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Reducing recidivism through entrepreneurship programmes in prisons

Thomas M. Cooney

Abstract: *Prison systems are facing significant challenges from overcrowding and a 'revolving door' routine. Reducing recidivism would help alleviate both these problems and would also assist in breaking the cycle of career criminality. However, one of the primary causes of recidivism is a lack of employment opportunities for people who have spent time in prison, thereby causing them to return to crime. Given the dearth of entrepreneurship research on ex-prisoners, this paper examines a 'Start Your Own Business' programme delivered inside a prison. Based on interviews with the participants, the author examines whether such programmes offer a realistic opportunity for reducing recidivism.*

Keywords: *entrepreneurship education; prisoners; recidivism; prison programmes; self-employment; start-up training*

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The high cost of incarceration in these times of economic recession suggests that existing penal systems in many countries cannot be maintained indefinitely and that contemporary practices of prisoner rehabilitation should be revisited. A significant challenge to reducing current levels of incarceration is that ex-prisoners face considerable difficulty in securing employment on leaving prison, a situation that contributes significantly to the high rates of recidivism experienced internationally. Former prisoners are frequently ostracized by society for their previous actions, and any government funding spent on their rehabilitation is open to public and political questioning. Attempts made by individuals to alter the existing provision of support services are frequently met with resistance and with the question 'Why should we spend money on criminals when there are more worthy people suffering?' The prisoner community commonly lacks a vocal group of supporters who are willing to champion their cause in the face of adverse reaction. Interestingly, when one examines entrepreneurship literature, there is a noticeable dearth

of academic research on the topic of prisoner rehabilitation through entrepreneurship, with the bulk of writings on the topic fixated on the similarity between characteristics of entrepreneurship and criminality. It is this lack of voice in the general population and within the entrepreneurship literature that makes the tag 'silent minority' appropriate for the prisoner community. But while there may be a general silence regarding the issue, it nevertheless remains evident that career opportunities for ex-prisoners must be re-imagined if society is to support them in securing a legitimate livelihood, thereby enabling them to become financially independent after their release.

The primary ambition of this paper is to explore the use of entrepreneurship programmes inside prisons as a method of increasing the prospects of prisoners identifying income-generating opportunities upon their release from prison. Within this overarching aim, there are also a number of secondary objectives: (1) to establish the current rates of recidivism internationally; (2) to examine the causes of recidivism; (3) to investigate the

relationship between entrepreneurship and criminality; (4) to analyse the results of the primary research; and (5) to offer insights from the research undertaken that could aid existing or potential stakeholders in similar programmes internationally. To achieve these objectives, the paper first considers the literature that has already been published regarding both recidivism and the link between entrepreneurship and criminality. It then examines a pilot 'Start Your Own Business' programme that was run inside a prison, a programme which incorporated 10 modules, group work, mentoring, business plans and a presentation to an evaluation panel. Primary research was undertaken through interviews with the programme participants, and the results of this research are studied carefully to generate critical findings that would advance the understanding of the benefits and challenges of delivering such programmes. The paper closes by considering the potential that entrepreneurship education offers to people leaving prison, discussing its implications for policy within justice ministries, and seeks to answer the question of whether recidivism can be reduced through entrepreneurship programmes being delivered inside prisons. While the discussion offers many interesting insights, it is recognized that the paper is significantly limited in terms of generalizable findings, given that it is based on only one small programme and interviews with its 14 participants. However, given that so little research is available within the entrepreneurship domain regarding this particular community of people, the paper does offer a baseline contribution upon which other researchers can build.

Rates of recidivism

In seeking to understand recidivism, a common error is made in that prison terms are frequently viewed by the general population as distinct periods that, once completed, allow people to rejoin society in a natural fashion. However, as Loucks *et al* (1998) note, punishment for a crime does not necessarily end with the completion of the sentence: the stigma of a criminal record may follow people for years after they have 'paid' for their offence. This challenge of attempting to build a new life following one's release from prison is something that an increasing percentage of people living in the USA have been experiencing over the past three decades, as evidenced by the fact that in 2009, over 7.2 million people were either on probation, in prison or on parole at the year end – a figure which amounted to 3.1% of all US adult residents, or one in every 32 adults (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). While the total correctional population declined (down 0.7%, or 48,800 offenders) during 2009, it was the first decline observed

since the Bureau of Justice Statistics began reporting this population in 1980. But this trend is not unique to the USA, since between June 1999 and June 2009, the number of prisoners in Australia increased by 36% (from 21,538 to 29,317) as reported by the Productivity Commission (SCRGSP, 2007). Over the same period, the number of male prisoners increased by 35% (from 20,181 to 27,192) and the number of female prisoners increased by 57% (from 1,357 to 2,125). Meanwhile, a report by Van Dijk *et al* (2005) on crime in Europe stated that, although crimes such as burglaries, thefts, robberies and assaults in the European Union had decreased significantly over the previous 10 years, the levels of serious crimes had increased. The report suggested that the factors associated with these high levels of crime included increased urbanization and the high proportion of young people in the population. Whatever the generators of such increased prison rates and criminal activity might be, Lockwood and Teasley (2005) argue that the economic cost to society and to those directly affected by criminal activity is certainly growing.

While the rate of crime remains an area of major concern for police forces globally, an additional concern for justice ministries has been the rates of re-offending by those convicted of criminal offences. In the USA, statistics show that within three years of release, 67.5% of prisoners are back inside prison (Langan and Levin, 2002). Across Australia, approximately 38% of prisoners return to prison within two years of release, but this number increases to 45% when other corrective service sanctions are included in the measure (SCRGS, 2006). In Europe, Wartna's (2009) examination of recidivism rates across many countries found that the rates of recidivism varied by country, as shown in Table 1.

Wartna highlights the fact that there are a number of substantial challenges in attempting to undertake comparative analysis across different countries, including: (1) differences in judicial systems; (2) differences in sentencing practices; (3) differences in registration; (4) differences in methods and measures being used; (5) differences in offender groups; and (6) differences in periods of observation. For example, Wartna notes that while reconviction rates in England and Wales are highest (with almost half of offenders being reconvicted within two years), the reasons for this are unknown. Is this because the penal system is less effective or is it because of some kind of hidden 'measurement factor'?

Payne's (2007) examination of recidivism in Australia found that an offender's lifestyle and drug use were significantly linked to recidivism, with unemployment, limited or low level of education, poor residential location, a history of mental health problems, family instability and serious, prolonged drug use being the key

Table 1. European rates of recidivism.

Country	Offender group	Selection period	Age	Number	Definition of recidivism	Percentage of recidivists after...				
						1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
Austria	Adults sentenced	1983	14+	69,267	New conviction	–	–	–	–	38.0
Germany	People convicted or released from prison	1994	14+	947,382	New conviction	–	–	–	35.7	–
Netherlands	People sanctioned for a crime	1997	12+	153,834	New conviction	18.6	27.7	33.4	37.4	40.4
Sweden	People convicted for offences	1999	15+	76,700	New conviction	22.0	–	36.0	–	–
Norway	People charged	1996	15+	65,086	New charge	19.6	30.5	37.4	41.5	43.4
Scotland	People convicted or released from prison	1999	16+	45,245	New conviction	31.0	42.0	49.0	53.0	–
England/Wales	People released from imprisonment or sentenced to a community penalty	1999 Quarter 1	10+	3,316	New conviction	–	48.0	–	–	–

Source: Wartna, 2009.

factors identified. In attempting to understand the profile of recidivists, O'Donnell *et al* (2008) tracked prisoners who left Irish prisons over a four-year period and found that 27.4% of released prisoners were serving a new prison sentence within one year. This figure rose to 39.2% after two years, 45.1% after three years and 49.2% after four years. Additionally, they found that more than half (52%) of those who re-offended had been unemployed prior to their current prison term. The research by O'Donnell *et al* examined 19,955 inmates released from prison between January 2001 and December 2004. The majority of the released prisoners were male (93%) and unmarried (82%), with an average age of just under 30 years. The research also found that recidivism was higher among males, younger people, the unemployed and those with previous prison experience. These findings closely correlate with Wartna's (2009) study, which highlights the characteristics that help identify those prisoners who are most at risk of re-offending: gender (males represent higher risks); age at first conviction (the younger the person, the higher the risk); country of birth (ethnic minorities display more recidivism); offence (risks highest after violence and property offences); and previous convictions (the more convictions, the higher the risk). Research by Fletcher (2004) shows that employment can help reduce the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half, as two-thirds of inmates arrive in UK prisons from positions of unemployment, and three-quarters leave with no job offer. The data from these studies clearly identify that those prisoners who are most at risk of re-offending are young men who are categorized as unemployed.

Upon their release, there are many reasons why former prisoners find it difficult to adapt to society and,

as previously highlighted, unemployment is one of the biggest issues that they face. The recent trend of mechanization replacing low-skilled jobs and the lack of skills, training or personal qualities possessed by prisoners relating to the increasingly important area of knowledge-based work means that the prospects of securing long-term employment are ever more challenging for ex-prisoners. The fact that they possess a criminal record also generates negative perceptions amongst potential employers and reduces the potential for being successful at a job interview. MacKinnon and Wells (2001) point out that the number of employers in New Zealand who requested information about criminal records increased from 13,000 in 1996 to 36,500 in the first half of 2000. The National Economic and Social Forum (2002) noted that only 52% of Irish employers would consider employing someone with a criminal record; while a 2001 Home Office Research Study in the UK found that only 10% of prisoners entered employment upon their release, and a 2002 Home Office review reported that employment could reduce re-offending by between a third and a half. The challenge in getting a job presents prisoners with a significant obstacle to reintegration into society, and a number of studies (for example, Pati, 1974; Hormant, 1984; Votey, 1991) highlight the importance of employment in preventing or reducing re-offending. However, while appreciating the challenge that prisoners face in getting a job, rehabilitation and education programmes within prisons generally do not consider entrepreneurship (self-employment) as a possible option for prisoners, but instead focus on training for employment.

Although it is broadly agreed that reducing recidivism is important, there is less agreement on how this might

be accomplished. Zamble and Quinsey (2001) argue that recidivism is affected not only by the factors that caused an individual to commit the initial crime (offenders' personal characteristics), but also by post-release factors (dynamic local antecedents) and that these two factors combine to influence the return to criminal activity. Many ideas have been proposed, including greater use of supervision, the use of halfway houses, general monitoring of convicts upon their release, as well as the implementation of drug treatment, literacy and other educational programmes in prisons. A study by the Connecticut Department of Correction (2008) explains that follow-up care is a key influence on recidivism rates, and prisoners who are released into a supervised halfway house for an assigned period are reconvicted at nearly half the rate of those who are released with no supervision. Steurer *et al* (2001) conclude that, although the effect of education on recidivism varied across participating states in the USA, all states showed a reduction in recidivism for prisoners participating in education. Their study also found that the post-release earnings of the education participants were higher than those achieved by non-participants. Lockwood *et al's* (2006) review of a wide range of studies examines the relationship between education and recidivism, and finds that increased exposure to training and education programmes results in a lower rate of recidivism, and by extension a lowering of the number of repeat offenders in the prison system. A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) in the UK suggests that education and training within the prison system have traditionally been viewed as a means of keeping prisoners occupied rather than providing them with the skills necessary for employment. The report notes that while there are many different types of training courses available to prisoners within the UK prison system, a review of the programmes provided revealed that specially designed 'Start Your Own Business' programmes were not commonly found amongst the available options, and so prisoners considering self-employment as a career option were disadvantaged.

While some business courses are provided within certain prison systems, a specially tailored programme would have to be cognizant of the obstacles that prisoners face in attempting self-employment upon their release and of the distinctive challenges that they would meet in establishing their own business. Arguably, the lack of self-employment courses is a surprising omission, given the difficulty that prisoners experience in securing employment once their sentence has been completed, and the resultant increased possibility of re-offending. Indeed, it is feasible to argue that giving prisoners an alternative career option through self-employment would be good for the prisoners, for the

prison service and for society as a whole. After an intensive search for such programmes in other countries, it became evident that in reality few countries offer such entrepreneurship programmes for prisoners.

Entrepreneurship and criminality

Why some people might choose criminality above other forms of income generation has been a subject of debate for many centuries, with Campbell and Ormerod (1998) suggesting that the general population can be broadly divided into three groups. The first group consists of those people immune to the temptations of crime, the second consists of active criminals, while the third represents the 'floating voters'. The final group are those who might be susceptible to becoming criminals under a particular set of circumstances, but who may instead decide to live lawfully. Campbell and Ormerod argue that individuals can switch from one group to another, primarily due to peer pressure: the higher the relative proportions of each group in a population, the more likely it is that others will join it. Bridge and McGowan (2007) suggest that people can fund their lifestyle through a wide variety of activities, which include: employment, self-employment, state support, begging, sponsorship, farming, hunter-gatherer activities, inheritance, marriage, pensions, gambling and crime. However, in practical terms, not all of these options are open to everyone and so people generally choose from a much narrower set of alternatives, which conventionally would either be employment, self-employment, state support or crime. Unfortunately for those who choose crime as an option for making money, there may be a significant difficulty in later returning to a more legal form of income generation.

When considering the activity of crime as a career option, it has occasionally been suggested that criminals possess one of the key characteristics required of all entrepreneurs – a willingness to take risks. In fact, as Gottschalk (2009) contends, many potential business opportunities can be found in human trafficking, money laundering, the narcotics trade, slavery, piracy, smuggling, 'protection' and other illegal markets. Lockwood *et al* (2006) undertook research to understand prisoner characteristics under the working hypothesis that inmates are simply entrepreneurs in spirit, dabbling in socially unacceptable 'enterprises'. Their results indicate that inmates are not noticeably different from entrepreneurs on the 'outside', and they argue that many prisoners are different from successful entrepreneurs in only one respect – the activities in which they are engaged are illegal and therefore detrimental to society (although there are some who would suggest that the behaviour of some 'legal' business people can also be

detrimental to society). Rieple's (1998) research found that offenders achieved higher scores on entrepreneurial personality characteristics than both nurses and civil servants, but lower than entrepreneurs when compared with research previously undertaken by Caird (1988). Similarly, Sonfield *et al* (2001) used tests that measured five motivational factors associated with entrepreneurial success (need for self-achievement, preference for avoiding unnecessary risks, desire for feedback on results, aspiration for personal motivation, and desire to plan for the future) and they remarked that, with the exception of entrepreneurs in high-growth firms, inmates attained the highest scores. A study by Fairlie (2002) presents evidence that drug dealers possess unobserved characteristics that are positively associated with future self-employment (such as low levels of risk aversion, high levels of entrepreneurial ability and a preference for autonomy). However, while the entrepreneurial characteristics displayed by prisoners and entrepreneurs may have a number of striking similarities, the challenges that they face when establishing a new business can be quite different due to their differing interactions with legitimate agencies and the training options available to them.

Because of the scarcity of research that has been undertaken on the distinctive challenges faced by former prisoners when looking to start their own business upon release from prison, very little is known about their specific training requirements in terms of entrepreneurship education. Jansyn *et al* (1969) cite three main reasons why former prisoners wish to go into business for themselves: independence, a desire to retain all of the profit from their work and the opportunity to earn high wages. The authors also observed that the risk associated with self-employment was lower for ex-offenders than the general population because their marginal position in the labour market meant that they had less to lose. However, despite having greater motivation and lower risk, offenders were found to need more assistance and support from external agencies. Rieple (1998) explains in her study that the principal factors identified as barriers to self-employment for ex-offenders include: lack of suitable contacts/role models, lack of financial support/credit history, difficulty in presenting oneself to the bank, poor educational and literacy abilities, stigma attached to having a record, lack of follow-through, persistence and dedication (lacking the will to overcome setbacks), problems relating to the dulling effects that prison exerts on some individuals, and lack of self-confidence (wanting to set up a business while in prison, but rarely following it through upon release). This work clearly highlights the fact that ex-offenders must confront additional and distinctive challenges beyond those difficulties that will

be experienced by a non-offender when seeking to establish their own business, but these challenges are frequently more related to behavioural issues than to business issues.

To address this gap, Fletcher's (2004) analysis of existing enterprise support programmes in the UK highlights four key aspects of good practice with regard to tailored enterprise programmes for prisoners. The first aspect is that successful interventions must be flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of the individuals following the programmes. The second aspect is that tutors need to be able to empathize with participants and build relationships of trust with them, with positive feedback and non-confrontational approaches being particularly effective. The third aspect is that tutors should have experience of running their own business, or that the programme should include input from business people. Finally, effective partnership working is important so that prisoners can benefit from different experiences and expertise. The conclusions drawn from these studies are quite representative of the findings that have been published from the limited research previously undertaken on this topic, and they lucidly demonstrate the distinctive nature of the unique entrepreneurship challenges that ex-prisoners need to address.

Logic would suggest that self-employment represents a very practical way for some prisoners to re-enter the labour market. Indeed, Sauers (2009) identifies a 'prisoner entrepreneurship program' (PEP) in Texas that has achieved a recidivism rate as low as 8% and an employment rate that is more than 80% within 30 days of release. However, what is not known from this study (or any other study) is the percentage of prisoners that might realistically benefit from entrepreneurial support, although anecdotal evidence would intimate that it is just a modest proportion of the prison population. Such programmes are not a panacea for the elimination of recidivism as not every prisoner wishes to pursue such a route (as with the general population). However, what is known is that some prisoners react positively to such a programme, and this paper discusses the approach taken to a 'Start Your Own Business' programme that was delivered in a prison and examines the results that were achieved. Through these discussions, the paper contributes to existing literature on enterprise support programmes for prisoners as it extends the limited body of knowledge that currently exists on this topic.

Research methodology

The research is based upon a pilot 'Start Your Own Business' programme that was delivered within a prison. The programme was funded by a group of support

agencies; it was designed and primarily delivered by an educational institution; it was managed by a project coordinator, and received the full cooperation of the prison governor and prison officers. The principal objectives of the programme were to introduce key considerations in setting up and running a small business, deliver relevant information on sources of assistance, highlight the challenges that a participant might face and how these could be overcome, and promote a career/life option of self-employment. The programme was primarily taught through a series of 10 modules, which included group work, mentoring, business plans and a presentation to an evaluation panel. The modules included the delivery of key content and featured either a guest speaker or an exercise relevant to the topic of the specific workshop. The design was traditional in many respects, but the content was tailored to the specific audience. There were no barriers to entry into the programme and all prisoners were invited to participate. The programme included 14 participants who came from a variety of backgrounds, had different levels of educational qualifications (ranging from a postgraduate degree to illiteracy) and were at various stages of their prison sentences.

Due to the small number of people involved in the programme and the exploratory nature of the research, the methodological approach employed was qualitative research through personal interviews with the 14 programme participants. Because prisoners were uncomfortable with a formal style of questioning and with recording devices, the interviews were of an informal nature, which Burgess (1984, p 102) refers to as 'conversations with a purpose'. Once these conversations were finished, the researcher would make an initial set of notes that captured the main highlights of the conversation, later writing up a more detailed set of notes. These notes were then analysed manually for trends, commonalities and other patterns that could be interpreted as particularly interesting findings. Any formal research methodology would have created difficulties with the respondents, but this approach enabled them to speak freely about their experiences and offer constructive comments about how the programme could be improved. Such an approach also gave respondents the opportunity to state whether they viewed self-employment as a realistic prospect once they left prison.

There are a number of disadvantages to the type of research methodology used for this study. These disadvantages include the usual challenges associated with using interviews, as highlighted by Curran and Blackburn (2001), such as the ability to avoid using leading questions or offering suggestive answers; repeating a question in a manner that is different from

the original question; raising several subjects simultaneously; the ability to avoid becoming involved in a debate or discussion; maintaining neutrality; and drawing conclusions from such a small sample. But the conversational nature of this research methodology caused some additional concerns, which included the possibility of bias or memory decay when generating the subsequent research notes, the lack of an aide-memoire to guide the researcher, and the lack of a recording through which one could review the conversations. In broader terms, there are significant limitations to the findings generated by this research as one cannot draw any broad assumptions or understandings from one small sample from just one programme. The best contribution that the paper can tender is that it provides an introduction to the topic and it offers the opportunity for a broader research study (possibly of a longitudinal nature) that could lead to a detailed understanding of how recidivism might be reduced through entrepreneurship programmes being delivered inside prisons.

Analysis of research

The feedback from the primary research provided fascinating insights into the successes and failures of the course. The first interesting statistic was that, of the 14 participants who started the programme, all of them completed it. This statistic was possibly the headline result, as anecdotal evidence locally suggested that such an outcome was generally rare within the prison system. This conclusion would suggest that the participants enjoyed the programme and received much benefit from it. Equally, the programme content was generally viewed as positive by the majority of the respondents, and the handouts provided were regarded as extremely helpful for retaining the knowledge delivered during the workshops, while there was also ample opportunity to ask questions at any time. There was unease around the use of very successful businesses for the case studies, and it was felt that small businesses and/or local businesses would have been more appropriate for the participants. The use of guest speakers from local businesses and support agencies was well received, although it was suggested that the programme would have been enhanced if an ex-prisoner who had started his own business could also have addressed the group. It should be noted on this particular point that a great effort was made to secure such a person, but ex-prisoners who have started their own business either do not want to be identified (for fear of their local community reacting negatively) or they do not want to go back inside a prison because of the memories that such a visit might invoke. Some video material was also used during the workshops to support the content, but it was

generally considered inappropriate as, again, it used highly successful business people as the primary examples.

There were two trainers delivering the materials on the programme, and the group noted that they had very different teaching styles. One had a 'story-telling' style of delivery, while the other was more 'professional' in style. The second style was occasionally too 'teacher-like' and 'dictatorial' (particularly at the beginning), which caused some disquiet amongst the group as it generated fears that they were being returned to the old education system that many felt had failed them. However, when asked which style they preferred, the group was evenly divided, as they saw the value of what both were seeking to achieve. Participants were greatly satisfied with the empathy that the trainers generated, along with the openness in the trainers' approach to helping participants with their desire for more information.

The original design of the programme included a number of role-playing exercises that would be performed in groups during the workshops. The first exercise was generally rejected by the participants, and later feedback reinforced the feeling that no such exercises should form part of future programmes, or that they should only be incorporated once trust had been established. The research identified that the participants were uncomfortable with having to offer any private thoughts in public, and that they responded far more effectively within one-to-one settings. The explanation offered for this was that no prisoner was going to give up any information that could be used against them in an environment in which they were living with fellow participants 24 hours a day. This reaction may also be explained by the literature, which highlighted the issue of low self-esteem as a significant barrier that prisoners must overcome. Similarly, the original programme design required that the groups should present their plans in public, but this was later revised so that each group presented to the two trainers on a private basis. This change in emphasis from public to private discussions had a very strong impact upon the programme and helped to establish a bond between the trainers and the participants. It was noticeable that the participants went through a positive change in attitude as the programme progressed, and prison officers commented upon the increasingly positive way in which the participants interacted with the officers themselves and with other prisoners.

Because of the difficulty in accessing information from within a prison (Internet access is not allowed), it was considered that using the workshops within the prison as business units would be a constructive way of getting participants to apply theory to practice. Parti-

cipants were asked to develop a business plan for the workshop to which they were assigned, and they were given support by the prison officers responsible for each of the workshops. Any information that they required for their business plan would be made available to them through the project coordinator. However, possibly the strongest finding from the interviews was that participants had difficulty in becoming emotionally involved with 'their business' and that they would have much preferred working on their own business ideas (although not all participants had a business idea). This situation also created a different challenge, as some of the business ideas were based on information acquired prior to entering prison but had now become outdated, while other business ideas may have been strong at that moment, but might be of little value by the time the prisoner had been released. The question then arose as to how a trainer should work with a business idea whose time had passed (or would pass) and yet not impact negatively upon the confidence of the participant.

Possibly one of the more interesting moments (from the trainers' perspective) on the programme was when the group was presented with international research findings (discussed earlier in this paper) highlighting the difficulties that prisoners face when seeking to establish a business upon their release. It was immediately noticeable that the group was uncomfortable with the topic and, despite many attempts to encourage (or even goad) them into a discussion on the matter, no reaction was forthcoming. When questioned about this occurrence, respondents revealed that prisoners deal with life inside prison on a day-to-day basis and that they have a 'rose-tinted' vision of what life will be like when they are released. Many do not want to look at future difficulties at this time because it only generates fear about their life upon release from prison.

The respondents offered many insights into lessons learned from this programme that could be implemented in any future programmes. They suggested that there would be a need to carry out pre-programme interviews with each of the participants so as to identify their business ideas, to set expectations on both sides and to begin the process of building trust. The first workshop would then need to set out clearly the full programme and how each workshop would build towards the ultimate goal of each participant having a career plan upon completion (not necessarily starting one's own business). Participants should not be asked to take part in any public assignments or to divulge their business ideas (without prior consent) within a group setting. Future programme designs would also need to incorporate a number of one-to-one sessions, which would enable individuals to develop their ideas in private. The pace of the presentation of the content could also be

increased, with harder-to-grasp information provided more frequently (the original programme moved a little too slowly). There is an additional need to separate finance into two modules (sources and accounts) and to support each workshop with expert speakers.

Possibly the most interesting finding to come from the respondents was the idea that a holistic approach should be taken to the programme, as opposed to simply delivering 10 modules. The holistic approach would require identifying further educational needs of the participants, plus providing a business mentoring service for a prisoner upon his release from prison. A significant challenge to former prisoners starting a business is access to finance and, because they have no credit history or bank account, the likelihood of ex-prisoners accessing loans through the normal channels is quite slim. It was suggested that, since many of them are looking to establish businesses in the area of trades (carpentry, stone masonry, etc), if given a small sum of money through a central funding mechanism, many would have the opportunity to start a new life. The respondents also pointed out that the programme was more effective for those who were close to finishing their prison sentence rather than for those prisoners who still had in excess of two years of their sentence left. Finally, the respondents noted that this type of programme was certainly not suitable for all prisoners; nor will everyone who participates in the programme eventually start their own business. However, they recognized that such a programme did offer a positive career option for a small percentage of the prison population and, if implemented widely, could potentially help reduce the current rates of recidivism. The participants generally stated that they were now more open to the possibility of self-employment on leaving prison, but one respondent noted that the people on the programme were already predisposed to this possibility since they had volunteered to attend the programme.

Conclusion

A study by SCRGS (2009), the Australian Productivity Commission, shows that in 2007–08, prisoners cost an average of \$269 per day in Australia (or \$98,000 each per year). According to an article in *The Irish Times* (2008), it costs €97,700 per year to keep someone in prison in Ireland. A report in the English newspaper *The Independent* (2010) states that the cost per prisoner per year is £41,000, while *The Daily Telegraph* (2010) states that the cost of re-offending to the UK economy is £10 billion a year. From a social and economic perspective, it makes sense to identify a new approach to tackling the issue of recidivism, and this paper has offered one such perspective. According to Payne (2007), there are three

areas on which future priorities in recidivism research should focus:

- (1) developing a national research agenda and national indicators of recidivism that are useful and provide information relevant to the aims and information needs of the various criminal justice agencies;
- (2) improving capacity to measure recidivism using administrative databases by improving the comparability of and linkage between criminal justice data collection sources and access by researchers to those data; and
- (3) increasing the value of recidivism research for policy development by ensuring that data, methodology and limitations are clearly identified and, where possible, standardized – this will facilitate more accurate interpretation and application to programme and policy development.

The limitations of this study mirror the broader proposals suggested by Payne and highlight the significant opportunity that awaits entrepreneurship researchers who wish to address this topic. As Ward and Maruna (2007) note, the currency of the term ‘rehabilitation’ in a twenty-first century context has altered dramatically, and they argue that the term has become a ‘dirty word’. Robinson and Crow (2009) contend that the so-called ‘receptacle model’ of rehabilitation (in which the professional counsels the relatively passive offender into avoiding future crime) is wrong for these times, and instead rehabilitation should be considered as a process that can include therapeutic interventions which aim to alter the behaviour of the offender through personal choice. Helping ex-prisoners to become self-employed and enabling them to live an independent life would fit with this twenty-first century understanding of rehabilitation. The Gardiner Committee Report (1972) states,

‘for rehabilitation to be complete, society too has to accept that they are now respectable citizens, and no longer hold their past against them ... the question is whether, when a man has demonstrably done all he can do to rehabilitate himself, and enough time has passed to establish his sincerity, is it not in society’s interest to accept him for what he is now and, so long as he does not offend again, to ensure that he is liable to have his present pulled out from under his feet by his past.’

This paper does not answer the question that was its overarching aim, as it cannot be unequivocally stated that entrepreneurship programmes within prisons offer a realistic opportunity for reducing recidivism. However, the research does indicate that the participants were more favourably disposed towards self-employment as a

result of taking part in the programme and that they would give entrepreneurship serious consideration upon their release from prison.

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