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EX-OFFENDERS AND ENTERPRISE

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Abstract

Offenders are by their nature potentially greater risk-takers than the general population, as are entrepreneurs. For this and reasons such as difficulty in finding employment, many offenders are likely to work in their own businesses. The provision of training in running a small business or self-employment can improve the chances of success. Offenders, as a group of people with special needs, may benefit from the provision of this type of training.

This paper describes the results of a pilot study which examined the potential of offenders for running small businesses and the current provision of small business training in prisons and probation services in the UK.

Introduction

The following paper describes an investigative study which is examining the provision of training for offenders in the UK in small business management or self-employment skills. The research is at an early stage, and this paper does not attempt to do more than pose some questions and indicate additional areas for research. Further work is currently being undertaken, which we hope will clarify some of the issues raised in this paper in due course.

The basis for this research study is that people who start businesses are breaking the mould, by doing something new and risky. People who offend for economic gain, who make up approximately 75 per cent of all offenders (Social Trends 18) are breaking the decreed conventions of society. Although what offenders do may not necessarily be innovative, any more than opening a new corner shop or painting and decorating business is innovative, it is certainly risky in terms of potential loss of personal liberty. In addition, offenders are less likely to find employment than non-offenders, and they may be termed a "socially marginal" group, both of which are predictors of entrepreneurial activity.

Our premise thus is twofold. Firstly, there may be some common ground between the two groups – offenders and entrepreneurs. From this underlying assumption we question whether offenders have greater-than-average potential for legitimate independent enterprise. If so, we wish to examine what is being done to help them realise this potential. Secondly, employment has long been regarded as a means of reducing offending (Dale 1976). Offenders, if given aid to develop their capacity for legal earnings and economic independence, may have less financial need to offend.

This area appears to be one in which a minimal amount of work has been carried out, either in the UK or elsewhere. As a subject it crosses two major academic boundaries, those of criminology and entrepreneurship. This paper thus describes some preliminary enquiries undertaken by the Enterprise Group at Cranfield School of Management, where it is hoped that this cross-functional method may develop a fresh approach to a long-standing problem.

The Entrepreneurial Personality

Many attempts have been made to identify the reasons why people go into business for themselves. Since entrepreneurship has come to be seen as necessary for economic progress (see for example **Kirchoff** 1991), studies have focussed both on the personal characteristics which appear to be associated with starting a business, and on the environmental circumstances which encourage, or even force people to take such a step. We have attempted, on a tentative basis, to relate what is known about both aspects to the characteristics and circumstances of ex-offenders.

In order to examine the psychological make-up of offenders, and to compare them with other groups, including those who have gone into business for themselves, we needed a test instrument which was validated across employment group types, including entrepreneurs, who are defined here as those individuals who found and run their own businesses. It also had to be feasible to administer in the prison environment.

As a result we selected the Test of General Enterprising Tendency, or GET test; (Caird, 1988). This test brings together the separate threads of a number of different studies which have been separately validated over a number of years. It measures five different aspects of people's personality which have been found to be associated with an individual's tendency towards entrepreneurship in other words to set up and run projects (*Figure 1*). Each is measured by asking respondents to state whether they agree or disagree with a number of statements.

Enter Figure 1 about here

The test as a whole is validated in its identification of entrepreneurs who score significantly higher than all of the comparison groups used, on a sample of approximately 350 individuals. As a test, it has weaknesses in its inability to discriminate within populations of enterprising people, but Caird suggests it is a useful initial tool for identifying entrepreneurial potential and subsequent changes in this potential, for example after participation in a course.

This test was administered to 55 inmates at Leyhill prison. Their average scores, out of a maximum of 12, for each of the attributes, and their total scores out of 60, compared with other groups (S. Caird 1988) to whom the same test has been administered, were as follows:

(Insert Table 1 about here)

The sample of prisoners on this test was too low for any valid statistical analysis to be made, and the scores must therefore be taken with some caution. These results are not on the surface supportive of our tentative hypothesis that offenders and entrepreneurs tend to have similar attributes; they only come up to a similar level to nurses and civil servants in autonomy, internal locus of control and risk-taking, and their total score is below any of the other groups.

The offenders were also asked whether they had at any time been in business for themselves. 40% stated that they had, which is a substantially higher figure than might be expected from the population as a whole¹. The test results for this sub-group were analysed separately, and their scores were higher at a total of 37.24. Even this figure barely brings them over the total for civil servants.

Nevertheless, in addition to the work which suggests that certain personality characteristics act as spurs to entrepreneurial activity, there is a substantial body of work which emphasises the importance of environmental and economic factors to the founding and development of businesses. Although our tentative hypothesis on the comparability of the personality profiles of entrepreneurs and prisoners was not supported, the additional factors of offenders' social marginalisation and difficulties in finding employment The following section looks briefly at these external motivations to entrepreneurial behaviour.

¹Information from the UK's Department of Employment Statistics for the years 1986 –1991 suggest that the figure is about 10 –12% in any one year. Figures for individuals who are employed by their own companies does not appear to be available.

External Factors Contributing To Entrepreneurial Activity

Bruce (1976) suggests that there is a great deal of evidence, at a national, a community and an individual level, that people start their own businesses because they are compelled to, for want of other options in a social or an economic sense, or because of a "determining event" which in some sense forces them to it.

Examples of this phenomenon, which he cites, are –

the economic success of countries such as Germany and Japan, which had become "socially marginal" in a global sense, and pursued economic enterprise not only because they had to, but also as a form of recovery of self-esteem

the history of socially marginalised groups such as the Jews, the Lebanese the Gujeratis from East Africa and other refugees

individual entrepreneurs founding businesses because a shock, such as redundancy, divorce, forced relocation or other loss was the critical stimulus to the creation of the business

It is not unreasonable to suppose that for some offenders at least the social disgrace of imprisonment, with the added difficulty of finding paid employment, may act in a similar way. The prison experience itself may also have a favourable impact. Studies (**Harper**, 1985 and **Bruce** 1976) of training programmes which aim to enable people to start their own businesses suggest that strict discipline, and even some physical hardship, may have an important positive effect on this process of firm creation.

In spite, therefore, of the somewhat discouraging result of the GET test, we have four, perhaps more positive, reasons to pursue the possibility of assisting offenders to start their own businesses:

- For many, it may be impossible or at least difficult to get a job with anybody else. Independent enterprise may be the only legitimate way to obtain other than claiming benefits.
- Nearly half of our sample have already been self-employed at some time in the past, and may be self-employed in the future.

- Offenders are "social marginals" vis-a-vis mainstream society.
- The discipline and hardship associated with imprisonment may have some positive effects as a stimulus and a preparation for enterprise. In addition the experience of making out in the informal intraprison economy may act as an additional spur.

In addition to these environmental incentives to entrepreneurial activity, prisons themselves have some long experience of encouraging enterprise within their walls.

Prison Enterprise

There is a long history of business initiatives within prisons, as a way of defraying the costs of imprisonment, and as a way of relieving dangerous boredom and a potentially rehabilitating form of skill training. Melossi and Pavarini (1981) refer to the contract system and other ways of organising prison labour in the United States and Europe since the eighteenth century. They also identify some examples of prison systems which encouraged inmates not only to make but also themselves to sell simple handicrafts.

Studies of more contemporary practice, such as those by G C Pati (1974), W Jensen and W Giegold (1976) and F Englander (1983) focus on the benefits of training within prison as preparation for finding employment but with others, rather than self-employment. The only study we could identify with even a peripheral relevance to our theme (Goodman, 1982) describes the beneficial effects of allowing prisoners to manage as well as work in prison workshops, but treats this as preparation for managerial employment, rather than self-employment.

Current Support For Self-employment In Prisons And Probation Services

In the UK little use appears to be made of the prison workshops as schools for entrepreneurs, for reasons of security, trade union opposition and organisational tradition². A number of prisons, and probation services,

²Informal survey at Prison Education Officers Conference, Blackpool, Nov 1990

however, do appear to be making some attempt to offer training or other assistance to help ex-offenders start their own businesses. We felt it would be useful to find out how many prisons and probation services offer such assistance, and if so, what was included in their programmes.

In terms of probation support, probation orders still have enshrined within them the expectation that offenders will lead "an honest and industrious life". This means that probationers should find and keep full-time employment. This particular clause has sometimes been honoured more in the breach than in the observance in recent years, and there has been some discussion about deleting it from probation orders. Nevertheless, it still exists, and probation officers have a responsibility to help their clients lead a productive life. This can include making available advice on employment, finance, and legislation.

It seems important, too, for prisoners who have undergone self-employment training whilst in prison, and who had already decided to set up on their own on release, to receive on-going support after their release. The probation service is an obvious potential source of this support, as many prisoners are released on parole, and all ex-prisoners have the option of seeing a probation officer on a voluntary basis.

Offenders often do find it extremely difficult to find anybody willing to employ them, (Dale 1976), which probation officers can only too readily confirm. This makes self-employment a more than real possibility. Despite this, there appears to be, on a subjective level, a considerable degree of practical ignorance on the part of probation officers of the possibilities of self-employment or small business training for those offenders under their supervision. This apparent gap in support was one which we felt justified further investigation. This is also a gap which the probation service itself has identified, and which is being addressed by the recent development by the Association of Chief Officers of Probation of an employment sub-committee, which includes self-employment in its brief.

As a result, we initiated a pilot survey of both organisations, with the intention of discovering the scope and content of current small business or self-employment training for offenders.

Pilot Survey Results

Two simple questionnaires, separately sent to prisons and probation services in England and Wales were sent. These asked what training and support for self-employment/small business was available, in what form, and did the organisation concerned have any plans for future developments. We also included a question about whether there was any coordination of provision between the two services, or indeed any knowledge of the provision of training from the other service.

We received responses from a total of 60 prisons and 43 probation areas (from a total sample of 103 prisons and 55 probation areas – a response rate of 58% and 78% respectively).

Training Programmes Offered

In this section of the survey we asked whether the prison or probation area concerned offered training programmes in employment or self-employment within their establishments, and what their intentions were for future training provision.

(insert table 2 about here)

Expanding on the above figures;-

36 prisons and 21 probation areas offer both self-employment and employment training.

7 prisons and 20 probation areas offered neither self-employment, nor employment training. In the case of the probation areas a recent White Paper on probation policy possibly had an effect on the responses, as it was given as a reason for the lack of training provision by one county. This was said to state that probation clients should access mainstream facilities, rather than probation run ones, the aim of this being the

integration of offenders within the community. Unfortunately we have not been able to trace this White Paper.

7 prisons and 13 probation areas offered employment training, but not self-employment training.

8 prisons and no probation areas offered self-employment training, but not employment training.

The majority of prisons (33) use their own staff to undertake the self-employment training, although a significant number use the assistance of outside agencies, such as local enterprise agencies, business enterprise trusts, correspondence courses etc.

Few probation areas (6) used their own staff. Most preferred to use external sources of expertise, again possibly as a result of the influence of the White Paper.

53 % of those prisons which do not currently run small-business courses seem to regard self employment training as an important future development, to the extent that it would have a higher profile than some current courses. One prison at least admitted that their reason for running self-employment training was an acknowledgement that prisoners would be unable to get jobs elsewhere!

Probation areas, on the other hand assign self-employment training a rather lower priority. Only two would be prepared to sacrifice other programmes in order to fund it.

Take-up Rates

In this part of our survey we looked at the numbers of prisoners or probationers who availed themselves of any training programmes offered.

(Insert table 3 about here)

Because a high proportion (40%) of the prisoners in Leyhill who completed our questionnaire have actually been self-employed in the past, this apparently low take-up rate of the training offered is something that bears further examination. Not all courses are available freely within prisons, and it may be that constraints of this sort were responsible for the low take-up rate. We did not investigate the total provision of training programmes offered, nor do we know the staff availability which may affect prisoners' options.

We also do not yet know the proportion of these prisoners who, after taking the training courses whilst in prison, subsequently go on to self-employment in the future.

Content of Training Programmes.

In this section we asked what was actually covered in training programmes offered, looking particularly for basis business skills namely:-

- Business plans;
- Book-keeping;
- Finance;
- Sales and Marketing;
- Sources of advice;
- Legal requirements.

The results were:-

(Insert table 4 about here)

43% of the 46 prisons covered additional areas, which included:- confidence training; selling; taxation; computing; availability of further training; communication skills; advertising and promotions; marketing;

financial management; customer care; market research; choosing premises; exporting; self-management; and managing people.

The majority of those taking the programmes prepared their own business plans. Few were able to put these into operation, however, whilst in the constraining environment of prison. 37 prisons were not able to allow inmates practical experience in running a business. Of the 3 prisons that did, or are intending to, methods included design, make, market and sell projects and toy design as a business simulation. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that security problems will make further developments in this area unlikely, at least for most of the prison service.

Probation areas, on the other hand, are less restricted in what they can do, and a higher proportion (38%) were able to offer supported practical experience in running a business. This, however, only relates to three areas, and so represents a small proportion of the total probation client group.

Follow Up Support And Co-ordination Between Services

The final section looked at each service's awareness of the others' work.

(Insert table 5 about here)

58% of both prisons and probation areas were not aware of any involvement in self-employment training in the other service. It is likely that prisons would only be aware of probation support on an informal basis. As the prisons presumably do not see it as their role to offer continuing support this responsibility falls to the probation service, who in their turn are depending on community-based resources.

It seems, however, that there is little coordination of practice between the prisons and probation services at present, although the large number of probation services that individual prisons would have contact with perhaps makes this result less surprising.

Discussion

Although the results obtained so far are from a purely exploratory study, we believe that they do point out the need for further work to clarify and explore the issues identified.

There are some major provisos to these initial results, however. Our sample of prisoners was too small to extend the results to the wider population. The GET tests were also administered to what is arguably an atypical group of offenders, namely prisoners at Leyhill open prison, where businessmen and entrepreneurs may form a higher proportion of the prison population than at other establishments. These factors are likely to make the GET score for offenders a higher one than is found in the prison population as a whole. This possibility is yet to be tested, however, and forms part of our continuing work.

In addition, all the respondents tested had been in custody for several months, and hence may have been subject to the potentially negative impact of prison on their entrepreneurial aptitude. Starting one's own business involves a degree of deliberate "getting off the rails", and it may be that the periods which our respondents had spent within a prison system which emphasises conformity has reduced their capacity for non-conformist thinking. On the other hand, as outlined above, the experience may act as a spur, in terms of creating an ability to cope with hardship and physical discipline.

This again will be examined in the continuing study. We plan to administer the same test to individual who have just started their sentences, and also those at later stages of imprisonment, in order to investigate the possible "de-enterprising" impact of custodial sentences.

It is also important to remember that our sample is skewed, in that people who are in prison have failed in their criminal enterprise. It might be that undetected offenders would display very different entrepreneurial tendency scores, The practical problems of identifying a sample of offenders who had not been caught is somewhat daunting however, and the objective of our investigation is in any case to assist those who are hampered by their criminal records. We are thus confined to those who have been less successful in their criminal activity.

Within the limitations of our sample, and of the selected test instrument, we must conclude that although a large number of them have been self-employed at some time in the past, prisoners do not appear to possess more entrepreneurial attributes than the population in general. They are also less entrepreneurial, as measured by the GET test, than people who are known to be entrepreneurs.

On the question of current provision of training for self-employment or small business, although it might seem from our results that prisons are addressing the issues of training for self-employment or business skills, whereas the probation services are not, a number of probation areas commented that their policy was to use community based resources. This, as mentioned earlier, appears to be to bring them into line with the policy in which the use of community-based resources are encouraged. This issue is now being taken up by the employment sub committee of ACOP, who are considering the appropriateness or otherwise of specialist help for offenders.

In respect of community-based aid, a number of different agencies were cited as being used by Probation services. These included the Apex Trust and Nacro, both of which are charities which provide employment experience and training for offenders, sometimes using government funding, and local Enterprise Agencies which are locally-based associations of business people, who provide consultancy and training especially in small-business development, once again with the aid of some government funding.

Recent discussions with NACRO, the Prince's Youth Business Trust and the Apex Trust indicate that they are currently carrying out a number of different projects to do with self-employment as a part of their programmes on employment in general. Both believe that more research could be done on the evaluation of the employment needs of ex-offenders, particularly the appropriateness or otherwise of self-employment training for offenders.

Other comments from Probation areas included the belief that many offenders were not capable of running their own businesses, and encouraging them to think that they could, would only set up expectations which would lead to failure! In contrast, one prison thought that self-employment training was necessary, as they suggested that offenders are unlikely to find conventional work. This argument is yet to be resolved, but is another area that we hope to address in our continuing study.

Other probation areas said that the target group in their own area was so small as for it to be uneconomic to run small business training programmes internally. This seems to be somewhat borne out by the apparently small take-up rate of training in some probation areas, although it is also possible that the quality of training was not sufficiently high to attract custom.

In contrast, most of the prisons seem on the surface to be addressing the issue of employment, and self-employment in particular, more seriously. Most establishments have programmes on offer for those thinking about setting up in employment on their own, even if a comparatively small number of prisoners actually choose to, or are able to, take it up.

This apparently low take-up rate of the training offered is something which we believe bears further examination, bearing in mind the constraints which prisons have on the availability of work-related training and other educational courses.

It seems too, that there is some unrealised potential for experimenting with real-life business situations within prisons or in the community. This appears not to be happening at the moment. This process could allow offenders to practise the skills of running a small-business, and would also help to identify whether they are suitable candidates for running their own businesses or not.

Although each individual prison establishment or probation area appears to be doing what they believe is in the best interests of their clients, overall, it appears that the issue of self-employment training is being handled in a somewhat uncoordinated manner. Prisoners can move from one prison to another during their sentence and as a result have training programmes disrupted. Similarly, few prisons and probation areas appeared to be aware of any provision for small-business training in the other agency.

There appears from this to be a large gap in the coordination and provision of services, which is likely to be at the least unhelpful and at the worst positively detrimental to the efforts of offenders to set up in their own businesses. Until this is evaluated however, it is difficult to say whether this is in fact so.

It appears too, that there has been, to date, little attempt to measure either the need for employment training, or to evaluate its results on either a national or local level on the part of the criminal justice authorities. This may be no different from the provision and evaluation of training programmes offered to non-offenders, but

it is arguable that they are such a specialised group of people that the normal, less than satisfactory, processes is not appropriate.

From our initial evaluation of the lack of research in this area, and our belief that it is an area which bears further development, an application was made to the Economic and Social Science Research Council for funding. This was successful, and the research is continuing to examine some of the issues raised.

Underlying our research are a number of hypotheses, which we intend testing more fully in the continuing study. These are that offenders:-

- 1) are more likely than the general population to set up in their own businesses
- 2) are more likely than the general population to experience difficulties in setting up in their own businesses
- 3) are potentially more entrepreneurial than the population as a whole (although this hypothesis appears less fruitful than it once did)
- 4) aptitude for entrepreneurship will be affected by the length of time that they have spent in prison
- 5) are in need of training and support, which is directed specifically at their own particular circumstances
- 6) currently receive less training and support than their situation warrants, both in terms of overall provision, and in quality
- 7) will run more successful businesses if they receive better and more appropriate training beforehand
- 8) would commit fewer offences if their employment (including business ventures) was more successful

In order to test hypotheses 1 to 4 we intend administering a questionnaire which includes the GET test to a statistically valid sample of probationers and prisoners at different stages of their sentences.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 will be tested by a qualitative examination of the provision and content of training programmes in a sample of probation areas and prisons. Subsequently, we intend interviewing a number of offenders who have run their own businesses in the past, with the aim of isolating particular difficulties that they have experienced.

We know that a high proportion of prisoners at Leyhill have been self-employed in the past, and may be so in the future. We do not know, however, how many succeed, or whether they experience greater difficulties than normal, for example in obtaining finance. Our belief is that training in business skills will substantially increase the chance of success, whether this is provided pre-release, or post-release, and almost certainly will improve the chances of finding sufficient funding and support.

As it appears that there is some scope for improving the coordination of educational services between the prisons and probation services, this, too, will be examined in more depth as part of the qualitative study.

Hypothesis 7 is difficult to test, but we hope in due course to examine this by means of a longitudinal study. This will follow a number of individuals after they have been trained in business skills and set up in their own businesses in order to evaluate the benefits or otherwise of such training.

Hypothesis 8 is also a difficult one to test, and is outside the scope of the current study. Nevertheless a belief in its validity appears to underpin much of the work of the criminal justice system in the UK and elsewhere, as it underlies this study.

Conclusion

Very little work in this area appears to have been carried out previously. Nevertheless, the potential for improving the provision of training in business skills for offenders appears great. Equally, the potential for improving the success rates of those offenders who do enter into running their own businesses seems considerable. From this initially small project we hope to develop these areas to the potential benefit of all those individuals with criminal records who also wish to work for themselves.

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- Social Trends, 18, HMSO UK table 12.15

1. The need for achievement,

Caird defines this as "a tendency to select and actualise challenging goals". This is tested by respondents' reactions to statements such as; "I find it easy to relax on holiday" or "I like challenges that really stretch my abilities rather than things I can do quite easily".
2. The need for autonomy

Defined as "the need to do and say as one likes despite unconventional expectations". This is tested by respondents' reactions to statements such as "I do not like to do things which are novel or unconventional".
3. "Internal Locus of Control"

This refers to the tendency to ascribe success or failure to one's own efforts, rather than to luck, fate or the impact of what other people do. This is tested by respondents' reactions to statements such as "You are either naturally good at something or you are not, effort makes no difference".
4. Creativity

This refers to the tendency to innovate. This is tested by respondents' reactions to statements such as "some people find my ideas unusual".
5. Risk-taking

This refers not to uninformed gambling type of behaviour, but to willingness to take calculated risks; this is tested by respondents' reactions to statements such as "before taking a decision, I like to have all the facts, no matter how long it takes".

Figure 1

The five aspects of Caird's test of entrepreneurial potential

TABLE 1

Survey Of Entrepreneurial Tendency Of Leyhill Prisoners In Relation To Other Occupational Groups

Attribute	Offenders	Entrepreneurs	Civil Servants	Nurses
Achievement	7.38	9.92	8.45	8.52
Autonomy	6.94	8.28	6	6.94
Internal Locus	7.67	9.51	7.5	7.76
Creativity	7.43	8.77	7.7	7.97
Risk-Taking-	6.82	8.75	6.8	6.61
Total	36.24	45.23	36.45	37.8

Source: Caird 1988 and current study

TABLE 2

Provision of Training in Self-Employment or Small Business in Prisons and Probation Areas

	PRISONS		PROBATION AREAS	
	Number of Responses	Yes replies	Number of Responses	Yes replies
Offer training in employment	60	43 (72%)	43	22 (51 %)
Offer training in self employment / small business development	60	45 (75 %)	43	8 (19%)
If not would like to see self-employment training introduced	15	13 (87%)	35	30 (86%)
If so, would be prepared to give up another programme to fund it	13	8 (53 %)	30	2 (7%)

TABLE 3

Take-Up Rates of Training in Prisons and Probation Areas

Percentage take-up rates of self-employment training in prisons or probation areas	PRISONS (48 replies)	PROBATION AREAS (8 replies)
0-5%	30 (62%)	3 (38%)
6-10%	9 (19%)	0
over 10%	4 (8%)	0
Not Measured	5 (10%)	5 (63%)

TABLE 4

Content of Training Programmes

	PRISONS (46 replies)	PROBATION areas (7 replies)
Number of options offered		
All options	40 (87%)	6 (86%)
4-5 options	5 (11%)	0
1-3 options	1 (2%)	1 (14%)

TABLE 5

Awareness Of The Provision Of Training In Prisons Or Probation Areas By The Other Service

	PRISONS (60 replies)	PROBATION AREAS 43 answers
Knowledge of self-employment training provided by other service	8 (13%)	3 (7%)
No knowledge of training provided by other service	35 (58%)	25 (58%)
No answer or don't know	17 (28%)	15 (35%)