

## Service Design in Criminal Justice: A Co-production to Reduce Reoffending

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**Summary:** This article provides an overview of a project undertaken with the UK prison service that uses music to help reduce prisoners' anxiety and stress, and assists prisoners in taking control of their future by developing skills, providing employment and supporting them on release. The project, which is a record label called InHouse Records, was co-designed with prisoners and the Royal College of Art. It now operates in four UK prisons and is demonstrably improving prisoners' behaviour. InHouse Records is encouraging prisoners to recount their experiences through restorative storytelling and helping to build skills for the future to improve opportunities for employment and reduce recidivism. It is an example of service design being used to co-create a service for prisoners, with prisoners, and is demonstrating the value of design-led innovation to tackle complex social issues.

**Keywords:** Co-production, prison, innovation, recidivism, design, service design, programme, music, records.

### Introduction

The goal of this project, undertaken by the Royal College of Art's (RCA) Service Design Programme, was to design and implement a vocational-based programme of skills development, education and work within a prison that could lead to new opportunities in the community as well as improve prisoner behaviour within the prison service. The design approach involved a collaborative effort with prisoners, prison staff and designers, supported by Ernst and Young (EY) and senior faculty from the RCA. The outcome was the design of a fully functional record label, created with and by the prisoners.

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This paper introduces the concepts of design thinking and service design and their application in the public sector. It describes how these techniques were applied in the UK Prisons to research the issues, and the resulting design and implementation of the service. It explores the impact in terms of behaviour, the anticipated benefits to the prison service, and the potential for it to impact recidivism rates as the first prisoners return to the community.

### **Service design and innovation in the public sector**

Over the past two decades, the importance of design and the value of design thinking (Brown, 2008), as a tool for innovation, have been recognised by both business and government. In the domain of digital consumer technologies, design has become a strategic tool for business, helping to translate technological innovation into user value, connecting with consumer needs, and creating compelling product and service experiences that leading firms have, in turn, successfully transformed into business value. Design has also been applied successfully to public service innovation – a notable example is the UK Government, which championed the use of design with its Gov.UK portal, which is recognised by other national governments, as well as through international design awards (Government Digital Service, 2015; Gruber *et al.*, 2015). The impact of service design is remarkable and the application of this concept is growing rapidly all over the world (Mager, 2016)

During this period management scholars have focused on the role of design management and service design as a tool for innovation in both products and services, and have studied its impact on business performance (e.g. Black and Baker, 1987; Bruce and Bessant, 2002; Chiva and Alegre, 2009; Gemser and Leenders, 2001; Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Kotler and Rath, 1984; Moultrie and Livesey, 2014; Walsh, 1996).

A designer's approach to a problem begins with an acute observation of the service users and of the system's context and constraints, be they socio-cultural, technical or economic, in what is known as the 'discovery' phase. This may involve ethnography, visual anthropology and the use of participative workshops with users and front-line teams. The next phase involves developing insights and framing the problem, often referred to as the 'define' phase. This is to ensure an understanding of the underlying causes rather than the symptoms of the problem and the

human as well as technical and economic constraints that will help define the brief. From here, designers move into the 'ideation phase', exploring through prototypes and visualisations. This will include working with potential users and other stakeholders to consider alternative potential solutions and how different types of users and stakeholders might interact with those solution concepts. In the final 'delivery' phase, the prototypes are tested not only in terms of their technical robustness and effectiveness, but also for their fit with users' needs and the broader context of their lives (Stickdorn *et al.*, 2017).

The rapid visualisation, building and testing of prototypes at different levels of fidelity and subsequent rapid iterations is a crucial part of the design process. It is used to bring together interdisciplinary teams to quickly share their understanding of the effectiveness of the proposition; by embodying the proposition in material form, it can create a boundary-spanning object (Tushman, 1977). A boundary-spanning object is a commonly understood object that enables different disciplines to communicate more effectively and to identify any previously hidden barriers to adoption, or possibly to explore opportunities to improve the proposition. In the case of this project, not only did the testing focus on the end service, but the process of testing also helped to anticipate systemic constraints and potential systemic barriers.

Applying this approach to services rather than the design of physical goods implies a detailed and profound understanding of the users' journey and experience before engineering the process workflow. The user experience rather than the phenomenon of the task flow becomes the frame of reference for the design, and each element or task within it. It involves co-design, designing with users, front-line teams delivering the services, and key stakeholders. It is a highly collaborative and iterative process that discovers needs, frames the key insights, and then rapidly prototypes and trials potential solutions with key stakeholders before moving into the delivery phase. At the heart of service design is the primacy of the human experience. The products, services, processes, organisational design and business model should enable that compelling, effective and even transformative experience, rather than the other way around. The user experience should not simply be a probable consequence of design choices; it should be highly intentional.

This approach is especially powerful when it used for breakthrough thinking and where disruptive innovation is required, or where there is a need to address 'wicked' problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973). This is

where the nature of the problems and the system's context may be unclear or highly complex. The challenges and complexity of the criminal justice system and, within it, the role of the prison service, have this level of complexity and can be categorised as a 'wicked' problem.

### **Project inception and research approach**

The project was initiated and led by Judah Armani, one of the authors of this paper, a second-year postgraduate student on the Service Design Masters programme at the RCA. This programme explores the intersection of design thinking, social change and enterprise, and encourages students – especially those with years of experience in design or related disciplines – to develop and apply their skills through an innovation project of their choice.

Judah spent 18 months researching the prison service through a combination of ethnographic research and the use of semi-structured interviews and workshops with prisoners, officers and governors. He then used co-creation workshops, first with prison officers and then with prisoners, to identify a series of insights and subsequently applied an action research approach to develop and test a service proposition to address the needs of the different stakeholders and the challenges identified through the insights. The initial proposition was first tested in HMP Elmley, where lessons were learned, and then deployed to a further 4 prisons.

### **Key insights from research**

His research findings identified five key insights that shaped, and continue to shape, the initiative and the resulting service proposition.

#### *Insight 1: Focus on what's strong, not what's wrong*

The interviews with prisoners identified that those who had been exclusively involved in organised crime, or drug dealing of some sort, were highly entrepreneurial. They understood stock, flow, supply and demand, for all the wrong reasons, but nonetheless they understood the concepts of business. This contrasted with the provision of work for prisoners within the prisons, which was very non-aspirational and could not exploit their entrepreneurial skills.

*Insight 2: Sustainability*

All the men interviewed suffered repeatedly from breakdowns in their relationships, which seemed to always end badly in their lives, whether that was primary caregiver or a love relationship. This led to the second insight, of ensuring that any programme or set of actions put in place was sustainable. Any solution that was developed would have to enable the development of long-term sustainable relationships that could span inside and outside of prison, as well as ensuring that the service is sustainable enough for prisoners to make longer term plans.

*Insight 3: Safe and enabling environments*

Judah's previous research with Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) indicated that of the 86,000 prisoners in the UK, almost 50% are products of a PRU or indeed never finished school at all. This led to the third insight, that it was imperative to create safe and enabling environments. The moment any delivery in prison begins to feel like school, the prisoners immediately disengage. The environments offered by any new service would need to be mindful of the social and physical architecture, and could be expressed as: how might we continually seek to create the space that provides safety and encourages personal expression?

*Insight 4: Language*

The average vocabulary of a prisoner may reduce to less than 3000 words after being in a prison for as little as 12 months (from an interview with Nicholas Coutts of the Dialogue Trust). The lack of language to express oneself can increase frustration and lead to more disruptive and violent behaviour, so the insight that emerged focused on how we might nurture dialogue and expansion of vocabulary with a view to reducing violence.

*Insight 5: Aspirational and restorative*

While there are already employment opportunities within prison, they do not cater for restorative practice and there appear to be no plans in this regard. There are restorative programmes on offer in prison, but these are never connected to employability skills, and tend to be administered by charities, which brings their sustainability into question. The final insight was that the solution would need to provide employment, skills development and opportunities that were both aspirational and restorative.

## **Solution development**

In September 2017, Judah began incorporating these insights into a learning and development platform designed for scale and for delivery of sessions within prison. To complement the platform, he chose the music industry, and specifically a record label, to provide all the learning and development, transferable skill sets and aspiration to a set of selected prisoners at HMP Elmley. The design was undertaken with the prisoners, so that the proposition that emerged was one they were wholly invested in, and the role of the service designer was one of facilitation, administration and helping to nurture and guide the concepts that emerged, as well as to visualise and bring materiality to those concepts.

Judah was supported by the Head of Service Design at the RCA, Nick de Leon, and from EY by Neil Sartorio and his team. Together they developed and then tested the initial concept, convinced the first prison (HMP Elmley) and its Governor to support this initiative, developed the model with the prison service and the prisoners, and collectively launched an initial prototype of the service in the autumn of 2017. From this initial prototype, the proposition was refined and it is now operating in four UK prisons.

A crucial element of the concept was to involve the prisoners as stakeholders in the design of the service and setting up the record label, InHouse Records. The prisoners came up with the brand, its name and the design of the label itself, and are not only stakeholders in its development and operations but will become shareholders in the social enterprise following the formation. Another important element is the design of the business model, to which the prisoners again provided input. All of the profits created by InHouse Records go to the Victim Support Fund.

The service has three distinct components – (1) the record label, which generates new music and releases singles; (2) the recording studios, which can be used by musicians outside of the prison and enables them to work with prisoners and record new music; and (3) a marketing and event management section to enable concerts to be performed within the prisons (as so famously demonstrated by Johnny Cash at San Quentin).

As future employment is a very important dimension of the service, the project sought sponsors and potential employment partners and has created a series of partnerships with Universal Records, Fender Guitars, Roland Instruments and the BBC.

There are two sides to the label: the one inside the prison that identifies and trains musicians, songwriters, marketing, engineers and technicians, as well as one outside involved in reaching out to the music business and channels of distribution. The element outside offers employment opportunities to prisoners when released as well as providing the support they need in making their first steps into purposeful work, either in the music industry through the partners listed above or with other firms where they can exploit their skills.

The record label identifies and develops the prisoners' talent in songwriting and musicianship, sound engineering and production, marketing and events management. It offers opportunities to prisoners to develop their capacity as songwriters, managers, producers and performers, and to develop skills as a result in leadership, management, supply chain, marketing, technical systems and project management, as well as their creative skills and potential. To achieve this goal, the prisoners are supported by experts from the music industry, academia and business. These are drawn from the partnership network of companies in the music business, media and professional services firms, especially EY.

One of the key goals is to help improve prisoners' attitude and behaviour by providing work experience with transferable skills and industry-accredited qualifications, all under the umbrella of the record industry, which is able to capture prisoners' imaginations and fuel their commitment. Outside prison, the label seeks to reduce reoffending and create safer, crime-free communities.

While setting up an enterprise of this kind within a prison is certainly innovative, the focus on prisoners' experiences is ground-breaking. Working with music enables the prisoners to unburden themselves emotionally through self-expression. The model focuses on what's strong – not what's wrong – and uses 'restorative storytelling' to help prisoners make sense of their lives by framing it all with music. In and of itself, the music offers genuine benefits for reducing anxiety and stress, which means that it is possible to positively affect the rehabilitation culture in prisons and help prisoners take control of their future. Prisoners are encouraged to recount their interests and experiences through restorative storytelling, where past experiences are explored and skills that the men once viewed as 'bad' can be repurposed for good. This process allows prisoners to look on the past not as a waste of time but as a mix of bad choices, salvaging skills that can be used in better ways.

The approach is highly inclusive and has encouraged some formerly more passive prisoners to not just take part but actually become involved in leading the label.

The initial prototype service was tested at HMP Elmley and the platform was refined as a result to ensure that prisoners could move through the service components in a non-linear way rather than with a highly prescriptive model. It also demonstrated the importance of industry partnerships within as well as outside of the prison to create opportunities for prisoners for subsequent employment as well as to support the skill development of the prisoners. When the first prisoners were released it also identified the need to provide extensive initial support to enable them to harness the experience they had had with InHouse Records and use that to create employment opportunities. The learning was exploited in subsequent jobs and the platform became increasingly robust and, importantly, applicable to domains other than music. This important element emerged from the testing, demonstrating that the platform, if sufficiently robust, could be tailored further and applied in domains such as fashion, catering and hospitality.

### **Achievement to date**

InHouse Records is now a functioning record label that's been launched in HMP Elmley and HMP Rochester. It is transforming the behaviour of high-risk prisoners, developing their skills and self-esteem, and creating job opportunities for them on release. InHouse Records is about to be incorporated as a company, and the prisoners involved are being issued shares as part of its formation.

The label began releasing its first singles in November 2017 and is targeting three new singles each month for National Prison Radio. Now a steady stream of music is emerging from all four prisons.

In December 2017, the first showcase of work by the prisoners was shared outside of the prison community. In front of a proud audience of friends and family, as well as 40 trainee prison officers, this vibrant showcase for the pioneering record label demonstrated previously hidden or undiscovered talents. The co-founders of the label confidently performed a set-list of their own songs, hitting the right notes between fun, camaraderie and, at times, brutally honest and confessional narratives.

## Impact assessment

It is still very early to assess the impact accurately; however, those who are participating in the label have since met with fewer problems in prison. The prisoners chosen by prison staff for the pilot at Elmley were the hardest-to-reach men. For instance, they had refused to leave their wing for any work in the past. After six months, a few showcases and five singles, there had been a reduction in negative entries on their personal records by 30%, almost 40% fewer adjudications, and a 428% increase in positive entries in the prison log.

As a result of the initial impact at Elmley, it received support from the Minister for Prisons and the Head of the prison service and it has been established in three further prisons at Rochester, Oxford and Lewes, with plans for Belfast. The current goal of InHouse is to grow to operate in 60 prisons by 2020, and strong support has been given to the service by the then Secretary of State for Justice.

Feedback from all those involved has been encouraging. A prison officer, Tom Cunningham, commented that ‘for me personally, the label has been the best part of my nine-year career in the prison service. Working with men who want to change and be the best versions of themselves has had a positive effect on my attitude.’

The Governor at HMP Elmley – referred to as ‘Number One’ – cites the label as ‘helping staff recognise a different way of approaching rehabilitation’.

## Learning from InHouse Records

The key lessons we can take from this are as follows.

- *Co-design and co-ownership.* The power and importance of a service design approach: in this case the prisoners were tasked with the challenge of defining the principles to ensure high-level design, and were involved not just as another stakeholder but at the heart of the programme and in a leadership role.
- *Alignment of interests.* The success of this initiative to date is based on the prisoners being engaged in an activity that resonates with their personal interest, ignites their passion and can give them a sense of achievement in a field that is recognised by their peers. It also is aligned with the prison services goals of skills development, reduced recidivism and improved behaviour. This last point is crucial, as poor

behaviour carries real economic costs for the prison service, so improvements in behaviour are reflected in savings to their budget and enable further investment in skills and training.

- *Partnerships.* The resources of other organisations and firms in the music industry and media industries are crucial to developing skills as well as supporting real employment opportunities.
- *Creation of role models.* In prison the role models are often negative ones with connotations of violence and control. This project has created a new set of role models, and the achievement of previously passive and even vulnerable prisoners has inspired not only the 'bigger characters' but also those who have previously stepped back from engaging in initiatives like this. The involvement of ex-prisoners who return to explain how the programme supported them on leaving has been an inspiration to many.
- *Creation of a platform.* The approach in terms of the design for prisoner engagement, on-boarding, management, partnership, business model, skills and training, release and support on release are all repeatable in other sectors; for instance, fashion, food and beverage and sport. As a result, working with the prison service, EY and the RCA, we are examining other opportunities, especially in women's prisons, to exploit this approach
- *Business model design.* It is important to combine a robust and sustainable service model with a robust commercial model. In this case, a service business can be funded through social investment bonds, and can deliver a service to the prison service. Combining the service design approach with EY's social venture practice has enabled the design of the service and the design of the business model to proceed hand in hand.

Service design is an innovative approach to public services that uses in-depth exploration in order to discover opportunities; co-creates concepts for desirable futures; and prototypes, tests and iterates these concepts – and thus is able to develop innovation that is rooted in user needs and is viable as a solid business model.

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