Job and employment quality in prisons: threats, low road policies and anchors for a way forward
Employment quality of prison staff: overview

1. A short reminder of theory
2. Employment quality of prison staff and recent trends
3. The role of policy and strategies
4. Anchors for employment quality: a framework
What is employment quality?

Reminder:

– Job quality: refers to the attributes of the job itself (independent of worker characteristics)
– Employment quality: relating to broader concepts linked to the features of the employment relationship
– Work quality: refers to the ways and conditions under which the activity of work can affect the well-being of workers
– We use the general term employment quality
Some characteristics of good jobs:

- Decent wages and working conditions
- Learning and career opportunities
- Working time arrangements and autonomy
- Security
- Health and safety
- Say, participation and representation
- Contact with other persons
- Support from colleagues and superiors
- Feedback and information
- Autonomy (over speed, method, sequence,…)
- Balanced mix of complex and easy tasks
- No repetitive tasks
- Limited work intensity
employment quality and well-being

- Voice and representation
- Job content
- Working environment
- Employment conditions

employment quality \rightarrow Well-being
Why is job content important?

- Psychological strain is not so much the result of workload, but the result of the joined effect of workload plus the level of decision-making power a worker has to cope with workload and the social support (s)he experiences.
- Control, autonomy, support and participation reduce the risks of stress caused by high job demands.
Why is job content important?

**Job demands**: complexity, variability, repetitive work, incompleteness (fragmented), role conflict, unpredictability, workload

**Job resources**: autonomy, control, participation and social support
Why is job content important?

Direct participation, or job control, at 3 levels:

• Job autonomy (individual task level)
• Support: possibility to ask supervisor or colleagues for assistance and feedback
• Organisational level decision latitude: consultation in regular meetings on unit/organisation level about work organisation, processes, quality issues, targets, etc.
The role of work organisation

Fragmentation: fragmented work, repetitive, no variation AND little control, autonomy and participation

- bins
- dust
- dust
- desks
- windows
- floors
The role of work organisation

self-organised teamwork: variable tasks, good balance, support, autonomy and control
Outcomes

- Direct outcomes: social, physical and psychological consequences
  - Stress, job satisfaction, work engagement, burn-out, learning possibilities, work life balance

- Indirect outcomes: personal and work outcomes:
  - Work experience, turnover-intention, innovative behavior, need for recovery
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What is typical for the employment quality of prison staff?
Employment staff of prison staff

Job demands: complexity, variability, repetitive work, incomplete jobs, role conflict, unpredictability, workload

Job resources: autonomy, control, participation, social support (mixed)
Employment quality of prison staff

Job demands

- **Role conflict**: difficulties building up positive role identities: guard or helper
- **Inpredictability**: Working with inmates often results in failure (e.g. recidivism)
- **Variability, completeness**
- “**Jail craft**” (a nostalgic, multi-layered, narrative or discourse, and set of tacit practices which are drawn on by officers to manage the affective and practical challenges of working with the demands of the changed prison environment (Peacock et al., 2017)
Employment quality of prison staff

Job resources

- **Autonomy and control:**
  - Strict reglementation by work rules
  - Hierarchical organization
  - Available information
  - Frequent communication breakdown and disturbances in daily communication

- **Social support:**
  - contact, peers, colleagues, supervisors
  - Isolated workstations

- **Participation:**
  - lack of participation in decision-making
Employment quality of prison staff: threats

- Voice and representation
- Job content
- Employment conditions
- Working environment

employment quality → Well-being
Threats to job content

Threats to job demands

• Increasing workload: staff shortages and prison overcrowding
• Complicated and diverse inmates (culture, language, aging, combined problems, sharp raise in pre-trial detainees)
• More unpredictable outcomes of work

Threats to autonomy

• Inadequate training of prison staff to face this increased complexity and unpredictability of work, growing work intensity and more duties
• Less time and resources for adequate activities and support: increased role conflict
• Growing use of surveilling systems

Threats to social support

• Leadership from a distance
• “Blasé” professionals: managers instead of committed civil servants
Threats in job content

Job demands: *complexity, variability, repetition, incomplete jobs, role conflict, unpredictability, workload*

Job resources: *autonomy, control, participation and social support*
Threats to working environment and employment conditions

Threats to working environment: occupational health and safety

- Complicated and diverse inmates
- Less training, more overcrowding and violence
- Work infrastructure: prisons in bad repair and overcrowding create safety issues
- Aging workforce

Threats to employment conditions

- Inadequate training of prison staff (and supervisors)
- Working times: due to understaffing and overcrowding (overtime), need for flexibility
- Job insecurity: temporary contracts, redundancies due to austerity, privatisation and outsourcing
- Pay levels: generally under pressure
- Administrative practices
Threats to participation and labour relations

- Privatisation and outsourcing (support functions first)
- Goal: Staff behaviour and thinking becomes aligned with centralized objectives.
- Result: competition between prison staff
- Blasé professionals: managers instead of committed civil servants
Changes in management style result in a shift in the occupational culture of prisons. Social support of peers and management often decreases, effectively making job demands more difficult to manage.
Employment quality of prison staff: outcomes

- Direct outcomes: social, physical and psychological
  - Work-related stress skyrocketed
  - Risk of burn-out is substantial
  - Increase in drugs and alcohol abuse
  - Low job satisfaction
- Indirect personal and work outcomes:
  - Absenteism increased slightly
  - Staff turnover is high
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The role of policy

Production regime
- How is work organised in view of economic added value (e.g. Cost-cutting/productivity versus quality)

Production employment interface
- Education & training system

Employment regime
- Collective influence of worker representation at different levels
- Inclusiveness and coverage of collective bargaining

Welfare regime
- Social protection, unemployment benefits, minimum wages, pensions
- Social services, role of public services
The role of policy

Anchors for employment quality: low road or high road
The role of policy

**Low road strategy**

- Imprisonment as criminal justice policy focusing on deprivation of liberty
- Requires low-skilled, flexible prison staff without any autonomy. Prison work as ‘assembly line’ work.
- Prison staff as ‘guards’
- Generalized privatization based on price, leading to downward pressure on labour costs and fragmented collective bargaining.
- Race to the bottom regarding working environment and working conditions. Low quality of prison services.
- State does not impose any minimum standards, prison services privatized.
The role of policy

High road strategy

- Imprisonment as welfare policy focusing on reintegration of inmates.
- Requires trained and highly skilled prison staff with sufficient autonomy and social support, possibly working in autonomous teams.
- Prison guards as ‘helpers’ (educators)
- Modern prison infrastructure and organization focusing on rehabilitative function. High level of prison services.
- Strong collective bargaining leading to high standards for occupational health and safety, high levels of job security, decent working times and investment in job content.
- Minimum standards imposed by the state, prison services part of national (social) services.
Employment quality of prison staff: the low road strategy

Policies that caused or influenced the identified threats to the employment quality

– Austerity measures
– Law-and-order discourse
– Privatization
– Neoliberal managerialism
Employment quality of prison staff: the low road strategy

- Austerity measures: cost-cutting and restructuring in most European countries
  - Spending per inmate decreased (median: from 53.4 euro in 2007 to 41.6 euro in 2012)
  - Prisoner/staff ratio increased (from 2.1 in 2008 to 2.1 in 2013)
  - Number of prison staff mostly dropped (from 308,647 in 2008 to 293,356 in 2013)
- Law and order policies:
  - Shift in goals of imprisonment: from welfare based social policy to criminal justice policy
  - Result: number of inmates increased significantly although varying between countries.
Employment quality of prison staff: the low road strategy

- Privatization and outsourcing of prison activities:
  - Mostly competition on price, resulting in cuts in staff costs
  - Risk of decreasing quality of service and employment quality
  - Risk of fragmented collective bargaining
- Neoliberal managerialism
  - Accumulation of surveillance, growing managerialism and a strive for control that is virtually complete.
  - Influencing the occupational culture of prisons
Employment quality of prison staff: summary

- Policies put pressure on all four dimensions of employment quality - job content, work environment, employment conditions and participation.
- This constellation is leading to a low road strategy implying the deteriorisation of employment quality in prisons, as can be derived from various social, psychological and physical outcomes such as an increase in stress, burn-out and drugs& alcohol abuse of prison staff and some work-related outcomes such as an increase in absenteeism.
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Anchors of employment quality: a framework

Goal:
• Developing a framework that enables case studies in different European countries.

Focus:
• Detection of differences in employment quality of prison staff between the countries.
• Can these differences be explained by the interplay between political choices and mechanisms.
• Recommendations
Anchors of employment quality

Production regime

• Imprisonment as punishment or welfare policy? This determines the role of prison staff: guard vs. helper and, consequently, the importance of jail craft. Relates to law and order discourse and the overcrowding and understaffing.
• How are prisons organized? Does it contain elements of team-based work organisation?
• Which leadership and management methods are applied?
• Outsourcing or privatization of prison activities?
  • Are quality standards included in public procurement?
  • Local or international providers?
Anchors of employment quality

Production employment interface

• What are the educational requirements to work in prisons?
• How are formal vocational and educational training and on-the-job training organized?
Anchors of employment quality

Employment regime

- What are the central themes of the social dialogue and collective bargaining?
- How is worker representation organized (in prisons and at sectoral levels)?
- Inclusiveness and coverage of collective bargaining: what are principles of extension of collective agreements?
- Does collective bargaining receive public policy support?
Anchors of employment quality

Employment regime

- How is wage setting organized (collective bargaining, unilateral state-decision, mixed)?
- How are working time arrangements determined?
- What regulations exist on occupational health and safety, how are they negotiated and implemented?
- Which measures guarantee job security of prison staff?
- In case of violence, how are prison staff insured?
- Do prison staff have the right to strike? What other options do they have?
Anchors of employment quality

Welfare regime

• Social protection:
  • Are there any minimums standards such as a minimum health and safety procedures, imposed by the state?

• Social services:
  • Are prison services, such as health, education or care, part of national programs or privatised?