

Organisational change, increasing managerialism and social work values in the Belgian Houses of Justice, Department of Offender Guidance

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of organisational change in the Belgian Houses of Justice, Department of Offender Guidance. The change that occurred in the Houses of Justice can be defined as incremental change. While Belgian probation has been managerialised in its processes and to a lesser extent its practices, it has not been subjected to the same shift in its purposes. However, one question currently remains: can the increasing emphasis on managerialism leave the social work values and aims of the Houses of Justice in place, or not?

Key words: Probation - Organisational change - Social work – Managerialism - Values

Introduction

In the beginning of 2011 *Justice in figures 2010* was released. The 75-page report provides an overview of key data (staff numbers, workloads, budgets, etc.) of all Belgian criminal justice departments. ‘The evolution of ten years Houses of Justice, in figures’ is described from page 62 till 71. What is of interest for this discussion is the pictorial imagery featured under the heading ‘The evolution of ten years Houses of Justice, in figures’. The picture shows a large image of a young female employee working away on her computer. Her desk is covered with different documents and notes, and a large diary to schedule her one-to-one meetings is also visible. At the other side of the desk is an empty chair; and next to her – within a short distance – are stored in a filing cabinet the different case files she is working on. By no means am I suggesting that this picture should be read as illuminating the real world of Belgian probation work. Nevertheless, the pictorial representation of a justice assistant (i.e. new name since 1999 for ‘probation officer’, see below), in one of the few publicly available documents of the Houses of Justice, hints that something similar is taking place *within* probation work.

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Several authors have argued that in the area of criminal justice the ‘field’, ‘habitus’ and ‘capital’ (Bourdieu, 1990) of many trained professionals have been transformed over the past few years (see, for example, also Chan, 1996; Hughes and Gilling, 2004 and McNeill et al., 2009). Garland, among others, has argued that ‘[the practitioners] their ingrained dispositions and working ideologies, the standard orientations that ‘go without saying’ has been undermined and rendered ineffective’ (2001: 5). As a consequence, practitioners’ daily working practices as well as their ways of viewing their role and responsibilities are transforming. This is also the case in Belgian adult probation work. While the pace of change is slower than in other European jurisdictions, National Standards, guidelines, work instructions and information and communication technologies are getting a more prominent place in daily Belgian probation practice.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to reflect on the possible impact of managerialism, including new information and communication technologies, on Belgian probation work and, more particularly, whether the increasing emphasis on managerialism can leave the social work values and aims of the Houses of Justice in place, or not? Put differently, the article examines whether it is possible for Belgian probation to be managerially and technologically proletarianized without being ideologically proletarianized (Derber, 1983). Derber has emphasised that a focus on the technical component, or the *means* of the labour process, and managerial control over the operation of the labour process has led to ‘the lack of control over the *ends* of one’s work’ (Derber, 1983: 313). He called the latter *ideological* proletarianization, thereby referring to managerial control being exerted over the goals and purposes of work, whilst the worker is becoming more powerless to define the use to which work is put.

Drawing from the author’s experience in researching Belgian justice assistants’ daily work, the article begins by providing a short overview of organisational change that occurred in the Belgian (adult) probation service, followed by a brief explanation of the social work values and aims of the Houses of Justice as well as the increasing emphasis on managerialism since 2004. In doing so, the focus – in this article – will be placed on a new way of working, being the implementation of managerialist processes and practices. I argue that while, on the one hand, (and due to this new way of working) a transformation from ‘the informal to the formal’ and from ‘the social to the informational’ can already be noticed in practice. On the other hand, even with the growing importance of new information and communication technologies and their impact on daily practice (for instance, the standardised inputs in the database), Belgian probation work is still primarily concerned with client-centred practice and one-to-one casework. In fact, practitioners emphasised that they did not (yet) witness a ‘shift from a narrative to a database way of thinking and operating’ (Franko Aas, 2004; Parton, 2008: 253).

Organisational change

Organisational change literature makes reference to many different scales and in many different ways. The broadest distinction is between what Callan (1993) and Dunphy and Stace (1993) have termed ‘incremental change’ and ‘transformational change’. Incremental change is the form of change characterised by adjustments and modifications within existing management processes, while strategic goals,

organisational structure, and cultural values remain the same. Transformational change is the form of change characterised by radical shifts in strategy, reorganisations of systems and structures, changing values and changes in the distribution of power across the whole organisation

The change that has occurred in the Houses of Justice, on a policy level and in official discourse, can be defined as *incremental change*. In line with other services within the criminal justice system and the wider public sector, probation in Belgium has been subject to public criticism, political pressure and calls for reform. Belgian probation policies have been guided by the politicisation of criminal justice policy. Crime control issues play an important role in electoral processes, often with an emphasis on tackling insecurity and restoring public confidence.

While in other jurisdictions, such as England and Wales (see, for instance, Raynor, 2007) and the Netherlands (see, for instance, Downes and van Swaaningen, 2007), the politicisation, tackling insecurity and restoring public confidence took place by the paramountcy of public protection from crime and recidivism, an emphasis on risk management, 'get tough' policies and on victim awareness and empathy, Belgium followed a different path. In Belgium, tackling insecurity and restoring public confidence happened through a reform of the conditional release system; a reform of the police; the establishment of the High Council of Justice, the reorganisation of the existing judicial and para-judicial services in general, and the reorganisation into Houses of Justice in charge of penal applications, civil applications, victim support and primary legal aid available to all citizens in 1999 (see Snacken, 2007).

This meant that upon inception in 1999, the Houses of Justice were assigned to all of the abovementioned numerous tasks, formalised by the Act of 13 June 1999 (*Belgisch Staatsblad* 29 June 1999). The Houses of Justice are administered by the federal Ministry of Justice and are funded 100% by the central government (through the Ministry of Justice). There are 28 Houses of Justice, one in each judicial district. The Department of Offender Guidance, previously called 'the probation service', is thus one of the departments falling under the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice. The Department of Offender Guidance is responsible for the execution of all community penalties in Belgium. The daily supervision of offenders and follow-up is carried out by justice assistants, who – since 1999 – are trained at a higher education level as social workers, social advisors, social nurses or assistants in psychology, while others are trained at a university level as social scientists (i.e. criminologists, psychologists, sociologists and educationists). This increase can be explained by the heterogeneity of the different tasks, formalised by the Act of 13 June 1999.

As a consequence, and contrary to other jurisdictions that officially discarded the traditional emphasis on probation as social work with a focus on 'advise, assist and befriend', the Belgian Houses of Justice (including the Department of Offender Guidance) for the first time had to make its work, values and techniques explicit. This happened in a keynote speech at the Conference of 10 years of Houses of Justice, at the end of 2009. Ms. Annie Devos, the director general, formally expressed *for the first time publicly* that the common aspect of all tasks falling under the responsibility of the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice are and have always been defined as '*social work under judicial mandate*'. This concept comes very close to the former work approach of the English and Welsh probation service, rooted in traditional social

work methods and expressed in the slogan ‘advise, assist and befriend’ or to the Scottish ‘criminal justice social work’. Belgian rehabilitative policies and practices thus experienced minor shifts in penal discourse, as well as minor shifts in penal techniques.

Social work values and aims of the Houses of Justice

The recent history of probation has seen the Houses of Justice emphasising the importance of ‘social work under judicial mandate’ in supervising offenders in the community. Part of this endeavour has been the way the Houses of Justice are articulating their values. Two attempts to articulate the values are to be found in: (1) the probation service instruction of 28 July 2003 regarding ‘*The service instruction clarifying the code of good practice of a justice assistant and some methodological aspects*’² (own translation) and (2) the ‘Vision statement offender guidance’ (2010). Both set out of what the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice describe as its core values.

The probation service instruction of 28 July 2003 makes it explicit, and in more detail, what has to be understood by ‘working under mandate’. That is, dependent on the task, as formalised by the Act of 13 June 1999, that the justice assistant acts ‘under orders of a judicial authority (referred to as individual (judicial) mandate) or at request of the victim, his/her next of kin and/or the citizen in need of information, assistance and referral’ (2003: 2). The document further elucidates the fundamental cornerstones of working under mandate and sheds light on confidentiality and information sharing issues.

The code of conduct mentions that justice assistants must adhere to the principles of respect, authenticity, acceptance and empathy. The starting point of their work is ‘one or more parties in conflict who came in contact with the judicial system’ (2003: 3). Through the assigned mandate, the duty of the justice assistant is to clarify the conflict and to verify the significance and the consequences of this conflict for all parties involved. Where appropriate, the justice assistant should ‘inform, advise and refer the parties’³ (2003: 4). The code of conduct continues by saying that it is important that the justice assistant should start where the client stands and understand the client’s views and life choices, and not make decisions for the client that are based on his/her own values and moral principles. Moreover, the justice assistant should work according to the principles of ‘self-determination’, i.e. each client has the right to make his/her own decisions. The justice assistant should respect the choices made by the client, which will enable the client to take responsibility for his/her actions. The code of conduct notes that the professional responsibility of the justice assistants is to serve as enabling and non-directive facilitators in the empowerment process. The change process for offenders is seen as integrally linked to the clients’ strengths and from building on these strengths the justice assistant can develop a positive

² The exact title in Dutch is the: Dienstorder ter verduidelijking van de deontologische principes van de justitieassistent - Belangrijke deontologische principes en bepaalde methodologische aspecten.

³ The law stipulates that justice assistants have a function of referring the client of the Houses of Justice to other resources in the community for help which the justice assistant or his/her own agency cannot provide.

relationship with the client, thereby supporting their clients in order for them to realise their rights and to live their lives without judicial interference. The instruction emphasises that ‘while taking the view of supporting the capabilities of a person, a positive relationship can be developed that can act as a catalyst for processes of change’ (2003: 4).

As the centralisation of all probation activities under the umbrella of the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice is relatively recent (since 2007), the official ‘Vision statement offender guidance’ has only been available since June 2010. Vision statements have been defined as ‘primary management tools’ to communicate the strategic direction of an organisation, to establish a common goal among workers and to provide a unique identity (Bart and Hupfer, 2004; Bartkus et al., 2004). Both Baetz and Bart (1996) and Bart (1998) have suggested that vision statements in the public sector act as a surrogate bottom line to establish a common purpose among employees.

The vision document describes the means justice assistants have to accomplish the primary intended outcome of non-recidivism in offender guidance (2010: 3). Reference is made to the fact that the conditions imposed on the offender are means to foster a learning process for the offender to encourage him/her to adopt a certain type of behaviour, which will no longer provoke judicial interference. In addition, the conditions imposed on the offender are of pivotal importance to build a relationship of mutual trust between the justice assistant and the offender. Through this relationship of trust, the areas of work the justice assistant may focus on are exclusively areas linked to the conditions that have been imposed on the offender. In addition, the focus has recently been put explicitly on a clearly defined practice using the skills and techniques from the systems perspective of the Palo Alto school (Vision statement offender guidance, 2010). This approach is still based on a client-centred casework model; a model that emphasises the importance of the relationship between the practitioner and the offender, and a belief that offender supervision should be adaptive to the needs of the unique individual, without necessary working with standardised risk assessment tools and group work programmes.

Furthermore, the vision document defines five core principles that have been identified as underpinning ‘offender guidance’ (2010: 4-6). The justice assistant should work emancipatorily towards empowerment; encourage the need for offenders to take responsibility for their actions and for the behaviour that led to the offence; work non-normatively; work non-substitutively; and limit the damage caused by judicial interference towards the offender. To work non-normatively and to work non-substitutively respectively mean that the justice assistant should not use his/her own normative framework and put forward their own values and life choices; neither should the justice assistant act on behalf of the client.

In summary, both documents highlight that the values that inform current policies within the Houses of Justice, Department of Offender Guidance, are still inextricably linked to the ideological and practice foundations that draw heavily upon the social work tradition.

Managerialism

A trend can, however, be noted that professional Belgian probation work in the last decade has been affected by the call for greater accountability and efficiency in service delivery, with a concomitant increased emphasis to render more effective the supervision of offenders in the community. This has manifested itself under the heading of New Public Management. New Belgian policy documents have introduced managerialist principles into the work with offenders as well as an increased emphasis on the controlling rather than the caring aspects of probation work. While these developments are in line with shifts identified within the broader literature of penal policies and penal practices in other jurisdictions, there is, however, an important difference. Concerns about the effectiveness of the Houses of Justice, Department of Offender Guidance, centre more around the manner in which the service is organised and delivered than in a loss of faith of their primary goals to reduce re-offending and to reintegrate the offender. Far from supplanting penal welfarism, recent developments have not undermined Belgium's main probation aims. This is most obvious with regard to the model of 'social work under judicial mandate' practice and the National Standards on 'offender guidance' (see below). Supervision in Belgian probation work involved and still involves a commitment to control, but remains still focused on assisting offenders to (re)integrate into the community, thereby continuing to use a client-centred practice and one-to-one casework, without working with standardised risk assessment tools and group work programmes.

While Belgian probation has not been subjected to shift in its purposes, it has been managerialised in its processes and to a lesser extent its practices. In fact, the Houses of Justice have sought increased legitimacy by introducing managerialist principles and management practices into working with offenders.

The outset of managerialism for the Houses of Justice, including the Department of Offender Guidance, was the appointment on 23 December 2004 of two consultancy agencies, by the Belgian Council of Ministers, to perform an audit with a view to modernising the Houses of Justice. The modernisation project was simply called the Business Process Re-engineering (often referred to by the acronym BPR) for the Houses of Justice. The motives for adopting the BPR for the Houses of Justice were largely driven by reasons of legitimacy as a result of the audit, exemplified explicitly in the key objectives of the BPR programme. They were: firstly, to improve the public service; and to ensure that the service becomes an efficient and effective organisation; secondly, to introduce more objectivity and rigour, and provide greater uniformity in probation practice, thus delivering a consistent service across all Houses of Justice in the country in relation to both the judicial authorities and the offenders; and thirdly, to improve the work processes by defining a transparent working framework for all employees⁴. The roll-out of the BPR programme⁵ began in June 2006 and was completed in all probation areas in April 2008.

⁴ Directorate General of the Houses of Justice, internal document entitled 'Presentatie van de resultaten - BPR Justitiehuzen', 2009: 4, own translation.

⁵ It should be noted that the Belgian National Standards as well as the communication and information tools are in constant evolution. For instance, even though no formal change was announced, the current national standards in Belgium are no longer the same standards as those implemented in 2007. Over time, small adaptations and revisions have taken place,

The National Standards were introduced in 2007. The Standards are available for each task the Houses of Justice are in charge of. This means that for the penal applications (offender guidance and penal mediation), civil applications, primary legal aid and victim support procedural documents have been made up. The documents describe for each task structured work processes that are to be conducted or followed within the organisation. The BPR had produced a comprehensive enforcement policy document for ‘offender guidance’, covering all aspects of ensuring compliance of a probationer during a probation order and the breach process. This involved setting minimum guidelines, from induction, initial and follow-up appointments, following up non-attendance, warning letters, recording practices, a detailed breach section, and a section on completion and early termination of the probation order. The offender guidance in the Belgian standards specifies that formal reviews of progress should be carried out at the first and fourth months, and where the length of the order permits every three months thereafter. The national standards delineate the range of this inquiry, which should address issues of offending behaviour and responsibility, finance, (family) relationships, education, training, employment, accommodation, lifestyle, physical and mental health, and substance misuse.

The BPR has resulted unambiguously in a new way of working for the Houses of Justice. Policy instruments were introduced with the aim of providing a better organisation and more efficient service. An increasing number of procedural guidelines, the implementation of new communication and information technologies as well as performance indicators and performance measurement technologies are gradually finding their way into the Houses of Justice. With the emergence of new styles of managerialism over the last decade, a new lexicon and a new management culture are slowly entering the Houses of Justice. Terms such as processes, strategic planning, balanced score cards, development circles, National Standards, performance indicators are becoming very common within the organisation.

Official discourses at the Belgian policy level and the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice consider the implementation of (actuarial) management techniques still all too often as just instrumental tools, as if the introduction of these managerial techniques has had no impact upon the institution and the values of the practitioners. In actual fact, penal discourses, penal techniques and the functions of punishment are definitely not ‘immune’ from this current ‘managerial drift’ (Kaminski, 2009: 34). Applied to Belgian probation practice, the introduction of managerialist principles and management practices in the Belgian probation service has undoubtedly had an impact on the social work values and aims of Belgian probation practice.

Let us consider, for instance, the following example and quote. At the Conference of 10 years of Houses of Justice in Brussels (December 2009), two senior justice assistants spoke on behalf of ten fieldworkers about the transformation in the field (Claus and Schoofs, forthcoming). They started their presentation ‘*Justice assistant in the past and in the present. Experiences in a changing organisation*’ (own translation) by saying that ‘ever since 1999 change has been on the agenda’. The practitioners argued that:

hence the references of the National Standards mention different editions and different dates linked to these updates.

'Currently, the Houses of Justice have become a business: managerial techniques become more and more important. Even when these techniques have the advantage of making work more objective, the techniques equally cause resistance in the field... What hits us the most today is the importance linked to 'quantity', which is slowly entering into our daily work. We start in the first place to have to think about our 'caseload', instead of thinking of the person behind the file number.' (Claus and Schoofs, forthcoming, own translation)

Staff reactions to change

Thus, while official discourses at the Belgian policy level and the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice consider the implementation of managerial techniques as 'neutral' tools or a pure means, empirical findings have provided a more complex picture. In fact, different levels and forms of resistance were found between probation staff. I shall first describe the research sample and methods, and then describe the views of justice assistants on the transformation from 'the informal to the formal', followed by their views on the transformation from 'the social to the informational' (Parton, 2008)

Research sample and methods

The research was undertaken as part of a PhD study completed between 2007 and 2011. The fieldwork started from April 2008 and was pursued until April 2009. I made use of method triangulation, i.e. file analyses, informal talks, interviews, and, to a more limited extent, observations (for more detailed information about the use of method triangulation in Belgian probation research, see also Bauwens, 2010). In researching the daily work of Belgian justice assistants it was foreseen at the beginning of the fieldwork that more information would be gathered after the file analyses through interviews with the practitioners responsible for the case, the fact was that seven of the thirty justice assistants involved in the empirical research had already left the probation service by the time the files were read. The justice assistants were however kept in the sample for the file analysis and very much helped us become familiar with the field. Twenty-three justice assistants were therefore approached by the researcher with the help of two primary gatekeepers and were invited to take part in the research. It was explained to the twenty-three justice assistants that participation was voluntary and confidential in as much as the names of participants would not be disclosed in the research. All twenty-three justice assistants had fieldwork roles; they had at least three years work experience, and all had experience in penal matters and had mainly worked with offenders who had been given probation orders or conditional release orders.

A transformation from 'the informal to the formal'

Before the period 1997/1998 (i.e. the establishment of the Houses of Justice) and even before the gradual introduction of the National Standards, guidelines and procedures in 2007, Belgian probation workers enjoyed high levels of discretion with very low

accountability to the organisation. This has been marked by Eadie and Canton in their model which offers a useful framework to explore professional discretion and accountability as ‘the bad old days’ (2002: 17). This result was inferred from my interviews with senior practitioners and was confirmed by the director general (in an interview held on 8th September 2010). In Belgium, and in line with previous research done in other countries (Satyamurti, 1981), professional freedom was heightened by the often complete absence of rules, guidelines and procedures. In addition, because policy was generally less prescriptive (if it was already in place), probation officers had a considerable amount of influence within the probation service whereby policies were often shaped around their priorities. Because probation officers’ personal views had a direct influence on the decisions they took, probation officers represented the classical street-level bureaucrats of Lipsky’s theory (1980), experiencing a substantive amount of freedom to perform their work in what they believed was the best interest of the offender, and in the way they thought appropriate. In addition, they were subject to relatively weak forms of bureaucratic accountability and managerial control. Thus, as long as probation officers operated within the law and adhered to their professional codes of ethics and conduct (for the Belgian Houses of Justice formalised for the first time in 2003)⁶ the scope for the use of discretion was extensive.

More recently, justice assistants mentioned that their professional discretion had been affected by the introduction of standardised procedures through the introduction of the National Standards and the communication and information technology. Whilst few justice assistants would have disputed the need to standardise some very variable and inconsistent practices across the country and between individual justice assistants, this is however no indication that the change processes went smoothly. Whilst some justice assistants welcomed the National Standards as a way of ensuring consistent practice and greater equity as well as supporting the social work under judicial mandate mission of their profession, others were more reluctant, especially in the implementation phase of the BPR.

Consider the following quote:

BPR or Business Process Re-engineering. BPR or three initials standing for an extensive programme which appeared to be, in the first place, an abstract concept, something that would not happen at all.

At first, no one seemed to be capable of pronouncing the words correctly. And, the hearsay information was not very positive. It came across as a collection of rules that prescribed ‘how to work’. Furthermore, ‘everything’ was foreseen and we had to perform the job without asking questions... That is, to only follow the work instructions.

In the implementation phase of the BPR we learned more about the programme. We were given an overview and afterwards we were invited to different presentations, organised in smaller groups, dependant on the task you perform in the House of Justice. Eventually, I started to feel myself part of the programme: thank goodness, I was not malfunctioning! But let’s be

⁶ The probation service instruction of 28 July 2003 regarding ‘*The service instruction clarifying the code of good practice of a justice assistant and some methodological aspects*’ (own translation)

serious now, I began to recognise parts of the BPR in my daily practice. That is the practice I have learned from older colleagues, and in this case the practice that the Service recognised as the way forward to adopt a professional attitude.

It was encouraging to find out that, dependant on individual situations, we could interpret the work instructions. The BPR did no longer come across as a rule book that had to be followed as a recipe book... Pfew, my work methods weren't (that) invalid and I would still have the possibility to use my professional discretion, practice wisdom and above all to be able to engage in a reflective practice.' (Claus and Schoofs, forthcoming, own translation)

It can be argued that because of the increasingly detailed procedural guidelines (i.e. the National Standards), the areas of discretionary decision-making by practitioners are much more circumscribed than they used to be. However, official policy documents and statements never claimed that professional discretion could or should be removed. On the contrary, policy documents both explicitly mention the use of discretion and they imply (high) levels of discretion. Professional discretion remains important in Belgian probation work because standards and guidelines do not always provide ready or instant solutions to the dilemmas practitioners face on a daily basis. Furthermore, the Belgian National Standards are essentially procedural documents, aimed at raising minimum guidelines of practice. They do not, in themselves, provide detailed guidance on the methods and approaches that might be adopted in offender supervision.

Because (1) the new procedural documents aimed at raising *minimum guidelines* of practice, (2) the role of professional discretion and judgement remains important, and (3) the current minimum guidelines have not yet been replaced by more stringent rules with the danger that these can become too prescriptive, obliterating the role of their professional judgement less practitioners' resistance to the transformation from 'the informal to the formal' was found in the field. The same could, however, not be said with regard to the transformation from the 'social to the informational'.

A transformation from 'the social to the informational'

The fieldwork revealed a broad range of responses to the use of new information and communication technology: from support and compliance through to simple acceptance and indifference. A relatively small proportion of practitioners in my sample clearly showed resistance and hostility towards SIPAR (Système Informatique PARajudiciaire, the Belgian information and communication tool operational in the Houses of Justice), although much of this resistance was only accessible through observations and informal conversations. The introduction of SIPAR created more debate than the introduction of National Standards, most likely because the use of information and communication technology in probation practice has a direct impact on justice assistants' daily work. This wide range of responses to the introduction of new technology in the Belgian probation service was equally found in a recent study by Jonckheere (2009).

A key theme that emerged in many of the interviews and casual conversations was that the introduction of SIPAR meant that most justice assistants felt they had to devote more time and effort to filling in forms and writing out full reports, sometimes

with the consequence of duplicating information (in the database and the offender's case files) or risking fragmented and dispersed information spread over different databases and other information kept in the files. Referring essentially to the increasing emphasis on form-filling and to repetitive paperwork generally - while recognising this as a crucial and integral part of their work - this resulted for some justice assistants in a high level of frustration and concern that 'inputting data' is at the expense of working with their clients. In fact, a number of justice assistants argued that the aversion to new technology came from increase rather than decrease in administrative work. In addition, not only did work intensification cause a sense of exasperation; it also explained the many technical problems experienced with earlier versions of SIPAR.

Resistance to information and communication technology was also likely where justice assistants perceived the system as technically difficult, inflexible, complex, 'annoying', cumbersome or time-consuming. Indeed, they preferred to devote their time and energy to working with clients, to what they referred to as 'their real work'. These justice assistants felt - in addition to the increased volume of administrative work - that the social dimension of their work was progressively being hollowed out by the increased emphasis on quantitative input/output in SIPAR (and consequently, the increased accountability) at the cost of what they viewed as the high quality of their work. They felt that the standardised input/output restricted their space for reflective action. By reflective action I mean that these practitioners complained that there was insufficient time to 'just sit down and think about a case'. They explained that there is always something else that needs to be done first, clearly referring to the time they spend daily on their computer filling in forms and writing reports.

Their resistance - whose aim was to create some extra professional time at work - was shown either through avoidance (by means of ignoring particular managerial requests or by refusing to participate) or by employing *partial or minimal* compliance as a resistant strategy. For instance, one justice assistant admitted filling in the very strict minimum in SIPAR, arguing that her manager would have to discipline her first before she spent more time using the tool. She went on to emphasise that the real social work with offenders would always come first and that the day she felt she could no longer defend her values in her work she would leave the Service immediately, which was not yet the case.

What also became apparent in the course of the fieldwork was the way in which SIPAR facilitated closer control over the activities carried out by the justice assistants. For many of the more senior justice assistants I interviewed, the capacity for improved control via SIPAR was interpreted negatively. These justice assistants claimed that the implementation of SIPAR and the subsequent standardisation on how to fill in the databases were not the main problem. They agreed with the goals of the National Standards to demonstrate transparency in their work. The main issue they were concerned about was that while they were being asked and expected to show transparency in their work, they felt this transparency was lacking in their hierarchy: their director, manager or senior management of the Directorate General of the Houses of Justice. The practitioners mentioned, for instance, the lack of transparency and communication on how and when performance indicators and performance measurement technologies would be used. Interviewees also believed, perhaps naively, that the use of communication and information technology was only to 'help

them with their work', and they were then very surprised to hear their director or manager announce the results of the first key performance indicators. This resulted in justice assistants becoming more suspicious of the communication and information technology, and in particular towards what they called the 'systems that monitor our decisions *secretly*'. One justice assistant phrased it as follows: '*in the end, I am afraid that we become more controlled than the offenders we have to supervise in offender guidance*'. They were afraid that their purely quantitative data entries in SIPAR might be used as the *only criteria* for filling in their 'career development circles' and 'individual balanced score cards'. Due to the (perceived?) lack of communication, an increasing uncertainty emerged. Practitioners strongly felt that the use of 'countable' and 'measurable' outputs extracted from SIPAR would not lead to a fair and qualitative staff appraisal and performance system.

Managerialism + social work: hybrid professionalism?

While professionalism in Belgian probation work in the past and before 1999 required *specific* education and training (that is a social work degree) in order to acquire the necessary knowledge, expertise and skills, and while practitioners were until 2003 guided in their decision-making merely by a professional code of conduct, the notion of professionalism has changed as a consequence of recent reforms. More recently, their professional expertise has no longer been beyond criticism.

Professionalism is now together with professional practice included *within* a framework of control and accountability. Belgian probation practice is no longer driven by self-regulation and self-control on the basis of knowledge, expertise and skills, but blended with professional and managerial responsibilities and values. Values are defined here as 'normative statements that can and should be embodied in both the aims and the methods of an organisation or profession' (Nellis, 2007: 239).

Noordegraaf (2007) has referred to this as a shift from 'pure' professionalism to 'hybrid' professionalism. He portrays 'pure' professionalism as *controlled content*, which means 'professionals must know and do certain things to be professional (content), and they must be part of professional associations (control) to acquire content and be regarded as professionals with special privileges' (Noordegraaf, 2007: 765-766). By contrast, he characterises 'hybrid' professionalism as *content of control*. From this perspective control methods such as performance indicators, for instance, are not about being or becoming a true professional, but 'about showing professionalism or putting on a professional performance to enact meaningful and legitimate work practices' (2007: 778).

The increasing proceduralisation of practice can in fact support good practice and insist as a precondition of purposeful activity on legitimate professional expertise. In addition, it can promote accountability towards the organisation, the mandating authorities and their clients by making practice more transparent and clearer. In recent years, new probation policies and procedures have sought to establish greater accountability to the organisation, the mandating authorities and their clients. This, in Belgium, has occurred largely through calling attention to greater control and regulation of probation practice and the requirements to give accounts or explanations

about conduct. However, it must be acknowledged that the ability to control and check the quality of the work of justice assistants is limited. This is due to the essentially invisible nature of practice (Pithouse, 1987), which is in essence a client-centred approach based on one-to-one justice assistant / offender supervision meetings.

The two senior justice assistants made, at the Conference of 10 years of Houses of Justice in Brussels, explicit reference to the transformation from ‘the social to the informational’ in their daily work, but also emphasised that they did not (yet) witness a ‘shift from a narrative to a database way of thinking and operating’ (Parton, 2008: 253). In addition, they praised the ‘client-centred approach’ of the Houses of Justice (Claus and Schoofs, forthcoming). They did, however, express some caution regarding the increasing use of technology and managerialist practices:

‘Team’, ‘manager’, ‘resource planning’, ‘case-load’, ‘operational objectives’, ‘strategic plan’, ‘SIPAR’: up till now this has not fundamentally altered our daily practices. But at certain moments, we feel that we are no longer speaking the language that we used to speak. There is still room for improvement with regard to communication issues. We have got the impression that, since the introduction of the BPR, our work has been guided by external experts and managers, who use a top-down communication. Whilst one can create a uniform Service, one cannot create a uniform offender. The relationship between the justice assistant and offender should remain a defining characteristic for probation service interventions. Individual case-work remains crucial. The ideology of managerialism and the social work ideology: the two ideologies clash. For us, it is important that the values which underpin daily practice are social work values. (Claus and Schoofs, forthcoming, own translation)

In conclusion, probation systems in several European jurisdictions have experienced continuous processes of modernisation, which has equally generated organisational complexity and cultural transformations. In other jurisdictions, such as for instance in England and Wales, the erosion of traditional probation values due to ideology of managerialism, which has permeated the Probation Service, has been well documented (see, for instance, Nellis, 1995 and Vanstone, 2004). The change in the Houses of Justice can be defined as incremental change. A change characterised by adjustments and modifications within existing management processes, while strategic goals, organisational structure, and cultural values remain up till now – to a large extent – the same. Without any doubt, the application of New Public Management principles and the contemporary managerial ethos that depends on intensive data analysis by first developing strategic plans, followed by the setting of targets and the development of tools for monitoring and evaluating performance will influence and shape the direction of the Houses of Justice in the future. It is too early to speculate on the extent to which managerial goals will impact the Houses of Justice as most of these changes have occurred relatively recently. For now, it is fair to say that the increasing emphasis on managerialism has left the social work values and aims of the Houses of Justice, Department of Offender Guidance, in place. Future research will, however, have to be undertaken to confirm, refine or perhaps change this conclusion.

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