely replacing one-to-one contact.

A case sample review of implementation after six months was not encouraging. While assessment tools were being used routinely, these were frequently used in isolation and were not subsequently linked to the level and content of the intervention. Referrals to any or all elements of the groupwork programme appeared to be based on ad hoc decisions. Individual casework continued in tandem and case records gave no indication that the groupwork programme was seen as an integral part of the intervention. Discipline for non-attendance at the groupwork programme was also inconsistent.

It appeared to the CJ Management Team that two main reasons lay behind this haphazard implementation. They considered that their failure to explain the rationale for change more fully at the outset had caused problems and these were compounded by an organisational framework – the generic area team – which reinforced one-to-one contact with clients as the norm. Also, within area teams, CJSWs were required to do all the tasks associated with the post. This resulted in those tasks with the tightest time scales, particularly reports for Court, being prioritised. Time to work with those subsequently placed on orders was not ring-fenced and hence tended to suffer. The two area team senior officers also carried responsibility for supervising community care work. With their attention divided, they tended to agree

to requests for exceptions to groupwork programme referral, and some of the practitioners who had been resistant to the changes asked for such exceptions routinely.

### **3.4 Phase 2: Planning and Preparation (November 1999 to May 2000)**

The Principal Officer presented the findings of the six month review to the local authority's senior management team. These findings were accompanied by a proposal to introduce the structural changes previously rejected by them (centralisation of CJSW services under the direction of the Principal Officer). This proposal was reinforced by a parallel *Best Value Review* and together they convinced the senior management team to establish two new central teams:

- An assessment team responsible for all diversion work, court and home background reports, and court duty;
- An intervention team responsible for the case management of all statutory orders and the delivery of the groupwork programme.

A streamlining of managerial responsibility was also proposed, with all CJ workers (other than those in Community Service which remained unaltered) responsible to either the court or groupwork seniors. The two existing area team senior officers were to be given centralised strategic responsibilities, the one for developing services for sex offenders, the other for quality assurance and training.

Before moving forward to implement these changes, the CJ Management Team reflected on the experience of introducing change in phase one. This experience had not been pleasant, with many workers and managers becoming resentful and fixed in entrenched positions. It appeared that inadequate communication was a factor in contributing to this experience. In reflecting on these experiences the CJ Management Team found it helpful to contrast what had happened with a model of how effective change occurs. They used the Prochaska and DiClemente Cycle of Change model (1992) simply because it was the model with which they were most familiar. This argues that change occurs in five main phases:

- pre-contemplation ("there is no problem")
- contemplation ("there may be a problem")
- planning ("I would like to do something about this problem")
- action ("I am doing something to rectify this problem")
- evaluation ("Has my action been effective?")

Using this framework the CJ Management Team realised that because they were convinced at the outset about the existence of a problem, they had moved directly to action. However, most practitioners had been pre-contemplative, unconvinced of the need for change – as they had little evidence of the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of their interventions with offenders, few practitioners had reason to doubt their practice.

In planning the next phase of change the CJ Management Team decided that they should learn from this experience and, prior to implementing the restructuring proposals, make a significant effort to convince workers of the need to change. Communication was seen as the key. Two information meetings were held for all 30 CJ staff, at which the outcomes of both the initial *Best Value Review* and the more recent "Implementation" review were presented by the Principal Officer. The proposed structural changes were presented as a necessary course of action to address current inconsistencies in practice.

In addition, all the professional staff were sent on a one day workshop on Effectiveness Research, run by Edinburgh University. This highlighted the background to the Scottish Executive's *Getting Best Results* agenda. Most staff reported their surprise at finding that few of the other local authorities in attendance had progressed as far as West Dunbartonshire in implementing the "what works" agenda. They had found themselves the source of some interest and there were numerous questions from others about the changes in service delivery. Most staff felt encouraged by the experience, which increased the proportion of staff vocal in support of the changes.

Finally, three new implementation groups were established to look at the mechanics of how the proposed structural change could be managed:

- Group One was given the task of setting out the roles and responsibilities of an assessment team;
- Group Two looked at the intervention team;
- Group Three considered how practical details – such as job rotation, reduction/increase in overtime and/or mileage, change of work location, and parking - could be managed fairly and consistently.

All 30 staff, rather than a small cross section, were involved in the groups and they were able to choose to join the group that interested them most. The CJ Management Team gave the groups a two-month timetable in which to make their proposals, allowing for a maximum of eight short (one hour) meetings. The Principal Officer elected to chair all group meetings in order to provide an overview and to allow for an element of learning to pass over from one group

to the next. He made it clear that the decision to form separate assessment and intervention teams had already been taken and that it was not the remit of the groups to debate that decision. However, the Principal Officer did give the implementation groups considerable latitude to make proposals on the precise nature of the two new teams, utilising workers' experience about what they thought might best work. Examples of the practical details considered by the implementation groups are outlined in Box 4.

***Box 4: Phase two examples of the details considered by the implementation groups***

- Having investigated the pattern of SER requests, workers noted that two out of three were for existing cases and concluded that such reports would need to be completed by the assessment team or the structural split would be rendered meaningless.
- Proposals were made by the groups about where responsibilities for diversion, supervised attendance, home background reports and throughcare might lie.
- Disciplinary protocols for dealing with offenders' non-attendance at the groupwork programme were drawn up and policies suggested for dealing with non-appearance for SER/ SAO/ diversion appointments.
- Practical arrangements were proposed by the groups to ensure no member of staff lost financially (additional travel/reduction in mileage/overtime) as a result of the changes.
- A rotation system between the teams was proposed to ensure that staff development needs were met. Staff had clear preferences about the team they wished to join at least initially. The implementation groups recommended that workers be allowed to self-select, a proposal approved by the Management Team, anticipating (correctly) from their knowledge of the staff group that this would result in two teams with balanced skills, experience and gender.

The management team realised that involving all staff in the implementation groups would be time consuming but they considered it a valuable investment on a number of levels. Some individuals' sense of professional self-worth had been damaged by the initial changes, with criticism of past practice interpreted as a slight on their skills. In Phase Two it was considered important that staff knowledge, experience, skills and abilities were acknowledged and utilised in planning and implementing the changes. Thus, all of the proposals made by the implementation groups were accepted by the CJ Management Team. Importantly, the Management Team was not faced with the difficulty which would have arisen should any of the proposals been considered unacceptable. However, there was possibly little risk in asking a group of knowledgeable staff to use their combined expertise and experience to problem-solve some mechanics of service delivery.

***3.5 Phase Two: Implementation and review (May 2000 – Autumn 2000)***

The structural changes were implemented on target in May 2000 and resulted in two months of frenetic activity as cases were redistributed to those moving into the new intervention team. There were joint staff meetings with offenders and summary handover reports were produced. Stand-alone databases had to be established as the centralised teams were not part of the area team IT network. The centralised office locations also had to be equipped to deal with the significant increase in numbers of staff. All groups took responsibility for co-ordinating different elements of the move. While the pace was fast and furious, there were no complaints from any member of staff, the tangible nature of the activity perhaps allowing all staff to feel involved and in some control over the situation.

Monitoring and evaluation were seen as fundamental to the change process. A framework was established to gauge the effectiveness of the new service delivery arrangements. It was designed to be used as an integral part of daily work and involved a range of measures to gauge offender, sentencer, worker and management feedback (see Box 5). This time, a case sample review of implementation six months on was found to be most encouraging. The level and nature of programmed interventions with those on orders was firmly and consistently linked to an assessment of risk and need. Case recordings indicated that the groupwork programme was central to the intervention and discipline for non-attendance was promptly and consistently applied. Though the programmed approach demanded substantially more commitment from offenders than traditional casework (an average of 100 hours over a one-year order), and discipline was more rigorous, breach rates did not increase. Contrary to initial fears, only a small minority of offenders could not function in a groupwork programme. Drug using offenders who formed the bulk of orders managed, in the main, both to attend and participate. Programme evaluations indicated that most offenders who attended found the experience valuable. Similarly an evaluation of Social Enquiry Reports (SERs) reflected sentencers' belief that the quality of reports had improved. Significantly, all practitioners were clear that they would not choose to return to the

previous models of working. All stated that they were experiencing greater job satisfaction and despite substantially more time spent with offenders, workers did not feel their workload had increased.

### **Box 5: Phase Two monitoring and evaluation framework**

- Establishment of a weekly peer screening group for reports
- Peer reading of reports
- Monthly peer monitoring and evaluation of reports
- Quarterly management monitoring and evaluation of reports
- Annual sentencer evaluation of reports
- Re-administration of assessment tools (LSI-R and RA3) at mid and end point of order
- Completion of attitudinal questionnaires by offenders at the beginning and end of each groupwork module
- Completion of end of module evaluations of learning by each offender
- Completion of end of order evaluations by both offender and case manager

Reviewing the situation a year later, no sign of drift was apparent and all staff remained content with the changes. Given a new, shared ownership of the change agenda, it proved possible to deal quickly with new problems as they arose. For example, the concept of rotation between the assessment and intervention teams was re-examined at the request of both workers and managers as it was felt to be too rigid to meet teams and individual worker needs. This was replaced with an individual staff development package which enabled workers in one team to take on limited pieces of work from the other and/or develop specialised interests such as practice teaching or work with young offenders/sex offenders/women offenders.

External evaluation of the impact of the groupwork programme re-offending rates is to be published in the near future but interim reports are positive and encouraging. The learning from both this and ongoing internal monitoring and evaluation will inform future developments.

## **4. Reflections and lessons**

So what can be learned from the West Dunbartonshire experience? And how does this fit with the evidence on what works in managing organisational change? This concluding section seeks to address these questions.

Earlier in the paper, we introduced six images of change management (see Box 1). Reflecting on the West Dunbartonshire experience, it seems that the CJ Management Team adopted a *directive* approach to managing change. Maybe this is not surprising given that changes were triggered by outside factors (the need to conduct a *Best Value Review* and the launch of *Getting Best Results*). While there was some scope for the direction of change to be determined locally – and hence the potential for a less directive stance – local decision-making was influenced strongly by the broader “what works” agenda.

The directive approach had some strengths, particularly in relation to establishing and maintaining a clear vision of a revitalised CJSW service, but it also led to problems. A strongly directive approach to managing change often pays too little attention to the need to involve others in ways that lead them to recognise a need for change. This was certainly the case in West Dunbartonshire. A committed belief in the direction in which the service was headed drove the initiative forward, feeding the momentum when progress appeared to have stalled or moved into reverse. However, this single-mindedness initially blinded the team to the need, at times, to take a more considered and collaborative approach to managing change. The price of failure to engage staff in the vision emerged in the drift in service delivery practice which followed the first phase of change.

Because the CJ Management Team incorporated a review process into the change initiative, they were able to recognise and then address the unplanned outcomes that arose out of the first phase of change. The approach they took to addressing these issues was to adopt a more participatory management approach, but to do so in ways that set clear boundaries to this participation. The implementation groups established in phase two were provided with clear guidance as the limits of their remit but within these limits they were given substantial freedom of choice. This is an important issue to get right. All too frequently attempts at consultation and participation are viewed as “going through the motions”, while participation needs to be viewed as genuine if it is to have the desired effects. The key skill for managers is to determine the appropriate boundaries for genuine participatory decision making, which inevitably involves taking some calculated risks.

While the predominant approach to change management remained directive, in phase two, there was some emphasis on shaping understanding, attitudes and capabilities. The training inputs offered by external and internal providers were important in this regard in at least two ways:

- The external training events increased awareness of the changing external context for CJSW services and helped reshape attitudes. This was helped by the fact that West Dunbartonshire seemed to be “ahead of the game” and hence a sense of pride in the service innovations was engendered.
- Both the internal and external training provided the opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills. The internal training was particularly important in providing a forum for airing and addressing fears and uncertainties about changed work processes and their impact on individual workers.

Models of the different phases that individuals go through when faced with change, such as the Prochaska and DiClemente model referred to above, suggest that managers will need to tailor their approach to change according to the stage that the majority of staff have reached. The CJ Management Team came to this realisation rather belatedly but then adapted their approach to great effect.

Overall, the case study of West Dunbartonshire CJSW services provides some support for the four generic lessons for managing change outlined earlier in the paper:

- The first lesson stressed the importance of analysing the local situation and planning interventions accordingly. Insufficient attention seems to have been paid to this by the CJ Management Team and this proved to be problematic. Their focus seems to have been on analysing the wider requirements of the “what works” agenda and initially not enough thought appears to have been given to the process by which practitioner behaviour would be reshaped.
- The second lesson highlights the benefits of incorporating a process of constant review into any change initiative. The CJ Management Team did implement a process of periodic review and this played a key role in the Team’s ability to detect and address the problems which arose.
- The third lesson relates to the benefits of being flexible about timescales. Maybe the surprise here is that the CJ Management Team were relatively inflexible about timescales. Certainly they showed great determination to implement the changes according to original target dates. Undoubtedly this provided a sense of momentum and we can only speculate about whether more flexibility in Phase One would have led to a better outcome.
- The final lesson refers to the importance of frontline staff understanding what is proposed and recognising that there are benefits for them in the change. This was clearly demonstrated by the West Dunbartonshire experience. While positive motivation and a commitment to change on the part of the majority of staff is not a requirement at the outset, it is something that those charged with managing change need to develop during the course of a change initiative.

Finally, the experience of managing change in West Dunbartonshire CJSW services highlights that significant change can be achieved within a tight timescale but the process is often difficult for all and painful for some. While it may often be the case that “there is no gain without pain”, there are things that managers can do to expedite the process of change and minimise its potentially harmful side-effects.

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