Correctional Industries and the Criminal Justice System

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Over a number of years, various papers have been published about inmate work. In most cases they have focused upon the dynamics of Correctional Industry programs in their relevance to inmate development and Correctional management. It is unfortunate that rarely in embracing this important subject, has the broader role and importance of work to the individual and to society been embraced.

I was particularly taken by a recent edition of the television program ‘Four Corners’ which profiled the human lifestyle as birth, school, work, death. Whilst this might profile our life cycle in a rather stark way, it does nevertheless focus upon the dimension of work upon our lives. I believe it is unfortunate that the Australian culture tends to underestimate and undervalue the role work plays in satisfying our needs and our development. The ‘Four Corners’ program continued:

“From birth to death, it’s work that shapes us. It is a simple equation. Work equals income, opportunity, security. It gives us purpose. With work we belong. Work in this society is identity.”

It is with the realisation of the role and value of work to the individual and to society in mind that the current program of Correctional Industry expansion and commercialisation in New South Wales evolved. The former Premier of NSW, the Hon. Nick Greiner, MP on 27th April, 1989 committed the new Government to this program in quite a profound way.

“One of the clear cut goals in my administration is to ensure that the long term rundown in Prison Industries is reversed and that within the first term of Government (if at all possible) each and every prisoner in the system is given the obligation and opportunity to do real and meaningful work.”

On the same day, the former Minister for Corrective Services, the Hon. Michael Yahoule MP profiled the Government’s philosophical commitment in a very direct manner:

“It is not work for the sake of work, so that the Government can indulge in some kind of chest beating exercise and say that we have got them all working now and they were not working before. It is very deliberately a program directed at rehabilitation, so that that great goal can be achieved that it is referred to by so many observers and experts in the field of penology. That is making prisoners come out of the system not better people than when they went in, ready to resume a law abiding life with skills that they did not have when first they entered the prison system.”

Clearly the tide had turned towards the imperative of having inmates engaged in meaningful program activity. What was important however, was that the policy commitment of the incoming Government was not merely political rhetoric. It was backed up by a level of structural and organisational commitment previously unknown to Correctional Industry programs. The ‘hand brake’ which for so long had bumbered the role of Correctional Industries to fulfill their potential and to serve the community had been released. This included:

- A clear policy commitment to provide an optimised implementation of the so-called competing dilemmas of Correctional Industry operation. I refer to inmate development, Correctional Centre management and economic performance expectations.
- The progressive commercialisation of Corrective Services Industries (CSI) work programs, to enable those programs to reflect and maintain real world ‘work environments’. This also meshed with enhanced expectations over the general performance of Government Trading Enterprises.
Inmate Employment

Figure 1.

“Commercialisation is really about replicating community based work environments.”

In this period, more commercial based inmate work positions have been created in five years, than existed after 200 years of Corrections in New South Wales.”

The ability of Corrective Services Industries (CSI) to provide work and gain accreditation that will enhance their chances of post-release employment. Small offset printing at the Parkville Young Offenders’ Corrective Centre (VIC) and the Hard Rock Cafe at Long Bay (opposite page) are two examples of the TAFE programs success.

CSI has tapped into the resources of NSW TAFE, in order to give inmates the chance to learn new skills and gain accredited qualifications that will enhance their chances of post-release employment. Small offset printing at the Parkville Young Offenders’ Corrective Centre (VIC) and the Hard Rock Cafe at Long Bay (opposite page) are two examples of the TAFE programs success.

Outsourcing structural reform to enable CSI to operate on a commercialised basis to facilitate long term business planning, to generate income to self-finance program development and to re-source capital development and replacement initiatives.

What has occurred in NSW South Wales over the last 5 years in terms of Correctional Industry expansion and commercialisation is unprecedented. This has had a profound and visual impact upon Correctional Centre populations. Throughout the NSW Correctional system, new industry facilities have been opened, existing facilities have been revitalised and extended and facilities previously closed reopened. No longer are Correctional Centres typified by groups of inmates sitting idle in workshop areas of the inherent de-structuve influences of human boredom. In such a situation little hope existed for either the inmate or the community.

What will be found is a large part of the inmate population engaged in a balance of education, vocational development and work program activity (see Figure 1). This is facilitated through a positive and productive rapport between staff and inmates which in turn has had a positive and overwhelming influence over the stability of the NSW Correctional System. The structural outcomes of this program of Correctional Industry revitalisation have been impressive by any yardstick. An additional 5,123 inmate work positions have been created representing an increase of 70%.

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The greatest attention has been to ensure that the positions created are part of a work environment which reflects the rigours, disciplines and satisfaction of a community workplace. This is commercialisation. It represents the most misunderstood element of Correctional Industry endeavour. There unfortunately exists a common, but false view that commercialisation simply represents a bell-bottomed desire to achieve ‘profit’. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Commercialisation is really about replicating community based work environments. This is fundamental to provide inmates with development opportunities to enhance their opportunity to understand and value the work ethic and to gain and retain employment upon release. It is about linking education and work in the workplace: of establishing regular working hours of attendance, of establishing productivity and quality assurance targets and of having a customer focus.

Having a customer focus recognises that without customers to generate sales, Correctional Industries programs do not exist. In NSW, as with all Correctional Industry programs, this has provided one of our greatest challenges. It is just five years ago that the central marketing strategy for CSI revolved around providing ‘cheap products’. Our time-deliveries, quality products and services and customer service have largely not existed.

We have great attention has been given to the transformation of CSI as a professional, and respected commercial organisation. This has incorporated a strong commitment to business planning and adoption of a marketing strategy which recognises the constraints and limitations of a Correctional setting and of our workforce. We have developed and implemented a ‘Customer Service Guarantee’ which is evidenced by an enlightened customer service program.

We are both delighted and encouraged by the many customer testimonials we now receive. They act as an inspiration and encouragement to both staff and inmates. Our diverse customer base, comprising private and public sector companies will provide record sales of $15m in the current financial year - an increase of 50%. The achievement of this sales development has not been without representations from some sections of the business community about the legitimacy of Correctional Industries to operate within the marketplace.

Notwithstanding that CSI is committed to adopting a sensitive and restrained presence within the marketplace, community concerns unfortunately and predictably represent a general phenomenon of Correctional Industry operation. It is however important to note that CSI has enjoyed a good rapport with the Trade Union movement. Indeed the Secretary of the NSW Trades and Labor
Council, Mr. Michael Rassou carried out a far-reaching review of CSI operations during 1992. Comments made in the review report bear mention:

"The concept of Corrective Services Industries and the path it is currently taking is in the broad sense to be congratulated and promoted. It is certainly something which I believe should be supported and encouraged. To this end, it is important that CSI continue to operate in the market at large and does not simply rely, as has been the case some years before, on public sector contracts. This enables diversification, skills enhancement and greater industry significance for the skills taught and goods produced. Whilst there will be successes as well as losses, it is nonetheless important to continue to focus on and commit resources to the process of rehabilitation. Corrective Services Industries has a vital role to play in this process. There is a good story to tell about the work CSI has done to date in the rehabilitation and training of prisoners."

The diversity of CSI functional endeavours reflects our commitment to operating sensitively and sensibly within the marketplace. We are fortunate to have in place the Corrective Services Industries Consultative Council. This Council, which comprises representatives of the Chamber of Manufacturers, the Metal Trades Industries Association, the Labor Council and a Community Representative, monitors the development and operation of CSI to ensure other businesses are not unreasonably impacted upon. A primary influence upon our achievements has been the development of private sector involvement in the management and operation of Correctional Industries. From complete management and operation, including provision of resources requirements to upgraded forms of involvement. The private sector has been instrumental in showing what is possible and in facilitating the cultural change so necessary to achieve our contemporary policy objectives.

Whilst the primary focus is not towards profit, our commercial endeavours, including upgraded pricing of our products and services, have provided a starting and positive transformation. From a chronic loss maker in the 1980’s of around $1.5m per year to a positive contribution level of $2.5m in 1993/94 (see Figure 2). This has secured the financial integrity and strategic direction of CSI. CSI is providing large numbers of inmates with the opportunity to develop skills and habits that are of direct benefit to their acceptance of work and to their opportunity to gain and retain employment upon release. With this in mind the primary focus of CSI programs is developing the work ethic and exposing inmates to the responsibilities, satisfaction and rewards of real work.

We do not hold unreal expectations about our ability to link technical skill training with direct community work placement. In large part this evolves from our restricted market access and commitment to not unreasonably impact upon other businesses. It also reflects the implications of a Corrective Services Industries consultancy dimension of our technical endeavours. This commitment is illustrated by the diversity of CSI functional endeavours (see Figure 3). A manufacturer of metal and furniture products; an operator of a Dairy to a Sewmill; a provider of re-upholstery services to a major textile product supplier; provision of skilled services to a range of cultural services; printed products and electronics. CSI work programs whilst primarily catering for those inmates with educational and work skill deficiencies, also cater for those inmates who possess sound to superior educational and work capabilities. To those inmates CSI offers a unique range of opportunities to ensure their creative talents can be utilised in a constructive and useful manner.

CSI is committed to continue with an important research study initiated in 1991 entitled 'Offender and Post-Release Employment'. That study found that Corrective Services Industries work programs had positive implications for both inmates and the Correctional system. The study will be continued during 1994 with a view to identifying the influence of CSI work programs over reducing recidivism levels and to provide inputs which will influence the future direction and operation of CSI work programs in NSW.

Our direction for the immediate future aims to create further inmate work positions in the remaining pockets of program deficiency. We will also continue refining our commercial infrastructure and performance to cement the future of CSI as a viable and professional commercial entity.

Correctional Industry programs aim to recognise that work is a cornerstone of our society and provide to both inmates and the community, hope and confidence for the future.

Nevertheless, managing Correctional Industry programs in the 1990’s provides a range of complexities. It encompasses setting and achieving social and commercial objectives. It involves balancing the constraints and opportunities of operating within a Public Sector and Correctional environment.

Finally, it includes setting and achieving commercial goals within a restricted, consumer-focused and highly expectant marketplace. The ethic, pessimism and visibility would suggest that optimising all these considerations represents an impossible task. In New South Wales through a team of highly dedicated staff we think otherwise and have the results to prove it.

CSI COMPARATIVE COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

![Figure 2](image)

**CONTRIBUTION - LOSS**

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CSI COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

![Figure 3](image)