Unpublished Report

Bathurst Gaol Evaluation Study - The Past and Present Role of the Bathurst Gaol Implementation Committee: Committee Members’ Perceptions

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During August members of the Implementation Committee were interviewed to ascertain any perceived changes in the position or role of the Implementation Committee within the gaol.

It had been noticed that attendance at the meetings had diminished even though the crucial time for monitoring the programme - the implementation stage - had commenced. Unit management, and team management are now underway. The Incentives aspect of the programme involving industries and education is about to commence.

Question 1: "What do you see the role of the Implementation Committee to be, both past and present?"

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Role</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Present Role</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning the programme</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Monitor programme, making recommendation or any adjustments</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Give members an opportunity to participate in gaol matters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor programme</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A communications point</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Other Results

Eleven members commented on the change in authority or power of the Implementation Committee. Two members felt that there was no change in the role of the Implementation Committee.

Discussion

All but two members acknowledged a change in the role of the Implementation Committee. This change involved a change in function, from being a planning and research body which met to devise the management strategy to a role that emphasized the monitoring of the programme, now that the plan has begun to be implemented.

Eleven members spoke of changes they perceived in the authority or power of the Implementation Committee. This has caused in their opinion a drop in attendance and commitment.
When the Implementation Committee was first formed it was a very active and central body holding weekly meetings to plan the programme. At this time, the Gaol Management Team had not been formed, and the number of staff and inmates was considerably less than now. There was a crisis point (late '82) when the Superintendent felt that the Implementation Committee was overstepping it's lines of authority. It was from this time that many members felt that the implementation Committee was left without any power to actively make things happen (as distinct from writing recommendations or submissions). Some of the comments concerning the change in the power of the Implementation Committee were as follows:

"No real responsibility or teeth ... now the day to day running of the gaol has been taken over by the G.M.T."

"Carries less weight now - the big decisions have been made".

"No role at the moment ... not much interest ... has no power ... G.M.T. can over-ride any decisions".

"No role ... people won't give it a role".

"Implementation Committee worked until the Superintendent came in and blow us up about overstepping our authority - it had important role and work. Nothing would have got off the ground without it".

Mr. D. Sutton, Chairman of the Implementation Committee gave his ideas on the lack of power and what he sees as the only solution as follows:

"People feel that it has no valid function and therefore don't give commitment. Implementation Committee needs a specific charter to develop projects ... it needs to be able to set its own issues, its own charter - there are no clear lines of authority".

Although members of the Implementation Committee see its role as very important, both past and present, they cannot be committed unless their involvement is not only recognised but also their recommendations acted upon. Comments which support the importance of the Implementation Committee's role now, were as follows:

"It has an important role now but management won't recognise it".

"Implementation Committee has a limited life - not permanent but necessary at the moment".

"Still needed until everything is settled in - still vital".

"Its role is just as important now as it was in the past".

"I see it as still having an important function because the programme is still in the development stage".

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Although not asked specifically about it, responses indicated a difference of opinion about the correct lines of authority. Two members felt that the Implementation Committee should submit all recommendations direct to the Superintendent who then makes his decision as to whether or not they come before the G.M.T. Other members felt that the G.M.T. has to deal with all recommendations from the Implementation Committee.

Question 2: "What is your role on the Implementation Committee?"

Results:

Members spoke of their individual contributions to the Implementation Committee. Prison Officers said that they could contribute information on progress of the programme from their specific work locations and responsibilities.

Comments were as follows:

"I can report to the Committee exactly what the realities are in the units - only the people who work there know".

"I add information from my specific work area. I can identify what is needed and what is happening".

Prison Officers on the committee also felt that they had a good idea of Prison Officer attitudes towards the programme. Comments were as follows:

"As a union representative, I hear and represent the feelings of a lot of Prison Officers".

"I can have a fairly well educated guess at what Prison Officers' attitudes will be towards the programme and its implementation".

One officer also felt that she knew from her experience "a lot about prisoner attitudes in general" that could contribute to discussions at the Implementation Committee.

Two executive officers who have been in the service for many years had this to say:

"I'm a person who has lived through twenty years of prison experience. I can draw from that experience. I can compare the past with the present".

"I can draw on fourteen years of experience and knowledge".

The professional officers on the committee also felt that they had individual knowledge and experience that they could contribute. The Prison Psychologist stated that it was his role to "bring to bear rational analysis of people's behaviour and motives - challenge assumptions that people have about gaol - give a rational view. I don't just assume that something will work. Psychological principles went into the incentives scheme".
The Education Officer said that his role on the Implementation Committee was to "push the interests of education - issues that should be pushed at the Gaol Management Team".

The other professional officer on the Implementation Committee (apart from the Chairman) felt that somebody else should take his place as a member, he is more interested in individual case work, and he feels that he does not have much to contribute.

The prisoner representative (the second prisoner representative has since left the gaol) on the Implementation Committee saw his role as a communicator saying:

"I see myself being representative of the inmate body - performing any duties the Implementation Committee sets for me. We are given a good hearing, something that I had not expected. I communicate proposals back to the inmates".

The only person on the committee from outside the gaol sees her role to be very important as she believes she is able to give an objective point of view.

The committee's chairman has a very specific role. He understands his role to be - "co-ordinate, set agendas, call people to the meeting, write minutes, send them out, write recommendations out and then take them to the G.M.T. (Gaol Management Team), follow up recommendations that are adopted and see that they are implemented". Mr. Sutton expressed some frustration over difficulties experienced in implementing recommendations that have been passed by the G.M.T. He gave the example of the recommendation that prisoners be allowed to purchase extra milk. This was passed at the G.M.T. and it was decided that it would be ordered along similar lines to newspapers. Two months later it was realized that nothing had happened. The problem appeared to be lack of communications and that Prison Officers will not act until given a direct order from a uniformed person.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, it appears that members perceive that the role of the Implementation Committee has changed over time from a researching, planning and policy making body to a committee that monitors progress and makes recommendations.

It appears that attendance at the Implementation Committee may have declined because of the following factors:

1) There are more prisoners and staff at the gaol now, so that a member's time may be more limited.

2) The G.M.T. has taken over the policy and decision making role that formerly belonged to the Implementation Committee. The change in the authority or power of the Implementation Committee has caused members to feel less committed because they do not feel that their involvement on the Implementation Committee can "get things done".
Most members feel that the Implementation Committee continues to have an important function, especially in regards to monitoring the progress of the programme. Although members feel that the Committee is vital at the present time there was a contradiction in that members were not attending meetings. Although viewed as important members felt that they could not afford the time to be involved or committed unless the Implementation Committee was an effective body.

Theories of organisational changes (Greiner, 1965; Lewin, 1958) stress that the implementation body or persons must be invested with power from the organisational head for the organisational change to happen and to be lasting. We believe that some members were mistaken when they said that "the major decisions have been made". There needs to be a greater realization across the goal that the planning is ongoing. Adjustments will need to be made to the programme as theory is fitted to practise. These sorts of decisions are just as important as the initial planning. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that whatever adjustments are recommended it is felt that they will not be acknowledged or acted upon.

Although the Implementation Committee was originally imbued with a great amount of authority and respect for members' knowledge and experience, it must be realised that this authority needs to be maintained until the programme is fully implemented.

**Issues Raised and Resolutions**

Three issues were raised about the operation of the Implementation Committee, and a number of options suggested for each issue. The issues were reviewed with the Implementation Committee and the G.M.T. and Superintendent Hay. The issues, options and resolution agreed to are set out below.

1. **How are matters the Committee is to deal with to be chosen.**
   - Options: By the members; and/or
     - By referral from the G.M.T.; and/or
     - By referral from the Superintendent
   - Resolution: It was agreed that all three options are acceptable.

2. **When the Committee has reached conclusions on a matter, what is the line along which it reports.**
   - Options: To Superintendent, for decision or referral elsewhere; or
     - To G.M.T. for decision subject to the final authority of the Superintendent
Resolution: The Implementation Committee's Chairman (Executive Officer) tables conclusions reached by the Implementation Committee at G.M.T. meetings and reports to the Superintendent through G.M.T. meetings. The Superintendent then determines how the matters raised should be dealt with - whether by the G.M.T., the Superintendent or in other ways.

(3) What are the functions of the Committee.

Options: Communication - pass information about the views, desires and reactions of groups (including prisoners) represented on it between these groups, and to the G.M.T. and Superintendent; and/or

Monitoring - seek out specific information on selected matters relevant to progress in implementation of the management plan, evaluate the implications and report.

Planning - develop detailed plans for aspects of the general plan before these become urgent matters on which immediate decision must be taken.

Implementation - take responsibility to put into effect specific components of the Implementation Plan.

Resolution: It was agreed that Communication, Monitoring and Planning were functions of the Implementation Committee. Actual implementation of specific components of the Plan had not been an Implementation Committee responsibility, and it was not seen as appropriate to extend the functions.

It was agreed that the Committee's name might be misleading but that to change it when it was well known would create confusion. The Superintendent and the Implementation Committee Chairman (Executive Officer) agreed that submissions could be made to the Superintendent on behalf of the Implementation Committee seeking delegation of authority to liaise with Head Office on specific planning issues.

It is hoped that this review and clarification of the Committee's functions and operations will result in increased commitment and further specification of planning and monitoring tasks. Presentation of the results to the Implementation Committee did result in active discussion of differences about the continued value and purpose of the Committee. Subsequently, meetings have been better attended and greater involvement has been evident. If the resolutions reported above can be put into practice and the renewed activity channelled into useful achievements, the Committee will have a useful part to play for some time.