

HM Prison Service

Changing HR on the inside

ORION CASE STUDY



In Brief

Who?

Her Majesty's Prison Service – over 48,000 staff and an annual payroll of more than £1.4billion.

What?

Design and management of an organisationwide business change process to implement a new shared service for Finance, Procurement and HR implementation for a new-look HR operating model across 130+ locations.

How?

We developed a business change strategy for the whole HM Prison Service and set up an organisation-wide network of change agents to implement it.

We facilitated one of the public sector's largest ever recruitment campaigns, placing over 120 HR Business Partners (HRBPs) and 14 Area HR & OD Manager roles within 12 months.

We created a tailor-made business engagement workshop for the HR function, along with recruitment and a 12-month induction and development programme for their new-look HR team.

The Background

Between 2007 and 2008 Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) underwent a huge programme to transform the efficiency of its HR, finance and procurement services.

Among other things, this programme (known internally as the Phoenix Programme) has included the formation of a new National Shared Service Centre in South Wales. Until 2007 each of HMPS' 130+ prisons handled their own back-office transactions. By the beginning of 2008 this centre was providing customer contact as well as Finance, HR, procurement and IT system services to the whole organisation - reducing duplication and improving efficiency.

The new shared services operation provided HMPS with the foundations to transform the rest of its HR function into a more business oriented, strategic service.

The service delivery capability established by the Phoenix programme was then the foundation of Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL). A unique partnership of public and private sector skills and expertise making the public sector more effective and delivering real savings.

Our Tasks

The Phoenix programme was a huge undertaking for HMPS, and they came to use for help in two specific areas:



Managing change within the organisation

The Phoenix Programme included changes to all finance and accounting procurement processes, expenses, all areas of pay, absence management, recruitment, training and development. It meant a host of new processes had to be rolled out to 48,000 staff across more than 130 locations – an organisation-wide change that would require detailed preparation and careful management.



Planning and implementing their new HR operating model

There was also the challenge of redesigning the rest of HR to work with this new Shared Service model, and managing the transition between operating models without day-to-day HR services breaking down.

“We were looking for someone to assist us in two key areas: To help define and then manage how to implement the change in the business, and also to support us in planning and implementing the broader changes to the HR operating model.”

Phoenix programme director

Task 1: Manage change within the organisation

What's the plan?

The first thing we had to do was to create a change strategy. To do this we worked with the organisation to answer the following questions:

1. How ready for change was HMPS, and how much change could it bear?
2. How should the change be communicated?
3. How would the rollout work across the estate, taking account of other business change activities?
4. How would the changes be made on the ground?
5. What was the best way to resource the change programme?
6. Were the business-case assumptions and costs still correct?

Armed with the answers, we mapped out the most effective way to roll out the programme's changes while keeping the business running as normal. We could also pre-empt how people would react at each step, and make plans to respond to these reactions swiftly and proactively.

Who to involve?

It was essential that we engage the senior managers who ran the prisons, as our approach absolutely had to be sensitive to the high-risk business of actually running a prison.

We also built a team of nearly 200 local 'change managers' within the prison staff. These change managers were invaluable. They helped us make informed decision at strategy planning stage. They were also a trusted source of information for their fellow employees when it came to implementation.

"We were keen to take an innovative approach to the change by embedding it on the ground, with local prison change agents delivering the change supported by a central team. Prisons are so different from each other that we need people who would understand the local nuances."

Jane Chesters, partner, Orion

Task 2: Plan and implement their new HR operating model

“Following the contribution made by Orion Partners to the success of the initial Phoenix Programme, we asked them to assist us with the creation and implementation of our new HR model.”

Director of HR, National Offender Management Service

The plan was to complement the new centralised shared service centre with HR Business Partners (HRBPs) in each prison, supported by regional teams of case managers and recruitment specialists. The role of the headquarters HR team was also refocused to be a centre of expertise for service-wide policy.

This was a big departure from the previous structure. Many of the prisons’ operational managers had never worked with an HRBP before. Many Heads of Personnel were also unclear about what the role would entail; some feeling it was simply a change to their job title. Clearly HMPS had both a cultural and operational challenge ahead, and we helped them meet that challenge in the following ways:



Organisational design

We helped the project team define the new roles required, (in particular those of the new HRBPs and Area HR managers). We had to get this organisational design right from the off, balancing the number of roles and the levels of capability with the capacity of the organisation to absorb the change.



Transition planning

Managing the rollout of their new operating model required a hugely complex transition planning schedule. It covered change activities and the resources they needed, budgets, work streams, rollout plans, communications plans and readiness and risk assessments. We also had to test the transition arrangements for staff moving into new roles within shared services.



Staff assessment

One of the most sensitive aspects of the programme was the selection of staff to fill the new HRBP and HR area manager roles. We wanted to help people make the right career choice, so we developed an internal assessment process built around a self-reflective day-in-the-life coached assessment. The aim was to bring the demands of the roles to life. So as well as helping HMPS find the right candidates for each role, they helped candidates get a proper feel of whether it was a job they wanted to do.



Recruitment

Internal assessments left us with around 30% of the vacancies to fill. Easier said than done when you're looking for highly skilled professionals to fill new roles in a public sector body without a particularly positive image. Central to success was being able to showcase the genuine opportunities the Prison Service offered in HR. So we developed a recruitment brand, along with websites and even podcasts from senior managers to build a rounded picture of the opportunities on offer. We also created a 'day in the life' scenario for use in external assessment days to give candidates a real feel for the role, to help us find the candidates with the best mindset for the HRBP role, and to ensure the least possible candidate drop-out rate.



Senior Management Team workshop planning

Of course, recruiting great people for these new roles would have meant nothing if their roles and responsibilities weren't understood, agreed and valued by the rest of the prisons' senior management teams (SMT). We designed a special SMT workshop for each prison. Co-led by the governor or area manager and the HRBP/OD manager, these offered the chance for SMTs to agree HRBPs' roles and responsibilities, and to see how they could add value to their individual areas.



Development programme design

Finally, together with the HMPS team we developed an intensive induction and development programme for each new role. The programme included 20 separate modules over 12 months, covering everything from the rationale for change to how the HRBP role is different from previous roles. It included a mix of on-the-job training, eLearning and classroom work. We also created 'learning buddies' who could support each other through the tricky first few weeks after go-live and who would form the basis for larger personal support networks across the service.

"We work incredibly hard to prepare the individual for the role, giving them intensive technical skills and knowledge and a deep business understanding so they know the business and appreciate that they are a key part of the leadership team. We have benefited from being able to draw on Orion Partner's research into what really makes HR professionals excel in these sorts of roles."

Deputy HR director, HM Prison Service

Reactions and results

“This has been a huge project for HMPS and we have received valuable support and assistance throughout from Orion Partners... Their experience enabled us to shape a recruitment and selection campaign that is getting the right people into the new roles, without disrupting the business. Their development programme helped shape the behaviours and build the skills that the new HR roles needed to be successful and, crucially, they approached each of these as an integrated part of the change programme maximising the value of their work.”

Director of HR,
National Offender Management Service