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A longitudinal study of a performance management system in a UK prison.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a longitudinal study of a private prison in Scotland and the impact of key performance measures (which form part of the contract between the Scottish Prison Service and the owners of the prison) on the operation of that prison. The contract was supposed to serve as a public sector exemplar of best practice in terms of accountability and transparency. This rhetoric of accountability has served to throw a veil over state activities (hiding behind a few chosen performance measures), rendering the citizenry quiescent. In organizations characterized by significant power asymmetry, those in power are able to use management tools like performance measures to deflect responsibility. We can therefore hypothesize that the possibility of enabling formalization will tend to appear utopian and naive and that the coercion logic could be inevitable in spite of the profound negative consequences.

Keywords: Performance-measurement; prisons; Bourdieu; Lacan