

## **The Rationale: -**

### **- for the proposed Experiment in Upside-Down Management for Probation practitioners**

This Rationale is partly a Literature Review, and partly a Business Case

#### **The Argument:**

1. Probation is currently performing poorly, by the expectations of the Inspectorate et al, compared with 15 years ago, and morale is not high. Alongside continuing workload pressures, one of the key reasons for this is that HMPPS's style of top-down micromanagement is the wrong approach to managing frontline Probation practice.
2. Other management methods are available, including Modern Probation Theory (MPT), which are more suited to managing a 'professional assemblage'.
3. MPT is a very specific form of practitioner-centred management (similar to the Timpsons'<sup>1</sup> "Upside Down Management"), which Defines WHAT Probation Practitioners (PPs) should be aiming to achieve with each case, but liberates the PPs to use their own creativity and initiative to decide HOW they go about achieving it.
4. MPT is a 'grounded theory', based on what was actually done in practice to manage a Probation area in the past – Berkshire Probation Service - which quickly achieved very good Inspection results and other key metrics.
5. A key 'component' within MPT is the principle that a PP should be focusing their attention with each case on where they want to get the case TO – defined outcomes – and that they should be able to self-assess their own progress towards achieving those outcomes 'in real time', and especially at the very point of closing the case.
6. The "How'm I Doing?" app is the proposed means of delivering that key component; much of it is already complete, and with the aid of some volunteer PPs it could be first piloted, then finalised as "1.0", and then given a trial run – that is the "Experiment" that is being proposed here.
7. The Experiment will not be successful, if the volunteer PPs don't engage with this way of working, or don't find it helpful, or don't actually like the responsibilities that it places on them as PPs – i.e. if they find they would actually prefer to return to being micromanaged.
8. The Experiment will be successful if the volunteer PPs find the app helpful to them in self-assessing their own work with each case 'in real time', and are able to record the outcomes that they have achieved with each case.
9. If the Experiment is unsuccessful, MPT will need to be rethought; if the Experiment is successful, then HMPPS may need to rethink how it manages Probation practice.
10. By helping to migrate Probation practice from being "process-focused" to becoming more clearly "outcome-focused" [Richard Susskind, *How to Think about AI*], Future Probation will be better prepared for using AI to become more effective.

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<sup>1</sup> See Timpson, John, *Upside Down Management: A Common Sense Guide to Better Business* (Wiley, Chichester, 2010); and Timpson, James, *The Happy Index: Lessons in Upside Down Management* (HarperCollins, Manchester, 2024)

## The Rationale

### The Problem:

Probation is currently performing poorly, by the expectations of the Inspectorate et al, compared with 15 years ago, and morale is not high.

### Evidence:

Although I would not, myself, regard this as conclusive evidence, it is noteworthy that over the last 4 years, HM Inspectorate of Probation has not awarded a rating above “Requires improvement” (3<sup>rd</sup> of 4 overall ratings) to any of the Probation delivery units that it has inspected in that time. But this is not in itself conclusive evidence of deficiencies in the current management approach because:

- Overall single ratings are in themselves unsatisfactory, distracting attention from focusing on which areas of work are going well, and which are going not-so-well.
- There are many other factors contributing to the Probation Service’s current poor showing – notably repeated reorganisations and restructuring, and an incremental pattern until very recently of long-term reduction in resourcing compared with the demands required. (For a frontline Probation practitioner, reduced resourcing means higher individual case numbers per practitioner – numbers far higher than for any individual Youth Justice practitioner, for example.)

However, having acknowledged those substantial considerations, there are further dimensions to the Inspectorate’s findings over the course of the last six years that suggest a deeper question to be asked. Notably, in 2019, when specific ratings were being awarded for aspects of management as well as for aspects of frontline practice, the Inspectorate found itself in the position in its end of year review<sup>2</sup> of having inspected 28 organisations (NPS regions and CRCs), and had rated three as “Outstanding” for ‘Leadership’, even though disappointing case supervision scores had led to all three being given an overall rating of “Requires Improvement”. Furthermore, of another 18 organisations, 14 had been rated “Good” for ‘Leadership’ while also only meriting overall the “Requires Improvement” rating.

Leaving to one side the issues (for the Inspectorate) of inspection methodology, and focusing instead on the more important question – for the Probation Service - of operational effectiveness, the question arises here: ***Isn’t good management supposed to lead to an effective organisation?***

I have previously reviewed some of the literature on that subject, in the Appendix 1 to an independent report on Kent, Surrey & Sussex CRC in 2020,<sup>3</sup> and of course the relationship between quality of management and organisational effectiveness is by no means a straightforward one. A very significant factor in Probation is – obvious, one would think - that there will be a notable time lag between any managerial action or improvement and any resulting change in frontline practice. Therefore, it could be argued that those organisations with Outstanding or Good Leadership might not show good quality frontline scores just yet, but will do so in the course of the subsequent two to three years. But, as we can see from the Inspectorate’s most recent Inspection reports, ***that hasn’t happened.***

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<sup>2</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation, *2018/2019 inspections of probation services: summary report* (October 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Bridges, A, Lester, S, & Smith, A, *Managing Probation: Private v “Private”?* (2021) pp49-58,

[https://www.andrewbridgesprobation.com/files/ugd/b9d8fa\\_5c5140e6b49f40bdac00f81b2c715300.pdf](https://www.andrewbridgesprobation.com/files/ugd/b9d8fa_5c5140e6b49f40bdac00f81b2c715300.pdf)

Could a firm conclusion be drawn from this? – almost certainly not. But equally it would surely be negligent to exclude the possibility that the existing consensus, or group-think, of what constitutes ‘Good Management’ might not be the right one.

Further evidence from the Inspectorate comes from some of their other recent studies.

In its January 2025 *Recruitment, training, and retention thematic inspection*,<sup>4</sup> the Inspectorate found that, essentially, many recruits had been misled about the nature of the work that would be required of them (that can be, and has been, rectified I gather). The current ‘leaver’ rates of Probation practitioners was nevertheless a clear concern, being 7.8% for POs, and 12.1% for PSOs. Low job satisfaction was a notable factor.

Moreover, a further “key issue” was the:

*“...tension between practitioners’ professional priorities and the expectations placed on them by the service. More needs to be done to harmonise these expectations and ensure that practitioners feel proud of the valuable work they do, to change lives and keep communities safe.”* (Foreword, page 5)

Such a ‘harmonisation’ is achievable, but in my view will not be achieved through ever-more-detailed top-down lists of instructions, however well-intentioned.

In an earlier inspection, on the role of the Senior Probation Officer,<sup>5</sup> the Inspectorate in 2024 criticised the sheer quantity of routine ‘checking’ and countersigning that had built up incrementally for SPOs. Some improvements have been made since then, though the underlying assumption remains that a key way of managing frontline practice is that many individual work processes should be ‘checked’ by a manager - essentially repeating the task.

In the *National Inspection*, published in April 2025, the Chief Inspector said in his Foreword on the subject of Leadership:

*“Leadership needed to be stronger, both in providing consistent messaging and delivering action, in relation to the key objectives of probation supervision: to protect the public and reduce reoffending. These two core objectives should not be delivered as isolated entities but embedded across all delivery outcomes, and we did not see this cohesion at a national level.”*<sup>6</sup>

In my opinion the points about the need for “consistent messaging” and a focused “embedding” of the “core objectives” are well made (though I don’t necessarily endorse all the detailed Recommendations, which themselves risk adding to the existing plethora of well-intended micromanagement).

There are also other sources of evidence that give grounds for concern about how Probation is managed. (Yet rarely, until very recently, has the subject of how Probation is **managed** – as opposed to how it is *structured* – been addressed by academics and other commentators. Certainly there are regular exhortations that Probation should be owned publicly rather than privately, or structured locally rather than nationally, but in my view these carry little evidenced analysis, and are in any case secondary considerations.) The Civil Service’s own annual ‘People Survey’ is one of these other sources of evidence.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/32/2025/01/Recruitment-training-and-retention-thematic-final-250211.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/32/2024/01/The-role-of-the-senior-probation-officer-and-management-oversight-in-the-Probation-Service.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/national-inspection-april-2025/#1-ForewordfromtheHMChiefInspector>

This annual survey<sup>7</sup> of all CS staff includes benchmarking by individual organisation, and the 2024 results, published in May 2025, will no doubt have caused the HR people some concerns when they compared Probation staff with the overall median CS results:

- Probation staff gave a lower response rate to the survey than other Civil Servants, and showed lower on the Engagement index (B47-51), and disclosed higher “stress”.
- Although they were actually more positive on “objectives and purpose” (B06-B07), they were markedly less positive on resources, workload, pay and benefits (B29-B37).
- They were less optimistic that changes from the top were “usually for the better” (B43), and on having an “opportunity to contribute my views before changes are made” (B45).
- They were much less positive that “I have a choice in deciding how I do my work” (B05) or on being “encouraged to come up with new & better ways of doing things” (B20).
- Fewer felt “valued for the work I do” (B27) and an **absolute minority** would “recommend my organisation as a great place to work” (B48) -
  - where the median for Civil Servants was that nearly two-thirds would say yes.

These results are by no means in themselves catastrophic for Probation, but a clear theme can be detected that staff, who have been required to undertake formal training in how to deliver an individualised service, then find themselves with insufficient discretion to decide for themselves how to deliver it, and with insufficient control over how they manage their own day-to-day working lives.

In response to this, the Civil Service has focused very strongly on the later questions, concerning bullying and inappropriate discrimination by managers, by commissioning the Rademaker Professional Standards Review (relevant indeed). In addition there have been other programmes to reduce workload and to enable more officer discretion and professional judgement: SEEDS2, RPSS and the Impact initiative – however, it can be seen that the reliance on yet more volumes of detailed instructions on how to implement these has greatly limited their potential benefits:

SEEDS2 and RPSS are very good well-intended training and development initiatives from the Learning Faculty of HMPSS. They reflect the desired aspiration for PPs to use their interpersonal skills and reflective abilities to engage effectively with people on probation, and thereby provide an individualised service. Although this aspiration is to be welcomed, the Sheffield Hallam evaluation<sup>8</sup> reveals its limited impact in real life and the reasons for that:

However, implementation was hampered by systemic issues, particularly high caseloads, time constraints, and competing organisational demands. A tension emerged between SEEDS2’s relational ethos and the bureaucratic, performance-driven structure of probation work. Some saw SEEDS2 as aligned with good practice, while others perceived it as adding to an already overburdened role. (p2)

However, the extent to which SEEDS2 has changed practice remains limited. This is primarily due to systemic constraints, including unmanageable workloads, role complexity, and misalignment between SEEDS2’s relational ethos and the service’s managerial priorities.(p3)

Actually, it is very encouraging that at least the intentions, as well as much of the content, of SEEDS2 and RPSS were welcomed by practitioners. Hopefully this also reflects their desire to be enabled by HMPPS to make more use of their own initiative(s) in their daily work.)

For many felt that they were already familiar with the principles of SEEDS2:

“I found that what we covered in the SEEDS training was what I (and many other practitioners) were already implementing. ..”(p15)

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<sup>7</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67974db0fadfcd21351e28dc/Civil\\_Service\\_People\\_Survey\\_2024\\_Benchmark\\_Results.ods](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67974db0fadfcd21351e28dc/Civil_Service_People_Survey_2024_Benchmark_Results.ods)

<sup>8</sup> SEEDS2 EVALUATION, Dr Jake Phillips, Sam Ainslie, Andrew Fowler, Dr Jennifer Rainbow & Dr Chalen Westaby, July 2025

- but for this PP the problem was not the principles but the implementation, as their comment continued:

“... The barriers to this are organisational priorities and policies, which do not fit into the SEEDS principles.”

Indeed, the majority of comments about the SEEDS2 training itself was very positive, but these PPs experienced a mismatch between the training and the way they were being managed:

“I think what SEEDS2 was kind of telling us about how we should be working is very at odds with what the organisation kind of expects and what the organisation is set out to do.”(p31)

“It is about the increase in bureaucracy, in prescription in micromanagement”. (Practitioner, p32)

“Yeah, I think that was the biggest issue for me - that it feels kind of at odds with how the organisation actually works.” (Practitioner, p32)

The researchers observe at this point:

This misalignment between person centred approaches and managerial focus of the Probation Service suggests that more needs to be done to counteract this managerial shift in probation for SEEDS2 to fulfil the potential that many participants identified in the approach... (p31)

Notably, even the RPSS has been experienced as a piece of bureaucratic procedure, and therefore in some respects an additional burden (despite its good intentions). Ideally:

“...reflective supervision can help people move from *being reliant on a colleague to make decisions to becoming responsible themselves...*”(SPO, p36 – my italics)

- but even this good initiative has been implemented by ‘issuing a list of actions’ – a case of yet more micromanagement.

Alongside this, even the Impact initiative has required a 13-page document of detailed instructions (April 2025) about how to reduce each PP’s workload by what is frankly a very marginal amount.

The Sheffield Hallam researchers have thereby identified “misalignment”, alongside workload issues, as the main obstacle to better implementation of these promising initiatives, and in response they understandably promote what are essentially ‘wishful thinking’ solutions.

A more comprehensive analysis of the management of Probation has at last arisen from other academic sources very recently, culminating in the April 2025 publication of a work by Kevin Wong *et al*<sup>9</sup>. Their “realist review” starts by describing and criticising what they call the “New Public Management (NPM)” approach to managing Probation – notably “visible hands-on top management; explicit standards and performance measures; greater emphasis on output controls ... and discipline and parsimony in resource use.” (Their definition includes the ‘marketisation’ etc elements that need not concern us here.)

They then posit an alternative approach, which they call “New Public Governance (NPG)” – a “mid-level theory of effective (frontline) management” - which they are urging current Probation management within HMPPS to adopt. Their review had been commissioned by the Inspectorate, so their NPG theory incorporates some of the assumptions also traceable in the Inspectorate’s recommendations in contemporary reports, including the assumption that close supervision by frontline managers of detailed processes is always essential.

Implicitly the authors appear to accept that their theory is, indeed, entirely theoretical, but claim that they are in current dialogue with “NPS” [*sic*] senior managers about moving towards it. From my perspective NPG seems a long way away from the realities of a practitioner interacting with a

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<sup>9</sup> Wong, Kevin; Fox, Christopher; Adams-Guppy, David; Hall, Ben (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) and Webster, Russell (Independent Researcher, UK), ‘A realist review to develop a theory of effective front-line management in probation and youth justice’, *Probation Journal* April 2025

succession of individual people on probation every day; it is remarkably complex and for me it does not quite pass the 'plain English' test.

But at least it is an attempt to move beyond solely retrospective critical analysis, and thereby to consider prospectively how practice – specifically Probation's frontline practice – could be managed differently. It rightly opens up the point that ***different types of work, and different types of organisation, might need different 'types' of management*** in order to be effective. This is the essential preliminary presupposition on which this Rationale is based.

### **Other management methods, including Modern Probation Theory (MPT)**

The wider canon of literature on management eventually evolved in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century into a series of 'horses for courses' debates, i.e. which style of management was best for which type of organisation?

Before those debates there had been earlier management theories, from the early concepts of Henri Fayol (the 'Classical School', focusing on military leadership) to the 'scientific management' of Frederick Taylor – introduced to make factory production more efficient – to Peter Drucker, credited with devising Management by Objectives. More recently was Peters and Waterman's McKinsey 7-S Framework for more modern people-centred enterprises etc. (See Bridges et al,<sup>10</sup> for a somewhat fuller review of this literature.)

But once it had dawned on academics that perhaps different organisations needed different management approaches, theories started to develop along the lines of 'which horses for which courses?'

Vroom & Yetton, and Henry Mintzberg, are two examples of authors who ambitiously sought a *universal comprehensive* answer to that question. In their different ways they aimed to achieve a situational prescriptive 'science' that would guide future managers as to what would work best in different circumstances. But this was illusory. David Guest<sup>11</sup> describes how the decision-tree devised by Vroom & Yetton was so complex as to defy any means of verifying it empirically. Meanwhile, Mintzberg appears to have abandoned his own ambition to produce a comprehensive 'Theory of Management Policy' at some point during the production of the third volume of his own planned five-volume work.

The principle of 'seeking horses for courses' was right, but the idea that this could in time be distilled into a comprehensive 'prescriptive science' to guide future managers in any given circumstance was as impossible as it has proven with all the human sciences – including, incidentally, frontline probation practice. The infinite variety of human beings, acting in an almost infinite variety of circumstances, means that while *approximations* can be deduced from evidence of past behaviour, *absolute accuracy* in predicting future behaviour is necessarily impossible. (This is compounded by the additional point that a human can always choose consciously to avoid behaving as predicted.)

Mintzberg seems to have taken this point in his later works, which set aside aiming at universality, but which remain focused on situational analyses, and on guiding managers in a practical way towards what actions and behaviours *are likely to be* successful. His observations are valuable, because in the tradition of Sune Carlsen and Rosemary Stewart he has widely studied what managers *actually do*, as opposed to what he surmises they *might* be doing.

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<sup>10</sup> Bridges et al, *Managing Probation: Private v "Private"?* (2021), pp49-58,  
[https://www.andrewbridgesprobation.com/files/ugd/b9d8fa\\_5c5140e6b49f40bdac00f81b2c715300.pdf](https://www.andrewbridgesprobation.com/files/ugd/b9d8fa_5c5140e6b49f40bdac00f81b2c715300.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> David Guest, "Leadership & Management" in *Psychology at Work*, ed P Warr (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 186

In his typology of five different types of organisation, the one he called in 1979 a “Professional Bureaucracy”<sup>12</sup> he renamed in 2019 a “professional assemblage”<sup>13</sup> and gave it a much punchier description. The learning to be gained from it is still the same, because as a theoretical concept it was one that emerged from grounded observational research. And its implications for finding better ways of managing Probation properly are very clear.

For Probation quite evidently fits the ‘professional bureaucracy/assemblage’ type, a structural configuration that is “common in universities, general hospitals, school systems, public accounting firms, social work agencies, and craft production firms. All rely on their skills and knowledge of their operating professionals to function; all produce standard products or services.”<sup>14</sup> This type of organisation requires *standardisation of skills* rather than *standardisation of work processes*;<sup>15</sup> its strength is in the training and skill levels of its “operating professionals” and its weakness is when there is ambiguity – or even downright disagreement – over what specifically each practitioner is striving to achieve. If it is not perceived by others as being ‘successful’, it is vulnerable to external interference. That ‘interference’ will often take the form of micromanagement, which is partly a consequence of the lack of clarity about *what specifically needs to be achieved*.

Naturally the managers of a professional assemblage need to apply an approach suitable to that type of organisation, so Mintzberg describes it as “Dysfunctional” when such managers respond to such external interference by trying to control the work of the organisation using “direct supervision, standardization of work processes, or standardization of outputs.” Often this also means direct regulation of how time at work will be spent, detailing every step in how every job will be carried out, and counting outputs of things that may be irrelevant or even counter-productive.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, staff who have been trained in the skills to deliver an individualised service will become frustrated if they find in such a climate that they do not have the discretion and control of their own job to choose how to use those skills.

If Mintzberg is to be taken seriously, the lessons are obvious. If the managers of Future Probation are to maintain any way of meeting Government and public expectations, while also managing their organisation(s) in a way that is appropriate for a professional assemblage – and with finite resources - they will have to make use of the skills, behaviours and actions that are the right ones for this particular type of organisation. Probation practice takes place in a dispersed setting, where managerial supervision is principally indirect, and where managers need their practitioners to ‘own’ and ‘internalise’ the purpose(s) of the organisation – this is because they need staff to achieve management’s objectives in settings that are not directly supervised. Because every case is different, they also need their practitioners to exercise wide discretion in how they go about doing that.

To achieve this, they need to be able to specify what success looks like, and to do so in a way that leads staff to attribute to their managers an intrinsic legitimate ‘right to manage’ – this is the ‘legitimacy’ dimension of attribution theory.<sup>17</sup> To this end, managers need to note that some actions and ‘mini-behaviours’ of managers/leaders will often be interpreted by subordinates and

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 348-379

<sup>13</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *Bedtime Stories for Managers*, 54-6

<sup>14</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 348-9

<sup>15</sup> “Standardization of work processes” is instead a key characteristic of a Machine Bureaucracy. *Structuring*, 314-347

<sup>16</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 376-8

<sup>17</sup> From their survey in five countries, AS Tannenbaum et al, *Hierarchy in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), found this to be the main given reason for staff complying with managers.

others as “leadership behaviour” whether or not they were intended as such.<sup>18</sup> In my experience, when practitioners feel that they can attribute a sense of ‘shared values’ – e.g. a ‘culture of quality practice’ – to their managers, this increases their desire to achieve what their managers want. So it is important for managers not just to specify what success looks like, but to do so *skilfully*.

This is where Modern Probation Theory (MPT) comes in, setting out a management approach that is suitable for a “professional assemblage”.

Modern Probation Theory (MPT) offers a comprehensive ‘whole system’ model of how PPs could and should be managed that avoids the constant need to issue detailed top-down instructions. It is a grounded theory, based on the experience of a very successfully managed area Probation Service 1999-2001 (Berkshire Probation Service). It is a very specific version of ‘practitioner-centred’ management, but it also has very strong parallels with the ‘Upside-Down Management’ approach described very fully by both the current Prisons & Probation Minister and his father.

MPT first specifies The Three Purposes of Probation:

- “Am I helping to Reduce this individual’s Likelihood of Reoffending?”
- “Am I helping to Implement this individual’s Court sentence, or Licence?”
- “Am I helping to Contain this individual’s Risk of Harm to others?”
  - (all to be done within a Framework of public service ‘parameters’).

- And then it Defines ‘success’ with each of them – i.e. “what good looks like” as Timpson would say. Outcomes in other words. MPT’s outcomes for each of the Three Purposes closely parallel the criteria & standards employed by HM Inspectorate since 2008 in their case inspections. Some language might at first sight seem unfamiliar, but the concepts are readily recognisable as good practice to most practitioners and managers (and inspectors).

Overall, while MPT Prescribes the WHAT that needs to be achieved, it does no more than Advise - and train, develop & support - HOW PPs might go about achieving it with each case.

(In case of doubt, under this approach training and development remains unquestionably an essential element of the Probation world, but MPT always uses this as part of its Advice function, not its Prescribe function. Indeed MPT **actually makes room** for the implementation of training and development initiatives like SEEDS2 and RPSS, because its clarity of focus on the WHAT means that micromanaged detailed lists of processes and procedures are either reduced or eliminated altogether.)

The full Introduction to MPT accompanies this paper as a separate document, for information, so there is little further description of it here. Alongside it is an additional document providing some evidence of how it worked and what that way of working achieved in Berkshire at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Objectives were set that ‘made sense’ to Probation Officers, being consistent with their ideas of ‘good practice’, and because they became more focused on what they were trying to achieve with each case they gained a sense of both achievement and recognition when the Inspectorate gave the Service a very positive report. (It later emerged that Berkshire had achieved the 3<sup>rd</sup> best result (from 55 Probation areas) in that inspection programme.)

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<sup>18</sup> Mintzberg’s research observations include, in the somewhat dated language of 1973: “Each time a manager encourages or criticises a subordinate he is acting in his capacity as leader. Most often, he does these things when he is engaged in activities that have other basic purposes – to transmit information or to make strategic decisions. But in virtually everything he does, the manager’s actions are screened by subordinates searching for leadership clues. In answering a request for authorization, he may encourage or inhibit a subordinate, and even in his form of greeting, messages (perhaps non-existent ones) may be read by anxious subordinates.” Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, 1973, p61

That experience confirms that in a ‘professional assemblage’ an essential element is that practitioners and managers have a sense of working to broadly the same ‘shared values’. When those shared values are clearly reflected in the outcomes that are Prescribed for them, this enables PPs to be positively motivated about working towards them.

### **Where this Experiment fits in:**

A core principle in MPT is this: By Defining clearly WHAT PPs should be aiming to achieve with each case – incidentally also emphasising that “Rehabilitation” is every bit as integral to PP work as is “Public Protection” – MPT directs the PP’s attention towards where each case needs to ‘arrive at’ when it closes. (This was initially quite a culture shift for Berkshire Probation officers in 1999, but in the event they made that shift quite readily.)

Furthermore, to this end, PPs need to be able to see for themselves, in real time, whether or not they are ‘on course’ for achieving the Three Purposes’ outcomes. Whereas any future inspection or management review of a case will necessarily be post hoc, and therefore too late to make any difference to the case in hand, if the PP can self-assess, or ‘self-inspect’ their own work with the case as it goes along, using the same “what good looks like” criteria<sup>19</sup>, then it becomes possible for them to modify their work if necessary while the case is still ‘live’. In effect, PPs are being invited to ‘check themselves’ as each case progresses, as opposed to waiting until an internal auditor or external inspector comes along after the event to tell them where they were going wrong.

But it is not straightforward to design and implement a ‘vehicle’ to enable that to happen in practice. (As a local Chief in 1999, I devised a combination of a paper form plus database for this purpose – that would clearly not be appropriate now.)

For the 2020s the obvious ‘vehicle’ for enabling ‘real time self-inspection’ is by means of an app, which can be carried on the PP’s phone. I am calling it the “*How’m I Doing?*” app. I have now, myself, almost completed writing the ‘front end’ of the app (the screens that the user sees / interacts with). My links with Unilink assure me that my design of the ‘back end’ (the supporting database) is sound in principle, so I am now well into the process of programming that in. For some further description – with “illustrations” – of the “*How’m I Doing?*” app, and its role, see another paper attached, ‘The Experiment: The planning so far – with illustrations’.

Therefore the aim of this project is, in effect, to road-test the tool, to find out whether it ‘works’ for the practitioners. If it ‘works’, it will be a large step towards demonstrating that HMPPS should consider changing its current top-heavy centrally-driven management of Probation work, and instead adopt the ***specific practitioner-centred approach*** advocated in *Modern Probation Theory (MPT)*. Strategically, this also means migrating ***from the micro-managing of processes to a clear focus on the specified outcomes*** – this is an essential pre-requisite for a Future Probation which will be looking to AI to help it improve its effectiveness.

AMB October 2025

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<sup>19</sup> These criteria are described in the Introduction to MPT, but to see them on the “*How’m I Doing?*” app, please refer to the ‘The Experiment: The planning so far – with illustrations’ paper.