It's not ok to not be ok . . . when you're a prison governor: The impact of workplace culture on prison governors' wellbeing in England, Scotland and Wales

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Abstract:	The wellbeing of prison governors has received little attention in penological research to date. The findings of this research reveal that governors' wellbeing is negatively impacted by a dominant Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) permeating through the organisation. While MCC negatively contributes to governors' wellbeing, they continue to engage in hegemonic masculine performances to show no weakness to cope with the pressures of working life. This has led to the emergence of a 'hyper-MCC' which we define as an overperformance of the MCC social script that is seen as a requirement to cope within an increasingly challenging workplace. The implications of hyper-MCC are a perpetuation of a toxic working culture and a reduced likelihood of engaging with wellbeing services. The response needs to be developing the right types of support that can attempt to re-frame dominant masculine working cultures, challenge hyper-MCC performances and remove the individualised responsibility of wellbeing away from the workforce themselves. However, this cultural shift will only be effective if coupled with a meaningful reconsideration of working conditions, which have resulted in the intensification of workloads and practices.

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Introduction

Prisons are often described as places of trauma, where emotional, psychological, and physical harm is inflicted on those who encounter them (Irwin & Owen, 2005). While such a statement is usually made in relation to those who are legally detained within these establishments, such impacts can also be experienced by those who work within these environments (see Arnold, 2005). This can include staff employed by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), such as prison officers, prison governors, probation officers and psychologists and those who are employed by third parties such as the NHS, and education providers. The experience of those working in prisons forms a fundamental contribution to prisons research and as such prison workers are a distinct occupational group deserving of focus. Furthermore, by concentrating on the prison working environment and those within it we can gain a better understanding of the impact that staff can have on people in their custody, and how the concepts of power, punishment, care, and discretion play out in such settings (Crewe, Bennett and Wahidin, 2008).

Existing research which has examined how prison staff experience their working environment includes a focus on the challenges and rewards of work, working with a range of prisoner populations, and the roles of a variety of professionals within this setting. In terms of health and wellbeing, there have been a plethora of studies (Bourbonnais, et al., 2007; Clements & Kinman, 2021; Griffin, et. al., 2012; Kinman, et al., 2016; Kinman, et al., 2017; Kinman & Clements, 2022; Okoza, et al., 2010; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015) which have examined how prison officers experience their working environments and how this has impacted on their health and wellbeing, with noted concerns including stress, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sickness presenteeism and turnover intent. More recent research, based on 63 in-depth interviews with prison governors, has endeavoured to take this discussion further by looking at the general health and wellbeing status of prison governors/managers in England, Scotland, and Wales (Harrison et al., 2024). This article presents those original findings but does so with a particular emphasis on how occupational culture impacts on the health and wellbeing of prison governors. Within the UK Civil Service job grading, the participants in our study held positions of responsibility between bands 6 and 11. To simplify this divergence of roles, and to maintain anonymity throughout, when referring to our research participants (in this article and beyond) we use the word ‘governor’, with this term meaning any participant whose job role fits within these bands.

To examine the impact of occupational culture on the health and wellbeing of prison governors, we present our data using the theoretical framework of Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC). This focuses on the four dimensions of Show No Weakness, Strength and Stamina, Put Work First and Dog-Eat-Dog (Berdahl et al., 2018) and is used to capture the dominant working culture of prison governors and how this can explain their working performances. Before we look at the MCC in more detail, we first

consider the nature of prison work and culture before explaining why the MCC was thought to be a useful framework for our discussion. We then explain the methodology of our study before we apply the MCC framework to our findings.

Prison Work and Culture

Working within a prison environment presents a unique set of pressures on staff while they attempt to ensure the safe delivery of the daily regime (Marquart and Sorensen, 1997). The demanding nature of working with vulnerable, at risk, and sometimes-violent individuals, requires staff to "cope with brutality without becoming brutalized" (Liebling at al., 2011: 160). Prisons are thus inherently emotional places, with dominant negative and painful emotions often found amongst prisoners, partly due to their own needs and experiences, but also due to them being locked up against their will (Crawley, 2004). Arnold (2005) additionally highlights how prisons are places of trauma for staff who work within them, stating "prison officers are affected by the work they do, the people they deal with and the situations they encounter" (p. 392). Examples of situations where prison staff have reported experiencing trauma include witnessing events including hangings or attempted hangings, serious incidents of self-harm with significant blood loss, as well as deaths from natural causes.

The ways in which prison staff are 'allowed' to cope with such trauma is often dictated by the culture of their organisation. In this context, occupational culture describes the shared values, beliefs, and norms associated with a particular type of work (Heery & Noon, 2008). While the definition of occupational culture has been contested, it is widely agreed that it is historically and socially constructed, and therefore difficult to change (Bloor and Dawson, 1994). Emphasising the interplay of individual behaviour with the sharedness of meaning and cognition at group level, Bloor and Dawson (1994) define organisational culture as:

> A patterned system of perceptions, meanings, and beliefs about the organisation which facilitates sense-making amongst a group of people sharing common experiences and guides individual behaviour at work (p. 275).

Workers' perceptions of the nature of an organisation (and the nature of the work carried out within it) leads to the common experiences that guide workplace behaviours. Occupations within criminal justice, for example, have been characterised as dirty work, which is defined as "any job that is physically, socially or morally tainted by society" (Hughes,1958: 122). Prison work is viewed in this way because it is tainted physically, because of the harmful and unpleasant nature of the prison environment; tainted socially, due to consistent contact with stigmatised people; and tainted morally, through working methods that are confrontational and potentially defiant of civil norms (Garrihy, 2022). Resilience, in

addition to fortitude and learned defence mechanisms, are therefore core elements of prison occupational culture (Britton, 2003), with these being seen in how officers relate to prisoners, each other and their managers, and how they respond to change (Crawley and Crawley, 2008).

Due to the potentially traumatic nature of the prison working environment, the prison, as a workplace, provokes anxieties in prison staff, necessitating a range of psychological processes and defences to manage it (Garrihy, 2022). One such defence is emotional labour which accounts for a further dimension of prison organisational culture (see Bennett, 2015). In their respective research on prison officers, Crawley (2004) and Nylander (2011) both refer to Hochschild's definition of emotional labour as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983: 7), allowing prison workers to achieve professional or organisational goals that are required by their work roles. In Humblet's (2020) research, for example, this was seen through officers needing to practice emotional detachment to manage their emotions when confronted with physically deteriorating and dying prisoners. Arnold (2005) additionally found that after six months in the role, prison officers learned to become less emotional about their work, and after a year, had "become accustomed to masking or suppressing their true feelings" (p. 401), instead choosing to embrace a tough, cool, calm, and confident demeanour. Discourses around manning up have also been found to permeate through prison culture (Crewe and Liebling, 2015), with prison staff who had experienced the death of a prisoner, being told that they needed to "hold themselves together" (Barry, 2020: 4) so they could be relied upon by others in challenging scenarios. Barry's (2020) participants also described their awareness of their emotional presentation to their colleagues which, if this was wrong, could leave them open to scrutiny. Attitudes and cultures of this kind can serve to create divisions between staff at different ranking levels or an 'us and them' dynamic (Harrison et al., 2024). Those viewed as weak in such environments may become targets of ridicule (Nolan, 2009) through a process of psychological harassment (Workman-Stark, 2021) or bullying (Harrison et al., 2024). Research on police officers, for example, has identified that seeking counselling or support may also be viewed as a weakness and a demonstration of a lack of resilience (Toch, 2002).

Reflective of most of the scholarly work concerning prison staff, the literature examined thus far has primarily focused on work and culture concerning prison officers with reference to how officers relate to prisoners and each other, and the requirement to manage emotions in their working lives. Such ways of working reinforce and encourage subscription to dominant macho norms of the occupational group (Crawley and Crawley, 2008). The intense pressure to conform to such group values can cause stress to staff through the doubting of "the validity of their own values and experiences" (ibid., p. 144). Furthermore, bullying can stem from a failure to operate within cultural norms, with such norms having been described as macho and involving the requirement to put on a tough façade (see Arnold, 2005; Bennett, 2015; Crawley, 2004; Crawley & Crawley, 2008; Hemming et al., 2020). Bennett (2016)

challenges former notions of the divide between prison officer culture and that of managers arguing that traditional officer culture is embedded in managers' working personalities, or habitus. As such, the existing literature on prison officers can inform our understanding of the working culture amongst prison governors with masculinity and macho performance being a common cultural feature across the organisation. It is important to note here that this working culture (and the application of MCC presented later) is applicable to both male and female governors[1] (see Bennett, 2016; Smith, 2021).

Operating in risky and unpredictable environments within a culture characterised by such masculine performances can result in long lasting psychological health implications such as PTSD, if not appropriately managed (Smith et al., 2008). Parpart and Partridge (2014) explain, for example, that while soldiers who survive conflict are viewed as successful warriors, they can experience social difficulties away from conflict zones including problematic relationships and the adoption of unhealthy coping strategies. PTSD amongst those who have experienced active combat can be attributed to (amongst several other factors) the unpredictable and risky nature of the operational environment, and this can lead to lasting health consequences (Smith et al., 2008). Missteps in such occupational scenarios can puncture the "winner image" (Smith et al., 2008) and in the context of prison governors (and indeed other grades of prison staff), those missteps can include a failure to present a tough facade through the exposure of emotional weakness, and emotional expression more broadly.

Masculinity Contest Culture

To frame how a macho working culture can have negative implications for the wellbeing of prison governors, the concept of MCC has been adopted to make sense of some elements of the study's empirical data. MCC is a valuable concept to employ because the nature of prisons as risky environments with a clear hierarchical structure predisposes them to being ideal sites for masculinity contests (Berdahl et al., 2018). Emotion suppression and displays of dominance through overt masculine performances are key elements of MCC, with this being conceptualised in four core dimensions. These are explained in more detail later, but in brief the framework comprises of (1) Show No Weakness (avoiding displays of femininity, such as vulnerability and some emotions), (2) Strength and Stamina (valorising physical strength and stamina), (3) Put Work First (expectations to work long hours and put work ahead of family and any other external obligations) and (4) Dog-Eat-Dog (a hypercompetitive environment pitting one person against another) (Berdahl et al., 2018). The rejection of stereotypical feminine characteristics and traits is firmly grounded in MCC with anger arguably being the only

[1] Empirical data from both male and female governor participants is included in this article to demonstrate the validity of the articulation of prison governor working culture using MCC as the dominant frame. Analysis of the research data focusing on gender as an important line of enquiry in this study is in progress and a dedicated future publication will explore this with the depth, rigour and focus it deserves.

culturally acceptable emotional display (Addis and Cohane, 2005). MCC can also vary according to context in terms of the identification of resources available to achieve dominance (Cooper, 2000, cited in Berdahl et al.) with some elements of the four MCC categories being more prevalent than others. For prison governors, examples of such resources can include the separation of emotional display from the working environment, being seen to be bulletproof, and consistently presenting a resilient front (Crewe and Liebling, 2015). Berdahl at al. (2018) also recognise the inevitable suffering of an individual's relationship to the workplace through experiences of hyper competitivity, toxic leadership and bullying, ultimately leading to burnout and high staff turnover. The perpetuation and endorsement of MCC within a working environment has a negative impact on an individual's mental health, as mentioned above, but also on their job satisfaction and engagement, and on relationships in the home (Munsch et al., 2018). Furthermore, MCC exacerbates perceptions of toxic leadership, and this can result in lower work engagement, lower job meaning and higher work/life conflict, stress, and turnover intent (Matos, O'Neill and Lei, 2018).

Characterising the prison workplace culture as being a MCC is therefore important because it enables us to accurately articulate the culture of a unique place of work which can cause harm to the wellbeing of its employees. It also facilitates a focus on culture as an element of the prison environment which, if challenged and improved, has the capacity to improve the wellbeing of governors and others working and living in this environment. This may also have important implications for improving staff retention through the addressing of problematic cultural issues leading to increased job satisfaction.

Methodology

This research utilised a qualitative approach to gain a deeper insight into the health and wellbeing of governor grade staff. Participants were recruited from the Prison Governors Association (PGA) membership, with the authors allowed to include an 'advert' for the study as the last question in a health and wellbeing questionnaire, which was distributed to the membership in early 2021 by a different research team. Governors who had indicated a willingness to take part were contacted by the authors and provided with information about the purpose of the interview, a list of the key themes, and a consent form. All 63 participants who expressed a willingness to take part were interviewed; 43 (68%) were male and 20 (32%) were female. The average (mean) age was 49.7 years with a range of 28-61 years. The majority of participants (60 people; 95%) were white British. Specific ethnicity detail for the three remaining participants has not been provided to maintain participant anonymity. The average (mean) length of service reported by participants was 24.2 years with a range of 2-35 years. Based on this demographic data, our sample was representative of the overall PGA membership. The participants represented all HMPPS regions, including all four male HMPPS prison security categories, the Scottish

Prison Service, the women's estate, the juvenile secure estate, private sector prisons and HMPPS headquarters. In addition, participants represented a range of job roles including Heads of Function (Operations, Security, Residence, Safety, Reducing Offending), Deputy Governors, Governing Governors, Controllers, and a range of headquarters strategic leadership and project-specific roles.

A semi-structured interview schedule was devised specifically for the purposes of exploring wellbeing with six broad themes explored: current state of health and wellbeing; strategies and support used to manage own health and wellbeing; strategies and support used to help their staff manage their health and wellbeing; whether such strategies had changed due to Covid-19; how work impacted on home life; and, how governors were currently feeling about their job role. All interviews were conducted between June and November 2021 using either an online platform or a telephone and were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and used during the data analysis process. Some interviews only lasted 35 minutes, while others exceeded two and a half hours. The interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo 12, following the thematic analysis principles of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). Following this analysis, twelve main themes were identified which were grouped under four superordinate themes: 'Workplace Culture', 'Exacerbating and Mitigating Factors', 'Impact' and 'Fears, opportunities and suggestions for the future'. This article examines findings relating to the 'Workplace Culture' theme of the research data with further publications relating to the other superordinate themes (see Harrison et al., 2024).

Ethics approval was granted by The University of Lincoln ethics application service (Reference: 2021_6526). All participants gave informed consent. They were advised that participation in the research was voluntary, that they could withdraw up to one-week post participation without giving a reason, and that the data would be anonymised and stored securely. Sources of support, should they have needed them, were provided via participant information documents in advance of interviews being conducted and reviewed at the time of interview. No participants chose to withdraw their interviews and incentives for participation were not provided.

The research took place while the Covid-19 pandemic was ongoing. During this time, the prison population experienced increased risks of transmission of Covid-19 and there were significant concerns that prisons could become high-risk settings for outbreaks resulting in high levels of mortality. In March 2020, prisons introduced full lockdowns with increases and decreases in restrictions across 2020, 2021 and 2022. Therefore, this specific context and the challenges arising from this have inevitably had an impact on our findings. Participants were, however, keen to express that whilst the pandemic may have exacerbated some of the issues, it was not the cause of them. Participants spoke not only about themselves and their own experiences, but also about the experiences of others and how they perceived them as part of the wider organisational culture. While comments made about oneself and about others (including organisational culture) are different in the sense that the latter are about individual

perceptions, the research found high levels of credibility given the similarity between these perceptions among participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This is evidenced within the detailed descriptions that support these findings (Slevin and Sines, 2000).

Masculinity Contest Culture and Prison Governor Performance

We next turn to the four dimensions of the MCC to organise and explore the research data to see whether the culture as described by our prison governors fits within this theoretical framework. Taking each dimension of the framework in turn, our data is used to consider whether culture can be used to provide an explanation for the state of governors' wellbeing. Various interpretations of the Show No Weakness and Strength and Stamina dimensions of the MCC framework can create an overlap in their application. To distinguish between the two, for the purposes of this article, Show No Weakness is used to include emotional labour, social presentation, and interaction, whereas Strength and Stamina involves presenting visible strength and toughness to reinforce such displays.

Show No Weakness

Berdahl et al. (2018) define Show No Weakness as an effort by individuals to look competent by avoiding displays of stereotypical femininity and overexposing emotions that might be perceived as weakness, such as compassion, empathy, anxiety, and fear. Concomitantly, more stereotypically male traits, such as competitiveness, anger, aggression, and frustration are displayed but are considered more acceptable because they are perceived as not showing signs of weakness. Show No Weakness aligns with the heroic model of leadership wherein a show of strength is perceived as being an important factor for inspiring organisational transformation by making significant sacrifices and taking risks to achieve individual or institutional goals (Allison, 2016). Such performances of competency are connected to a dominant or 'hegemonic' masculine perception of what it means to be strong (Berdahl et al., 2018). This must be continually earned and reasserted through a hegemonic masculine performance (Berdahl et al 2018; Bosson and Vandello, 2011) which creates insecurity around one's identity and can lead to attempts to hide any displays of emotion that betray it. Emotion management is thus used to create a facade of emotional self-control to appear competent (Bell and Eski 2016). The perpetuation of this performance contributes to the creation of a culture wherein it becomes difficult to show weaknesses or vulnerabilities.

Descriptions of hegemonic masculine performance and emotion management were common when our participants spoke about the culture of the prison working environment. One participant, for example, described "a macho culture that doesn't want to accept that we suffer from stress" (PGA 46). Within the context of prisons, emotional management requires prison staff to show resilience and that they have

the ability to cope with the demands of the job. Participant PGA 23 stated how as governors "we all stick our chest out [like] we're superhuman", with another explaining how they were expected to "come to work and pretend we're made of Teflon" (PGA 3). Portraying such traits was seen by participants as being culturally integral to the job, it was the armour required to cope with the demands of the risky and unpredictable nature of working in the prison environment:

> . . . you're the one in the middle and you're getting all the crap flying in between and you have to be quite thick skin[ned] . . . If you're not, you're not going to last very long (PGA 49).

In one participant's observations of this kind of approach to working, being a "coper" meant not only supressing certain emotions but also being reluctant to access wellbeing support when required:

> I think there's a sort of sense, certainly, amongst older and longer standing staff that "I cope, this is how I deal with things. I'm a coper. I don't need any of that". And [there's] certainly a sort of sense of pride in that I don't need that sort of [support] (PGA 1).

Furthermore, participants felt that revealing certain emotions or accessing wellbeing support could have a negative impact on their reputation and potentially be career destroying:

> We've got a new governor. . . As I don't know the guy very well, I've not really felt comfortable to approach him and [let him] know how I'm feeling . . . that [might be] committing career suicide (PGA 37).

Concerns about accessing support were not always about accessing wellbeing support *per* se but more that it would not be confidential and that other members of staff would construe this as a weakness and the individual would risk either being managed out or be limited in job or promotion opportunities. This is symptomatic of both show no weakness and a low trust environment wherein staff did not feel able to share the difficulties they were experiencing with colleagues or support services. While some participants defended the acceptability of accessing support, the pervasiveness of the culture resulted in this being construed as a weakness by many within prisons despite the opportunity for it to be interpreted as a sign of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2020):

> . . . [accessing support] doesn't mean you can't do your job. It doesn't mean you're not good enough. But for some people they don't want to see that (PGA 6).

The perception of being unable to show any weakness has arguably resulted in a culture of hyper-competitivity, which is also evident in the Dog-Eat-Dog dimension of MCC. Berdahl at al. (2018) describe a hypercompetitive workplace as a gladiatorial arena where winners dominate and exploit losers, and rivals are crushed because others cannot be trusted. Many participants in our research feared asking for help or accessing support services because they felt they would be "seen to be a failure" (PGA 7), which resonates with Toch's research with policing staff (2002). PGA 7 also noted a further barrier in this respect:

> If you're off with stress, details go around the morning meeting that you're off with stress. And so, there's little or no privacy, it is still in the operational world.

Furthermore, while support services were available, there was a perception that they were tokenistic, and that organisational leadership signposted staff to them as a matter of ticking boxes. This perception emphasises the belief that prison staff should not be displaying support seeking behaviours. Consequently, showing no weakness appears to be the cultural norm amongst the prison governors interviewed in this study. While experiencing these emotions does not mean that staff are unable to do their job, it often acts as a barrier to accessing support:

> You have to say you're alright. You see somebody or you cut somebody down from hanging or slitting their wrists and somebody will ask if you're alright because that's process and then, you know, (in) this male dominated environment you go, "yes, I'm alright". And then . . . you go home, and you struggle at home. So, we're not good at coming forward and talking about our issues (PGA 40).

> I guess the crux of it for me is to actually, properly invest in [support] and not do it as a tick box. For me, the mental health support should be a dedicated member of staff that is actually on site and can do home visits and all the rest of it . . . But I'm not expecting it (PGA 45).

> The prison service [is] very good at corporately showing a tick box exercise to mental health and wellbeing. It suggests that we have great [Occupational Health] . . . But there is a difference between providing a strategic service and having a cultural drive that is authentic and actually is believable (PGA 33).

Some participants described the research interview process as cathartic providing a rare safe space to speak about their experiences which they felt was unavailable elsewhere. Many of the participants shared their emotions and disclosed vulnerabilities when being interviewed, including information about their personal lives and wellbeing. This included expressing sadness, fear, anger, regret, and anxiety about the future. Some participants vacillated between performances of stereotypical masculinity and being open and vulnerable providing insight into how these conflicting performances co-exist and manifest themselves in the workplace. Many commented that they were grateful to have someone to listen to them and validate their feelings:

> This has been enormously cathartic for me, just having a safe space to exercise the concerns and thoughts. But just like having the opportunity to have a safe space to say these things. Because we're not afforded this luxury, very often (PGA 2).

Strength and Stamina

Distinct from the previous dimension's focus on emotions, Berdahl et al. (2018) explain that the Strength and Stamina dimension involves the valorisation of physical strength and stamina. While avoiding the over-exposure of emotions may involve the adoption of dominant physical presentations, this section of the article will be aligned specifically to the physical performances which stem from organisational culture. In the context of prison work, this involves presenting visible strength and toughness.

Several participants used military descriptions when discussing their work, such as the need to "soldier on" (PGA 35) and "be bombproof" (PGA 17). This demonstrates how language is also used to show strength and stamina. As explained in the literature, a failure to "just put your big girl pants on and . . . go in another day" (PGA 13) can result in the adoption of unhealthy coping strategies away from the workplace. In some cases, prison governors were resorting to "going out . . . alcohol or anything" (PGA 29) to cope with work stress. At times, this was exacerbated by the unprecedented challenges experienced because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with some participants describing it as a battle.

> What we've been asked is utterly, there's absolutely nowhere in my job description that goes anywhere near what we've had to do in the last 18 months. Just had to battle my way through it (PGA 55).

However, references to the job as a battle were used outside of discussions of the pandemic, with participants discussing the "battle to try to educate new officers and to get them to trust" (PGA 19), the "massive battle of health and safety" (PGA 20), "this terrible battle of trying to do things that everyone's dead against" (PGA 30), and in terms of staff relations, having "to decide whether the battle is worth my energy" (PGA 33).

Displays of strength and stamina also related to the normalisation of excessively long working hours with some suggesting that this way of working had become culturally embedded across the system:

> I think they need to tackle this long hours culture, and I think they need to be upfront about that, and I think the MoJ [Ministry of Justice] is very underhand about that culture . . . I would really like the service to be open about this long hours culture . . . Most people in offices start work at 9am. We start our working day at half seven. We're in the office for half seven. And it's kind of frowned on if I drop my kids at breakfast club . . . and I get in by eight o' clock . . . and I feel embarrassed, I have to apologise when I walk in at eight o' clock. And I catch myself thinking hang on a minute. If I leave at six, seven o' clock most nights, I'm doing 55, 60 hours a week here. Why am I apologising for walking in at 8am. This is madness. Madness (PGA 16).

Some governors further demonstrated their commitment to the cultural norms of the organisation by adopting dehumanised performances that protected their inner self despite the difficulties they faced. PGA 34 described governors "becoming robot-like where there is an insensitivity . . . driven by what you need to get done". Others were acutely aware of their performance in the workplace and rationalised this as being a necessary approach to working within the prison community:

> . . . everything that you see here now, is a learned behaviour, over 35 years of trying to be a good prison governor. This is the way I think I have to present [in] order to do my job. So, when I go home, and take my uniform off, that's me. I'm much quieter, much more introverted . . . that's my real personality (PGA 18).

Coleman et al.'s (2017) research on the mental health of members of the armed forces identifies physical toughness and combat readiness as desirable attributes which, if not upheld, risk the discrediting and tainting of the individual through the stigmatisation process (Goffman, 1963), with this also being apparent here. Performances of physical strength and toughness are adopted by prison governors in the

same way, driven by the imperative to meet the internal and external expectations of being an effective leader:

> As leaders, we're expected to, you know, get right up front and lead by example (PGA 21)

> I don't do sick I just don't do sick. I just can't . . . I don't do sick or absences I always try to give 100% to the job even if it does start affecting me at work. I feel like I'll let people down if I go off (PGA 38).

Amongst the participants in our study, the fear of stigmatisation prevented many prison governors from accessing required support, as also evidenced in the Show No Weakness section above.

Put Work First

The third dimension that reinforces and maintains MCC is Put Work First, which involves creating a barrier between work and outside sources (such as the family) to prevent interference with working commitments. This can be seen through presenting a "workaholic" status (Lewis (1991: 84) and impacts on an individual's work-life equilibrium by prioritising work over other aspects of life (Munsch et al., 2018). This can create a work-life conflict wherein people struggle to fulfil other societal roles often putting strain on relationships with families and friends and impacting on wellbeing (Munsch et al., 2018).

Work-life conflicts were common among our participants due to their roles being demanding in terms of time, energy, and loyalty:

> One aspect of being a manager is that you've got the ability to reflect on previous issues and incidents and conversations and actions. And . . . home indeed is a good time to do that . . . the level of the work that we do prevents you from switching off while we're at home . . . I don't know if some people think that we're all machines, and we can just switch on and just switch off, [but] that's impossible (PGA 21).

> . . . the biggest sacrifice is when we had a daughter. I was commuting . . . and I'd leave at five o' clock in the morning. Sometimes didn't get home until midnight. But that wasn't an exception. That was a regular occurrence. And I did that for 10 years. And I look back now, and I

> think, oh my god, I missed the first 10 years of her life . . . and there's nothing I can do about that . . . I beat myself up on a regular basis. And I try to invest more into my granddaughter as a bit of payback (PGA 17).

> If you want to do well, it's expected that you just flog yourself . . . into the ground (PGA 48).

Coser (1974) refers to organisations such as prisons as greedy institutions that discourage involvement in other social spheres and can create conflict with other social roles. Indeed, we found that governors felt they did not have a work-life equilibrium:

> What work life balance? I don't have a massive work life balance . . . I don't see my children before I go to work . . . one night a week I'm away . . . my leave has been constantly interrupted by telephone calls or having to go into work (PGA 05).

Furthermore, governors commented that the intensity of their workloads meant they were often unable to complete their tasks resulting in frequently working beyond contracted hours. Putting work first often created work-family conflict creating a clash between two greedy institutions in one's life, in this case work and the family:

> I'm away from the home a lot . . . when the kids were younger, it was difficult to get to parents' evenings and [I] missed taking the kids to school sometimes. And as I've got older, [my] kids remind [me] of things [I] didn't do (PGA 47).

Putting work first is a key component of the prison working environment which creates work-life conflicts by having a significant impact on relationships with families and friends, and individuals' wellbeing. It however appears to be a culturally accepted way of dealing with what has always been a demanding job within a greedy institution.

> My quality time away from work is getting less. I'm still focusing on work away from work more than I ever have in the past (PGA 40).

> I spend a lot of hours in work. And when I'm away from work, I feel like I need to spend time with my family first. So, time for me comes third (PGA 03).

Dog-Eat-Dog

The final dimension in the MCC framework is Dog-Eat-Dog (Berdahl et al., 2018). This describes a hypercompetitive environment where people are pitted against each other or pit themselves against others. Dog-Eat-Dog norms are reinforced where leaders foster and encourage competition among subordinates, allowing the strongest to survive and rise to the top (Glick, Bardahl and Alonso, 2018). As explored by Bennett (2020), such approaches to leadership and management are grounded in managerialism which is characterised by the control of employee behaviour through target setting in large organisations that have hierarchical structures. Born out of neo-liberalism, managerialist approaches involve intensive employee monitoring that have distinct implications for working culture. Drawing on Cheliotis (2006), Bennett notes that increased hierarchical division of labour and intensive competition remove prison managers' orientation towards welfare. In relation to their own welfare or wellbeing however, obsessive attitudes towards targets see prison managers becoming distressed when they are unable to meet them and thus, they may experience "intense, psychological feelings" (Bennett, 2020: 8):

Competitiveness and survival of the fittest was experienced by our participants:

> There is a bit of like an old boys' club, an old boys networking service, and people do get tapped on the shoulder and told they need to apply for the next step up. No one's ever done that to me (PGA 16).

> It's almost understood that you will potentially stand on people on the way up. We have certain individuals who seem to take that not as an unfortunate side effect, but almost a welcome opportunity. They will take great delight in shitting on people on the way up (PGA 36).

For PGA 36, not only can being "thrown under the bus" be a normal element of working life for those with ambitions for career progression, for some, it is also a satisfying experience through the successful deflection of responsibility and accountability onto somebody else.

This is characteristic of toxic working environments which are "environments that negatively impact the long-term viability of an organisation" (Harder et al., 2014: 207) and are destructive to employees.

Bennett (2020) proposes that managerialism contributes towards creating a toxic working environment through a decline in collaboration which has made way for the previously noted target-obsessed culture. Toxicity becomes noticeably destructive when multiple toxic elements accumulate causing the introduction of negative emotions to the workplace. The three broad toxic elements include organisational principles, working conditions and intra-office relationships (Harder et al., 2014: 208). A combination of these elements contributes to the Dog-Eat-Dog dimension of MCC demonstrating the relationship between attitudes and actions of this dimension and workplace toxicity. It should be noted however that organisational systems operate in a range of toxicity (Harder et al., 2014) and therefore toxicity can be present in functional organisations, such as prisons.

Toxicity is thus a feature of "toxic masculinity" (Bliss, 1987) which embodies emotional distance or absence, aggressive competition, and dominance. In the view of PGA 37:

> The prison service has a massive problem with . . . toxic masculinity. Well, that's just the culture . . . people climbing over each other to get to the next job.

As such, successful career progression in the dog-eat-dog environment incurs a personal cost and risks the normalisation of unsustainable working practices. Governors' attitudes towards sick leave, for example, can sustain this normalisation and have an impact on staff relations:

> I got quite proud of my sick record. So, I protected it . . . I behaved in a way that meant that I didn't go off. And I looked down on people who did as being somehow less dedicated and less committed (PGA 41).

Records of sick leave are therefore in some cases used as a tool for competition, through the comparison of one's own record to that of others. This is problematic as it leads to the continual redefining of expectations, both of self and of others and can lead to sickness presenteeism.

The hyper competition of the dog-eat-dog environment pervades the prison institution, with prisoners *and* staff carrying the weight of the hegemonic masculine institutional culture. In the same way that prisoners' efforts to fit into an excessively performance-orientated masculine culture can work against goals to reintegrate offenders back into society (de Viggiani, 2012), the efforts of prison governors to fit into the prison culture can inhibit their own personal goals, and in turn, the goals of the institution. For example, the importance of putting on a facade can obscure governors' decision making:

> It's the kind of the position that governors are put into or allow themselves to be put into where it becomes about their ego and not about what's the best thing" (PGA 14).

The dog-eat-dog characterisation of prison governors' working experiences is engrained in the cultural norms of working practice. While challenging and changing cultural norms in any working environment is no small feat, Glick, Berdahl and Alonso (2018) propose that dog-eat-dog competition can be mitigated through the creation of policies that do not tolerate or reward bullying, harassment, or sabotage.

Berdahl et al.'s (2018) MCC concept has thus provided a useful framework for articulating the working culture of prison governors. The data provided in this part of the article demonstrates how all four of the MCC dimensions are evident in working culture within this group, and how together, they are helpful in articulating the permeation of masculine ideals and performances through this occupational grade.

Austerity, Frame Collapse and the Emergence of Hyper-MCC

Our findings reveal that some governors in the study were at "breaking point" (PGA 5) in terms of their health and wellbeing, risking disruption to the effectiveness of their working performances, which they relied upon to demonstrate that they were coping. This section of the article utilises the work of Goffman to further explore performance in the working lives of prison governors and explain the emergence of a 'hyper-MCC' in response to challenges to the perceived cultural legitimacy of MCC performances. It situates this issue in the context of the imposition of austerity measures by the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrats Coalition Government in 2010, which saw a 22% reduction in funding to HMPPS between 2010 and 2016. This has resulted in a shift in prison governor work, revealing the interplay between structural and cultural factors that have contributed to the current state of prison governors' wellbeing.

Goffman (1974) divided the social world into "strips" which refer to "any raw batch of occurrences that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point" (Goffman, 1974: 10). Further, Goffman conceptualised "frames" to understand people's performances within different strips; with frames defining situations that are "built up in accordance with the principles of organisation which governs [social] events and our subjective involvement in them" (1974: 10). Frames are socially constructed and interacted with by individuals to create a mutual understanding of how to act in a way that does not cause embarrassment for the self or others. Within this research, we view the prison as a strip and frame our understanding of prisons as risky and unpredictable institutions which require a hegemonic masculine performance to navigate the environment (Berdahl et al., 2018). We identify MCC as the dominant culture among prison governors resulting in them presenting an appropriate "social script" or

"front" (Bennett 2016) to meet what is expected of them and what they expect of themselves and others. This is the part of the individual's performance which "regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1959: 22).

From this perspective, the prison governor role can be viewed as a performance involving their activity during their work which is viewed by and has influence over their observers: other prison staff and prisoners. This performance is based on the "idealised image" (Goffman, 1959) of what is expected of a prison governor; however, it is precarious due to a risk of failure which can discredit them and disqualify them from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963). For prison governors, disqualification from social acceptance in the working environment has implications for their legitimacy as a leader and their authority. This disqualification can occur when a governor departs from approved standards of behaviour revealing their shortcomings or inability to perform the role (Goffman, 1963). To mitigate this, a key element of the prison governor role is impression management which enables them to influence other people's opinions and confirm their identity in the role (Goffman, 1959). This includes manner (ways of interacting with others), appearance (dress code and body language), and front (social scripts)**.** The manner, appearance and front of prison governors is reflective of MCC which enables them to maintain "the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged" (Goffman, 1959: 251).

Impression management has been made increasingly difficult for prison governors due to a perceived increase in workload and an intensification of broader work-related pressures. The UK Coalition Government's imposition of austerity was a significant contributor to this change, which required the then National Offender Management Service to deliver savings of £900million between 2011 and 2015. As explained by Bennett (2015), this was achieved through a reduction in the size of headquarters, the standardisation of institutional resourcing through the 'benchmarking programme' and the contracting out of internal prison services. As "local agents of national change" (Bennett, 2015: 19), managers in prisons were shifted into new capitalist workplaces that left them feeling insecure in their roles, uncertain about the future and having to role model corporate visions that they did not necessarily agree with.

Our study shows that keeping up the MCC performance for the purpose of impression management has become increasingly challenging for prison governors as work has become more demanding. The difficulty of sustaining this performance has resulted in some governors breaking frame thus discontinuing the performance (Goffman, 1974). Some participants had become increasingly cynical about the role being performed (Goffman, 1959) resulting in a disruption in the mutual understanding of the frame ('frame collapse'). This has now left some governors disorientated about what performances or social scripts to use in their working lives (Davis, 1975):

> [If they said] you can go two years early, I'll be like thank you very much I'll take that (PGA 27).

> Why do I still do this job . . . I could be paid better doing something else, and probably be healthier . . . I need to keep believing for a little bit longer (PGA 14).

According to our research, the main response to this frame collapse has been the amplification of the MCC social script with governors increasingly reluctant to show weakness, presenting themselves as physically resilient and putting work first by working increasingly longer hours which creates poor work-life balance. Our participants perceived prisons to have become riskier as a result of the wider structural changes, thus requiring an exaggerated MCC performance to navigate the ever-challenging environment. We term the exaggerated MCC performance as 'hyper-MCC' and define this is as an over performance of the MCC social script that is seen as a requirement to cope within an increasingly challenging workplace. This involves working more, taking pride in a refusal to take sick leave, and putting work before personal health and wellbeing. The implications of hyper-MCC are a perpetuation of a toxic working culture and a reduced likelihood of engaging with wellbeing services. Governors in this research explained that engaging with wellbeing services is perceived as showing weakness or revealing one's shortcomings in the role. As the idealised image of a prison governor is grounded within the hyper-MCC social script, any deviation from the performance has the potential to discredit and spoil a governor's identity (Goffman 1959) which can risk them being passed over for promotion, being managed out of their role, and ultimately causing them to commit "career suicide" (PGA 37). While many of the governors in our study who engaged in hyper-MCC performances were cynical about it, they felt trapped and unable to disclose their emotions or ask for help for fear of being seen as not able to cope with the job:

> I actually felt too embarrassed to ask, I didn't feel like I could ask. I should've asked (PGA 16).

Conclusion

This article has adopted the MCC framework to articulate the nature of working culture amongst prison governors and the role that this culture plays in the state of their wellbeing. Emotional detachment in prison work protects staff from both the challenging and traumatic nature of dirty work, and from being seen as vulnerable or weak by others. This has led to macho performances being a common cultural feature across the organisation to present a performance of coping. Like police officers (Toch, 2002),

prison governors can be reluctant to seek support to ensure they show no weakness and outwardly demonstrate strength and stamina in their workplace performances to uphold the expectations of the 'ideal' prison governor. The data presented in this article evidences this particularly through governors' reluctance to take time off work when they were ill in the knowledge that colleagues would be made aware. In addition, the evidence provided in the Show No Weakness section of this article demonstrates that this reluctance also extends to engagement with Employee Assistance Programmes[2] due, in part, to a fear of colleagues finding out. The normalisation of this approach to prison governor work and the reluctance to respond to self-identified poor health has negative implications for mental and physical wellbeing, including negative impacts on relationships inside and outside of the workplace. In concluding this article, we offer two core arguments in response to the findings presented.

First, a primary barrier to responding to poor wellbeing is MCC, which is a deep rooted and traditional response to working in a risky, unpredictable, and greedy institution. This research has found that due to increasing and intensified workloads, some governors are now struggling to maintain the kinds of macho performance expected of them within this occupational culture. This has caused a disruption to the effectiveness and perceived cultural legitimacy of MCC performance as a strategy for coping with day-to-day working life. According to our findings, the tendency has been for governors to overperform MCC as a coping mechanism (hyper-MCC) in response to changes to the nature of their work. Managing the prison environment requires governors to 'be ok' to live up to the expectations of being in the role and the MCC framework captures this through the requirement of governors to visibly demonstrate emotional and physical resilience and cope with increased workloads.

Secondly, it is important to problematise the current mechanisms of offered support which responsibilises governors to better manage their own wellbeing. Such wellbeing support tends to both individualise and medicalise wellbeing as a personal flaw, and while the support offered may address some elements of the 'bio' and 'psycho' in the holistic biopsychosocial model (see Engel, 1977), it ignores organisational and wider structural issues which have resulted in managerialist practices (Bennett, 2016). Through new public management and managerialist agenda, the public sector has had the logic of neoliberal market economics imposed on it by the state through league tables, targets, increased bureaucracy and surveillance, and reduction in resource (Bennett, 2016; Harvey, 2005). Consistent with Bennett's (2016) observation of workload intensification for prison managers and the degradation of working conditions within prisons, our data presents evidence that the impact for some

[2] Existing support services include PAM Assist (Employee Assistance Programme providing a range of free face-to-face and remote support services to employees across a range of organisations), reflective activities, a wellbeing toolkit, TRiM (Trauma Risk Management is a post traumatic peer group delivered management strategy which aims to keep employees of organisations functioning after traumatic events), a post-incident care policy and mental health allies.

governors has been the experience of poor wellbeing which they then have to manage themselves. This is further exacerbated by working within an MCC that dissuades the seeking of support.

Prison governors are one example of a group impacted by this problem. It also extends to prison officers and others who work within the prison estate, police, probation, and members of the armed forces. Thus, the response needs to be developing the right types of support that can attempt to re-frame dominant masculine working cultures, challenge hyper-MCC performances and remove the individualised responsibility of wellbeing away from the workforce themselves. However, this cultural shift will only be effective if coupled with a meaningful reconsideration of working conditions, which have resulted in the intensification of workloads and practices, across the prison estate and beyond.

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