Managing cases or supporting change? Some implications of desistance research for case management

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ABSTRACT

This article will consider how desistance research relates to the purposes of case management. Drawing on research evidence about the process of desistance this article considers what kinds of interventions and practice approaches appear to support it. The article concludes with an exploration of the potential implications of desistance research for the construction and process of case management with offenders.

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this article is to scope out some of the implications of desistance research for case management. We start by outlining some of the key findings about what research tells us about the process of desistance and what supports it. We then consider how desistance research might inform the role and purposes of case management. Finally, we discuss some of the potential implications of desistance research for the construction and process of case management, paying attention to the challenges and opportunities this presents.

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING DESISTANCE

Giving up crime, like any process of change, is often very difficult; it can mean for some people changing their lifestyles and friendship groups – as well as changing their values and beliefs. It is not surprising then that the research suggests that the process of desistance is typically characterised by uncertainty and indecision (Burnett, 1992). It is not an event, it is not a linear process; it is more of a zig-zag process of progress and setback (Glaser 1964), of hope and despair.

Some theories of desistance focus on the significance of ageing and maturation. They suggest that people grow out of crime as they mature (Glueck and Glueck, 1940; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Rutherford, 1992; Wilson and Hernstein, 1985). Other theories focus on the role of life events and transitions or turning points and social bonds in triggering change (Hirschi, 1969; Laub and Sampson, 1993; 2001; 2003; Warr, 1998). They suggest that gaining employment or getting married support change by rendering offending incompatible with the change in lifestyle, routines and roles that

these bring. For example staying in and spending time with one's family, as opposed to going out and hanging out with friends can make it easier to avoid trouble. Others explain desistance in relation to subjective or internal changes in the offender and his or her sense of self (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). Most people accept that all these factors are probably relevant (Bottoms et al., 2004; Farrall, 2002). So it is not just getting older, getting married or getting a job, it is about what these kinds of developments mean to offenders themselves and whether they represent compelling enough reasons for, and opportunities to, change the pattern of one's life. Desistance may be about identity transformations and the development or maintenance of the personal relationships that support them. However it's not *just* about someone's subjective experience of those aspects of identity. It is as much about the social, structural, and cultural conditions which make these aspects of identities assets or liabilities in the desistance process. These 'objective' social conditions must also be recognised in thinking about supporting desistance (Farrall et al., 2010; McNeill and Weaver 2010).

Hope plays a key part in the process of change – particularly in the early stages. Hope can give people an increased sense of confidence that they can exercise choice and control over their lives and overcome the challenges they face in trying to give up crime (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). With hope, a person may be more inclined to take advantage of positive social opportunities, such as employment. They might also feel more resilient when they encounter disappointments or setbacks, so long as the problems they encounter are not excessive (LeBel et al., 2008). Too many disappointments and obstacles and people can feel overwhelmed. Yet, the reality is that many people experience adverse social circumstances and these can undermine any hope they have (Burnett and Maruna, 2004). Offenders often encounter particular challenges when trying to go straight – for example – just having a criminal record can make it difficult to obtain work; for some, a limited education can constrain the types of work available. However, desistance can be prompted by someone believing in the offender (Maruna, 2001); someone who can convey hope and keep it going when the offender is experiencing particularly challenging times. This

person could be a friend, a partner, a mentor or a case manager.

Perhaps because of their experience of adversity, we know from research and practice experience that persistent offenders are very often highly fatalistic. They don't feel that they can determine the direction of their own lives. Rather, life happens to them. Yet, in spite of this, desisters somehow manage to acquire this sense of 'agency' – a sense of being able to make choices and exert control over their own lives (Maruna, 2001).

Crucially, desistance is not just about changes like these that take place inside the person. So it is not just about a change in the way the person sees themselves. It's not just about feeling that they have more choice and control over their lives. Nor is it just about learning the kinds of skills that offender programmes typically focus upon, which aim to change how people think and respond to situations that can arise. Desistance also requires social capital (Barry, 2006; 2010; Farrall, 2002; McNeill 2009; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). Social capital is essentially the network of social or relational connections that exist between people, based on norms of reciprocity and mutual helping, through which we achieve participation in society (Fukuyama, 2001). There are three types of social capital, two of which are most relevant here (Woolcock, 2001). Bonding social capital refers to close ties with family and friends. Bridging social capital refers to more distant ties, for example with a wider network of acquaintances and colleagues. People who persistently offend tend to have very little licit or legitimate social capital. Their damaged ties even to friends and family mean they often have limited access to new pro-social networks. They have to rely on criminal networks for social participation and support and this can threaten their prospects for desistance (Webster et al., 2006).

It follows that rebuilding emotional ties with families, and developing new social relationships, for example, are important aspects of desisting from crime (Giordano et al., 2003). The point is that the relational and structural contexts in which obstacles to desistance are both constructed and overcome are as important as the subjective or internal elements of the process. To support desistance, we have to

understand that 'objective', 'subjective' and 'inter-subjective' aspects interact in complex ways. Later in the process of change, social redemption also becomes important (Maruna, 2001). 'Social redemption' essentially means finding a way to 'make good', to make a positive contribution to families or communities. This is often linked to what developmental psychologists call 'generativity' (Maruna 2001; McNeill and Maruna, 2007). It is linked to re-establishing a sense of self worth and a sense of citizenship (Uggen and Janikula 1999; Uggen et al., 2004).

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO CASE MANAGEMENT

If relationships and social capital are important elements in the process of desistance, then this seems to suggest that to support desistance, we need to adopt a relational approach to case management. This means looking at how case management processes and practices are co-constructed in relationships between practitioners, offenders and those significant others that matter to offenders. More widely, it implies a role for case managers in supporting the development, or maintenance, of an offender's positive social relationships, with friends and families - as well as engaging *them* as part of the change process. A relational approach to case-management would also seem to require building constructive and collaborative relationships between justice services, voluntary and faith based organisations and communities. We will look at these three elements in turn.

The quality of the relationship between the case manager and the offender is widely recognised to be crucial in supporting the process of desistance (Leibrich 1993; 1994; Rex 1999; Barry 2000; Burnett 2004; Holt 2000; Hopkinson and Rex 2003; McNeill et al 2005; McNeill 2006). In various studies, offenders have said that what they have valued in this relationship is having someone that they could get on with and respect; who treated them as individuals; was genuinely caring; and was clear about what was expected of them and trusted them when the occasion called for it (Leibrich 1993; 1994). Offenders valued being actively engaged in the process of change. Their commitments to desist were reinforced by the personal and professional commitment shown by their case managers. They interpreted advice about their behaviours and underlying problems as evidence of their case manager's interest in their well-being and concern for them as people (Rex 1999). By contrast, people did not appreciate the sense of being 'processed' (Leibrich 1993; 1994). Where case managers communicated a lack of concern for someone, perhaps by being late or missing appointments, or showing disinterest in their concerns, this undermined the relationship and lowered people's feelings of self worth. Putting it more crudely, just like everyone else, offenders don't seem to have much time for soulless bureaucrats – but they do want fairness, consistency and reliability as well as humanity.

Case management in the UK has become more individualised in recent years – at least in the sense that the individual offender has been very much the main (or the only) target of the intervention. However, there has been an increase in interest in understanding how best to work with and through families in order to support desistance (see for example Shapiro and DiZerega, 2010; Trotter, 2010; Volvegang and Van Alphen, 2010). Such work may involve helping offenders, ex-offenders and their families to *repair* the bonding social capital represented in family ties. It might involve helping people to prepare for and *develop* ties with the new families that they form as they establish intimate relationships and become parents. This might also mean developing relationship-focussed interventions (see for example Jarvis et al., 2004) and engaging these families and other relationships as part of the change process. Restorative (Robinson and Raynor, 2006) or relational justice approaches (Faulkner, 2004) have shown that this can be effective.

A relational approach to case management as a means of supporting desistance might also involve building constructive and collaborative relationships between justice services, voluntary or third sector and faith based organisations and communities (O'Connor and O'Bogue, 2010). These organisations have particular contributions to make in supporting an offender to achieve social redemption and in promoting citizenship. This would require case managers to focus on the development of bridging social capital as a means of assisting the offender to develop stronger ties to their wider

community. In this context, there is developing interest in the role of volunteers and the role of volunteering in supporting desistance and civic reintegration (Uggen et al., 2004; Drakeford and Gregory, 2010a). This might include engaging members of the community as volunteers in mentoring current offenders, for example (Brown and Ross, 2010) and engaging ex-offenders as volunteers either in the delivery of interventions or in the community (Weaver, 2011; forthcoming). Such activities have been positively associated with desistance perhaps because they establish or reinforce notions of reciprocity and mutuality (Drakeford and Gregory, 2010b). They promote generativity and, through social recognition, they affirm and acknowledge citizenship. Furthermore, this not only benefits ex-offenders, but also the recipients of the support they provide (Uggen and Janikula, 2009).

By developing offender's positive contributions to families and by building positive ties to and roles within communities, services can create channels for the generative activities that seem to be important to those desisting from crime. This can support the identity transformations we referred to earlier and can help people to see themselves as assets, as positive contributors to communities rather than risks or threats to them, and therefore liabilities to be controlled and managed (McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

Drawing some of these strands together, then, the relational context within which desistance is co-produced would suggest that case management processes progress beyond their current focus on the individual (Farrall, 2002). If we accept that the change process extends beyond what happens in programmes or professional interventions to what individuals and informal networks contribute (see Clinks: www.clinks.org; Weaver, forthcoming), then professionally driven interventions and initiatives should be balanced by a more outward looking approach to offender and community engagement. Such an approach would include generating and supporting networks of relationships to produce changes in people's contexts and behaviour through the modification of existing relations (Donati, 2011) and, in so doing, activate the natural potential of social networks and make use of innovative forms

of relationality. This might mean not only utilizing the resources that reside within networks, families and communities to support offender re-integration but engaging under-utilized peer and familial resources within services themselves (Weaver, forthcoming).

While interventions or programmes designed to change the way people think play an important part in helping people change, they should be balanced by approaches which can harness the strengths residing in peer support networks. Such approaches might involve supporting the development of peer-led or self-help groups or access to peer mentoring schemes for example (Weaver, 2011; Weaver and Armstrong, 2011). Enlisting former offenders to speak to groups of offenders about their own experiences of change is also likely to enhance motivation and encourage hope (Weaver forthcoming). Approaches like these have been successful in supporting 'recovery' from addictions (i.e. the AA/NA model) (Marsh, 2009). Developing offenders' positive contributions to families might include providing, or using volunteers to provide, parenting classes (see Jarvis et al., 2004). Equally, group work with offenders might take the form of discussion groups that have more of an appreciative than a correctional focus (Weaver and Armstrong 2011). As well as looking at issues surrounding offending, case managers could explore, for example, men's subjective experiences of their masculinities, how these manifest in relationships, and explore alternative ways of accomplishing masculinity and identity (Gelsthorpe and McIvor, 2007).
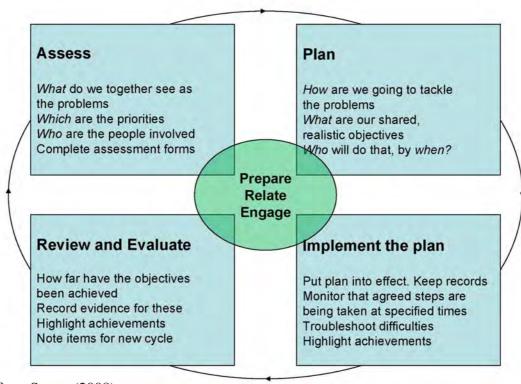
The point here is that there is scope for developing a much more robust role for enlisting volunteers in the delivery of interventions and enlisting ex/offenders as volunteers and mentors both in prisons and in community based services as well as in the community itself. Supporting desistance and community re-integration means developing programmes and initiatives that promote social responsibility, active citizenship and generativity (see for example Edgar et al., 2011). Such an approach could include increased user involvement in the design and delivery of interventions, services and policies (Weaver, 2011), a theme to which we return a little later.

THE ROLE AND PURPOSES OF CASE MANAGEMENT: MANAGING CHANGE

Managing change means securing a commitment to change from the offender and it means securing for the offender social integration within communities. Desistance can be conceived as the pathway or process to this outcome. Services, systems and case managers need to begin by understanding the desistance process and how to support it. They then need to embed the case management process in this understanding, and then embed within case management the role that various programmes, interventions and initiatives may play (McNeill 2009; McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

The term 'case management' does not describe a single way of working, but rather, to use a relational term, a family of related approaches (see Turner, 2010). In practice, this means that resources follow assessments of risks, needs and strengths. Essentially a single case manager decides how to support the change process in relation to a single service user. S/he is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to deliver a plan, but other people, often from different organisations, are also required to deliver specific inputs.

FIGURE 1: PRE-ASPIRE (SOURCE MCNEILL, 2009)

Assess

What do we together see as the problems
Which are the priorities
Who are the people involved
Complete assessment forms

Plan

How are we going to tackle the problems
What are our shared, realistic objectives
Who will do that, by *when?*

Prepare Relate Engage

Review and Evaluate

How far have the objectives been achieved
Record evidence for these
Highlight achievements
Note items for new cycle

Implement the plan

Put plan into effect. Keep records
Monitor that agreed steps are being taken at specified times
Troubleshoot difficulties
Highlight achievements

Adaped from Sutton (2008)

McNeill (2009) provides some useful insights as to how the research outlined above might inform the task of the case manager in supporting the process of change as a whole. The model of case-management he proposes is structured around the key stages of the process of intervention captured in the acronym ASPIRE[1]. However, as with many case management approaches, this has an important limitation because it is focused on what the case manager does, rather than on what the offender does in the change process. To correct this McNeill

(2009) points out that there is a *PRE*-ASPIRE stage that is critical to the success of every stage in the practice process. PRE stands for prepare, relate and engage. He argues that attempts to support desistance might be enhanced where supervisors can take the time to:

● Prepare for initial contact by reviewing all the available information and by trying to anticipate the types of aspirations and concerns that the offender may bring to the supervision process.

- Relate to the offender both by anticipating and exploring their aspirations and concerns and by taking time to develop a relationship characterised by openness, trust, warmth and good humour.
- Engage the offender in the supervisory relationship and in the supervision process, contracting the relationship carefully, openly discussing the boundaries between the negotiable and the non-negotiable aspects, identifying the costs and benefits of supervision for the offender, and winning their active participation in the process.

The point he makes is that paying attention to the relational aspects of practice with offenders, and to the skills through which effective relationships are developed and maintained, is a necessary precondition of engaging the offender in the change process. Little can be achieved within any method of intervention unless practitioners can establish the right kinds of relationships with offenders, although it is also true that good relationships are not sufficient in themselves to deliver change.

Partridge's (2004) identification of the core case management principles are also useful in thinking about how to enhance engagement:

- Case management models need to acknowledge offenders' experiences and needs;
- Continuity of contact with the same case manager and other staff is essential to building confidence and rapport, or a particular connection, with the offender, particularly during the early stages of supervision;
- The greater the level of task separation, the more offenders were confused by why they were undertaking different elements of their supervision;
- Face-to-face contact with a small case management team was beneficial for both staff and offenders;
- Openness, flexibility and support were key motivating factors for offenders – exemplified by three-way meetings between case managers, practitioners and offenders and where case managers attended initial meetings as offenders moved to new delivery teams.

This suggests that any service is likely to ensure a better focus on effective practice if it is able to put individual case management at the centre of a holistic service. This might be realised by developing a single concept of implementation where key stages are mapped on an end-to-end process where case management binds them together into a coherent whole, using different approaches, and enabling different resources and styles to be matched to different cases. While this requires that one case manager implements one plan, this process is most effectively assisted by variable forms of teamwork and organisational support for the core process of case management.

The research evidence reviewed here, in particular it's consistent and compelling message about the importance of the relational aspects of effective practice, would suggest that the task of managing interventions to promote and sustain change is not an administrative one. The case manager's role is 'therapeutic' in the sense of being an active part of the change process rather than merely a coordinator of services (McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

In reviewing the implications of research on models of case management for effective probation practice, Holt (2000) identifies four over-lapping features of case management:

- Consistency is a vital ingredient of seamless service delivery. It allows the worker to promote and reinforce effective learning by providing opportunities to put theory into practice. Consistency provides an essential element of the positive working relationships that, as we have seen, are critical in order to support and enhance motivation to change.
- Continuity across all aspects of the intervention and over time is necessary if the intervention is to be meaningful and productive for the offender. The case manager needs to ensure that the offender experiences supervision as an integrated holistic process. A key part of achieving this integration is likely to be the provision of one stable and supportive relationship throughout the duration of the supervision experience.

- Consolidation of the learning is achieved when the case manager allows the offender to reflect upon the learning achieved in the different aspects of supervision. This involves enabling the offender to make connections across all aspects of the process; to join up the learning. However, consolidating the learning also requires accessing opportunities for community reintegration, where the offender's strengths can be employed and confirmed.
- Commitment of the case manager to the offender and to the supervision process is essential in promoting desistance. This commitment creates stability in the delivery of the intervention.

A fifth feature needs to be added to this model of case management given the criminal justice context; that is, the management of compliance. Rather than complying because of an increased threat of enforcement, Ugwudike (2010; 2011) suggests that offenders' compliance and engagement relates to the *positive* benefits that supervision provided; namely, the prospect of receiving meaningful help with their difficulties. It may be that initial offender engagement in change processes can be secured by emphasising positive incentives rather than threats. As well as fostering engagement, receiving useful help seems likely to be a key aspect of developing relational attachments between supervisors and supervised. Such attachments are highly likely to characterise those relationships that reinforce commitment to the change effort and ultimately of the internalisation of new norms.

This sense of commitment is likely to be underpinned by an attachment to the supervisor, which in turn is an indication of legitimacy. If the worker-client relationship is the prime site upon which legitimacy is negotiated, where there is discontinuity in supervision, problems may arise. Legitimacy emerges from the offender's experience of interactions with a case manager, and reflects the establishment of mutual respect and trust between them. The challenges of securing and maintaining engagement in the process of change are then likely to depend on developing and sustaining relational legitimacy (on the subject of compliance and legitimacy see Robinson and McNeill, 2008; McNeill and Robinson, 2011). Understanding the

subtleties of this illuminates specific opportunities for the construction of a relationally informed approached to case management.

IMPLICATIONS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION AND PROCESS OF CASE MANAGEMENT

In the context of the preceding discussion, a desistance-based perspective seems to imply an approach to offender engagement and supervision that is less intervention-led and professionally-led and more process and offender-driven. Moreover, it is apparent that case management cannot easily be made into a simple process. Desistance supportive interventions are likely to involve several personnel within the correctional services and outside it. This means that the practical difficulties of maintaining sufficient integrity across the different aspects of the supervision process are likely to be considerable. Moreover, implementing complex plans to promote public protection while supporting change will always be a challenge with people who may not only be reluctant to engage, but may, in some cases, be assessed as dangerous.

The findings emerging from the desistance literature have wide-ranging implications for case management and offender engagement, many of which are still being thought through and considered. However, there are some quite specific central messages. Firstly, if desistance is an inherently individualised and subjective process, then we need to make sure that offender management processes can accommodate and embrace issues of identity and diversity. One-size-fits-all interventions might be a reasonable way of dealing with very particular problems (like taking a pill to relieve a headache), but there is no single pill that can make a person healthy or happy or a good citizen. Secondly, the development and maintenance not just of motivation but also of hope become key tasks for case managers. Thirdly, desistance can only be understood within the context of human relationships; not just relationships between workers and offenders but also between offenders and those who matter to them. Fourth, although case management has tended to focus on responding to offenders' risk and needs, they also have strengths

and resources that they can use to overcome obstacles to desistance, implying a need to support and develop personal strengths and resources and strengths and resources in their social networks. Fifth, if desistance is about discovering agency, a sense of being able to make choices and exert control over one's life, then processes and interventions need to encourage and respect self-determination; this means working with offenders not on them. Finally, interventions based only on the skills, knowledge and personal resources of the individual will not be enough. Case management approaches need to generate social capital and, in so doing, develop relationships, networks and reciprocities within families and communities. Engaging offenders is not enough; there are others who must also be engaged and mobilised to support the process of desistance (see McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

Much of the focus of research on effective practice has been on how to change or improve interventions or programmes. Perhaps, until recently, we have spent too much time thinking about interventions or programmes and too little time thinking about the change processes that they exist to support. Desistance research, if taken seriously, would invert our priorities – recognising the change process as our central concern and considering offender programmes as one aspect of the many means of supporting the process (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; see also Robinson and Raynor, 2006).

A relational approach to case management means enabling supervision to be more relationally engaging and thus being more respectful of the offender's active role in and ownership of the change process. It requires the provision of assistance in tackling practical problems that are not only perceived by the case manager as problematic, but the offender too (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; Weaver and Armstrong, 2011). In terms of finding ways to more clearly apply a relational approach to case management, it may make sense to pilot different strategies in different areas in order to analyse their differential impacts on outcomes. Though a range of particular strategic and practical approaches could be developed and piloted, a more radical alternative might be to give a local area particular consultancy or training support in applying a

desistance-focused relational approach to case management practice (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). This would probably require that they are given a high degree of autonomy to enable them to respond to the diversity and level of localism that such an approach implies (Weaver, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Even if we wished that there was a practice model or a 'desistance manual' that could be prescribed for case managers, there is not. As we have tried to point out here, desistance research itself makes clear that offenders are very different from each other. Their needs are complex and their pathways to desistance are individualised. Overly generalised approaches to interventions are, then, inconsistent with desistance research (McNeill 2009; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). It follows that effective case management can only really emerge from practitioners' reflective engagement and continual dialogue with those individuals with whom they work, and with the research that should inform how they work. This presents unique challenges and opportunities for the construction and process of case-management in any jurisdiction.

The relational approach to case-management implies that the process of change occurs in the context of relationships and interactions with significant others in both a professional and personal context. This is a process which can be achieved with a range of 'stakeholders' which includes families, networks, and also members of the wider community, including volunteers - perhaps former offenders themselves. Models of restorative and relational justice might well have key contributions to make to inform the construction of relational approaches to case management (Faulkner 2004; Robinson and Raynor, 2006). A more radical opportunity would be to harness the strengths and experiences of offenders and former offenders by involving current and former service users in co-designing, co-developing, co-implementing and co-evaluating a desistance-supportive intervention process (Weaver, 2011).

Desistance research itself has been informed by listening to and learning directly from offenders' and ex-offenders' experiences. However, such an

approach is also consistent with what the research has to say about the importance of developing agency, generativity and civic participation. Placing offenders at the centre of change management processes is of central significance in offenders' accounts of achieving change and giving up crime (Maruna, 2001). Offenders need to be constructively engaged in the process of change towards desistance from crime, which means having a say in how they should be supported to rehabilitate themselves. Indeed, utilising (ex-)offenders' experience and expertise on their own situations to inform the development of criminal justice interventions might further enhance the credibility, meaning or legitimacy of these interventions for those who are expected to have an investment in this process (Rex, 1999). It might also make the whole process less exclusionary and more comprehensible to those individuals. If services are co-designed and co-delivered by their current or former users may well be more likely to be fit for purpose and thus effective – not to mention imbued with credibility and legitimacy.

With this notion of co-production in mind, we conclude by drawing attention to a current initiative that Fergus McNeill, Shadd Maruna and Stephen Farrall have recently commenced. The *Discovering Desistance* project involves first the co-production of a film about how and why people stop offending and how we might best support that process. The film involves the collaboration of current and former offenders, their families and practitioners across the UK jurisdictions and in the USA, as well as with professional film-makers. But producing the film is just the first stage in a process of exchanging knowledge and stimulating debate on this important subject. The Discovering Desistance team have started a blog (see: **http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/ discoveringdesistance/**) and are keen for as many voices to be included in this process as possible, so please join in the conversation and access the learning as it happens.

NOTES

1 AS represents Assessment; P represents Planning; I represents Intervention; RE represents Review.

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