Technology in Corrections

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Introduction

Technology in Corrections covers a wide range of areas and applications. It must be accepted that technology is here to stay and that its use across all correctional spectrums will continue to assist both Prison and Community Corrections streams. For the purpose of this report we have focussed on the use of technology from a correctional institutional perspective.

Jurisdictions must be able to assess and adapt the correct technology for their particular circumstance, it is therefore incumbent on us as correctional leaders to ensure research of technology is undertaken, the most suitable technology is adopted and that staff have adequate training and skill to fully utilise the technology.

The role of staff in the correctional institutional environment will never be obsolete but the use of technology can enhance and enable staff to perform their jobs more efficiently and in a safer and more secure way.

The pace at which companies are developing new and more sophisticated systems, equipment and technological solutions is increasing exponentially to meet the demands and needs of correctional jurisdictions worldwide.

All of this is happening in a fiscal environment where Government and the department want “more for less”.

Key Issues

We have identified three key issues that have the capacity to impact on the success of technological solutions and systems within our correctional institutions. They are as follows:

1. The use of technology to address the increasing security requirements of our correctional institutions, including the introduction of specialised management programmes, and the inherent staff training and “buy in” needed to ensure successful implementation and ongoing use.

2. Greater utilisation of resources outside of Australia and New Zealand in the arena of Technology Research and Development to enable Australia and New Zealand to more effectively evaluate the options available and make informed decisions.

3. The need for a more consistent, timely and proactive approach to the development, procurement and implementation of technology across the jurisdictions, including clear and agreed criteria for where the use of technology can be of most benefit.

International Trends

The onset of technology into the operation of correctional institutions started in the 1960’s with the arrival of close circuit television (CCTV). This paved the way for monitored perimeter security. As technology changed and the need for more secured environments became obvious, national and international agencies began to canvas the idea of more elaborate and sophisticated equipment.

New South Wales (NSW) built on this foundation with the construction of the Katingal Correctional Centre in 1970. This institution was soon nick-named the “Electronic Zoo” due to the large amount of technology incorporated into its design.

Correctional institutions grew larger to accommodate the ever growing inmate population and the construction of correctional centres and the supply of new and more advanced technology developed specialists in these areas. Key trends in inmate movement control, gate operation and electronic perimeter security became a part of the industry. NSW, Victoria (Vic) and New Zealand correctional systems quickly adopted the technology into their Capital Works programs and institutions such as Parklea (NSW), Jika Jika (Vic) were constructed using what was then seen as the latest in security technology. For the first time this included control room
operations and monitored controlled inmate movement.

Correctional jurisdictions in Australia, New Zealand and around the world now deal with more sophisticated and technical trends and patterns in correctional institution security.

Staff safety was also enhanced using technology with duress alarms providing staff with a level of safety that was previously unknown. What is important to note is that trends in correctional institution violence, escapes, staff and inmate safety and community confidence became the catalyst behind the ever-growing need for more secured centres and thus more advanced technology.

Technology in the areas of biometrics, iris scanning and mobile phone detection is now established as a minimum standard within most correctional institutions in the world. Further studies and research into the areas such as terrorist activity, and other illicit activities show a shift towards the detection of contraband. New challenges in Access control identity management and tracking has become a huge focus for all the agencies and with this have come new research into how to deliver best practice into the correctional industry.

Phillip Bulman writes, “To help Correctional Managers detect contraband and run safer institutions, The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is sponsoring several research projects and pilot programs based on recommendations from expert practitioners to test an array of technologies scanning and detection devices can help spot everything from a cell phone to a knife. Devices using radio waves can track prisoners and staff movements within an institution. New computer programs may help predict where problems are likely to occur.” (Using Technology to make prisons and jails safer).

**International Trends versus current practice**

The use of technology in correctional institutions is now widespread and as the scope and sophistication of options available increases the challenges we face is where to go with technology in the future.

There are a number of factors that need to be considered:

- Technology is expensive so where is the money best spent;
- What if any are the criteria for deciding what represents value for money;
- Not all systems suit all environments;
- The lack of consistency and the varying levels of technology across different jurisdictions;
- Access to the research, development and implementation being undertaken in other countries;
- Best practice versus good practice and the $$ impact.

The trend both internationally and nationally within the corrections/justice field has been for the formation of joint working groups. The focus of these groups has been to identify the most important technology needs facing their business, then research and discuss options available to address those needs.

The United States has a group known as the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centre (NLECTC), set up in 1994 as an arm of the National Institute of Justice's office of Science and Technology. The group offers support; research findings and technological expertise to help law enforcement and corrections personnel identify ways in which they can perform their duties more safely and efficiently, using technology.


The formation of these working groups has provided a forum for discussion but given the pace at which technology is
developing, the myriad of options that may be available and the range of drivers for introducing new technology it is crucial that some priority be given to the areas where the use of technology can be of most benefit.

It is fair to say the United States is some way ahead of us in respect to the use of technology in their prisons. Whilst there are some prisons in Australia that are “State of the Art” in terms of the technology being used this is not the case in every Australian or New Zealand jurisdiction.

The prioritisation of the areas where the introduction of technology can provide most benefit gives both clarity for the business overall and a pathway for those prisons where technology is not as advanced.

The NLECTC have identified the top eight priorities in 2009 as being:

- Improved contraband detection;
- Detection/defeat of wireless communication (mobile phone jamming);
- Staff ID, location and duress;
- Inmate location and tracking;
- Improved surveillance and monitoring alert;
- Language translation and interpretation;
- Improved data integration, analysis and sharing to identify criminal activity and security threats;
- Selection and implementation guides for institutional corrections (Web Site);

The National TWG has identified their top five priorities as being:

- Mobile phone jamming
- National web site for access to shared information
- Drug testing
- National procurement of technology options
- Improved data integration

The similarity between the identified priorities offers an opportunity for Australia and New Zealand, through the National TWG to build stronger links with the NLECTC to take advantage of the research and development work completed by this group.

**Strategic Recommendations**

Technology is a major part of the future in corrections. To ensure that we are getting the best out of it key issues and drivers must be factored in to any choices made.

To enable corrections to make informed decisions and move forward in a clear defined way we recommend the following:

1. Agree through the National TWG on clear criteria for deciding which technology will be introduced into the corrections system. This may include clarification on best practice versus good practice, particularly in regard to price.
2. Appoint and fund a specialist Project Manager role to drive and co-ordinate the work of the National TWG.
3. Adopt a consistent, timely and proactive approach to the development, procurement and implementation of technology.
4. Formalise the links between the National TWG and international partners such as NLECTC as well as local, interstate and international law enforcement agencies, with a view to closer integration of data and information.

**Conclusion**

In closing, we would like to share with you the following statement made by James R. Upchurch “Correctional managers must carefully assess new technology to determine how it will fit in any particular correctional environment they must avoid attempts to force-fit technology that cannot be incorporated in an overall positives and constructive manner. Corrections must guard against change for changes sake and recognise...”
that change in organisations always comes with a cost. To the greatest extent possible, change should always be limited to only that which is easily recognised, readily defined and clearly distinguishable as progress”.

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