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Advocating for Youthful Offender Rehabilitation: The Case of Venture Partnerships in Prisons

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Abstract This study provides a qualitative analysis of the 1990s joint venture partnerships in prisons, focusing on the California Youth Authority's (CYA) quest to evolve and effectively rehabilitate young adult offenders. It explores the complexities of implementing these partnerships and the importance of goal attainment and cultural considerations, which are intertwined with accountability, inmate wages, and prison-base work programs. The research, based on interviews, document analysis, and original research, offers a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to the joint venture program outcomes.

Keywords: *rehabilitation, joint ventures, corrections, young adults*

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1. Introduction

During the 1940s, a change in thinking in criminal justice was taking shape in California. The California Youth Authority (CYA) was established in 1941 and aligning its operations with humanitarian goals to improve successful reform of young adult offenders (or wards) incarcerated in state prisons and camps. Challenging the prevailing norms with its mandate to teach, train, and rehabilitate young adult offenders, the CYA showed its bold initiative to replace punitive measures with purposeful work and meaningful rehabilitation [1]. This scenario was a stark contrast in an era where retribution was often the go-to approach. The CYA built training schools and engaged psychologists, social workers, educators, and vocational experts to curb criminal behavior among young adult offenders by fostering an ethos of rehabilitation over strict punishment, as well as replacing idleness with meaningful work [2,3]. In the 1990s, a resurgence of interest and public policy activism spurred public-private collaborations to reduce high incarceration costs and facilitate achievement of correctional missions and goals for better prisoner (inmate) outcomes. The "get tough" programs were losing appeal (e.g., surveillance and revocations, outrageous recidivism numbers). Consideration of this period, or cultural context, can shed light on collaborations in prisons. Frederick Mills, manager of the CYA Joint Venture Program, faced a variety of challenges implementing public-private partnerships (or joint ventures), which involved cultural, financial, legal, ethical and accountability issues.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to address critical research questions:

1. How did the cultural differences between the California Youth Authority (CYA) and private businesses impact the implementation and success of joint venture programs in the rehabilitation of young adult offenders?
2. To what extent did the CYA's rehabilitation approach and joint venture programs contribute to the successful reintegration of young adult offenders into society, and how did this compare to the outcomes of the "Nothing Works" philosophy and retribution through incarceration? This study reviews data, ideology, and the impact on public-private partnership management style to attain goals and mitigate cultural contentions.

The literature review focuses on the CYA goal to teach and train young adult inmates and the cultural issues that influenced Mill's management approach. The critical questions frame the study and the synthesis to the collaborative management theory.

2. Theory

Collaborative Management Theory is attracting interest among experts in public administration and criminal justice [4]. It is a key framework in the venture research project, and underscores the importance of cross-sector collaboration, shared decision-making, and mutual understanding. It was crucial in the California Youth Authority's (CYA) joint venture rehabilitation program, helping to understand how public and private partners can collaborate effectively despite differing goals and norms. Researchers realize the importance of clarifying *what works* in inmate reform [5]. Regarding prisoner accountability, and corrections effectiveness, managers can use values that reinforce steady employment and marketable skills training and literacy in structured partnerships (e.g., trade schools, prison workshops). The theory highlights the importance of understanding roles and responsibilities, the need for an entrepreneurial mindset, and motivated leadership for successful collaborations [6,7]. Its application provides insights into the complexities of implementing joint ventures and achieving successful rehabilitation outcomes.

3. Literature Review

Corrections Data and Ideology

According to the U.S. Department of Justice [7], the federal and state prison population increased by 94% in the early 1990s, up 94% over the preceding five years. A 2022 report by the California Legislative Analyst Office about prison population increase meant excessive costs--state prison services were $106,000 per prisoner over the past two years: $45,000 for security, $33,000 for inmate care, and only $3,500 for all other costs including rehabilitation. These intolerable high prison costs led to a focus on joint venture, collaborative, programs as a response to high recidivism rates and overcrowded conditions. However, rehabilitation remains challenging, with only 40% of parolees successfully completing their release conditions due to inadequate education and job training. Despite an average recidivism rate of 44.5% for young offenders in California between 2007-2015, state treatment programs have shown some effectiveness [8]. Partnerships between businesses and corrections, focusing on ex-offender employment preparation, can support post-release outcomes if partners are open to compromise [9]. In 2007-2015, the recidivism rates averaged 44.5% for young adult offenders in California corrections; at best the state treatment programs are, at best, a fair performance [8]. If state corrections are a place of “second chances” in which incarceration can “lead to a better life” [9], then partnerships between business and corrections need to focus on ex-offender preparation for gainful employment which includes workplace literacy. Today, the research on partnerships, or collaborations between corrections and businesses, can harness the enterprising spirit that fuels the U.S. economy and support ex-offender post-release outcomes provided that the partners remain open to compromise [12].

Ideology

Ideology has influenced the CYA goals and culture in terms of increasing contention between the managing partners. First, the culture of CYA as a government agency was primarily shaped by the distinct goals (public safety), values, and operating procedures, which primarily focused on the ideology of rehabilitation and retributive justice (punishment). Ideologies can be catalysts for selection and implementation of correctional programs [2]. From 1940 to 1980, the CYA earned national and global recognition for its innovative approach to rehabilitation and treatment, standing in stark contrast to the “Nothing Works” ideas of Robert Martinson and Andrew von Hirsch’s philosophy that favored retributive justice through incarceration. Second, the management journey of Fred Mills was not without its challenges for reform-minded administrators like Frederick Mills, who had worked against the warehouse and lock-em up corrections models, advocating for meaningful education and work provided in the privatized workshops operated *jointly* by the CYA prisons and businesses. Mills argued that these collaborations positively impacted the wards’ successful reintegration into society as workers contributing to their family and community. Ideology is particularly frustrating for experimenting with new and untried ideas such as public-private partnerships aimed at managing the successful outcomes of young adult offenders. However, today, there is low tolerance for overreliance on retribution through incarceration. Challenges to manager philosophy can increase the politicization of correctional programs and there were cultural factors that contested Mills implementation efforts of effective and efficient joint ventures.

Legal Challenges and Managing CYA Goals

The California Youth Authority (CYA) and private companies had differing goals: businesses sought profitability, while the CYA focused on inmate management and public safety. Navigating these differences, Fred Mills worked to align the partners’ objectives. Despite legal challenges and public scrutiny, important to Mills was fostering mutual understanding and goal alignment between the partners for innovating joint venture collaborations in the CYA to teach and train young adult inmates. The CYA adoption of federal guidelines under the Prison Industries Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) Act, authorizing prisoners to work in privatized workshops, led to competition between ventures and traditional government-operated enterprises. The author’s interviews and document reviews indicate overwhelming concerns for clarifying laws and regulations [10]. There was disillusion and mounting scrutiny by policy makers and community groups, such as the complaints from the Public Law Institute for alleged Eighth Amendment violations. In addition, the CYA faced criticism for prison operations exceeding capacity as noted in a 1991 Rand Corporation study that highlighted institutional inadequacies due to overcrowding, which limited rehabilitation. In 1990 voter approval of the Governor’s Inmate Work Program initiative (Proposition 139), saw improvements in structuring ventures, granting the legal rights to inmate-employees. Mills’ priorities: to secure the rights of working young adult inmates and mitigate public cynicism about involving the private sector in prison programs. The venture legal procedures and guidelines (e.g., hiring practices, work conditions) were helpful to the implementation of goals in the CYA camps and state prisons. Mills spearheaded the Free Venture Program, fostering partnerships between the CYA prisons and businesses to provide employment opportunities for wards upon their release. The legal provision affecting the implementation of these partnerships clarified regulations on federal occupational standards, wage regulations, tax deductions, and stronger protections for young adults and adults that volunteered to work in ventures. The PIECP Act expansion meant competition between the joint venture and traditional (license plate making) government-operated enterprises as either could employ prisoners.

Financial Challenges and CYA Goals

The CYA goals to teach and train were impacted by the financial goals. In the 1990s and the dawning of the twenty-first century, remained scrutiny of traditional government-operated prisoner work and literacy training programs because they paid nominal wages (less than a dollar per hour). Paying low inmate wages and the excessive costs of prison management in overcrowded CYA facilities was an enmity to the *Advante-garde* intentions of Mills [10]. The enormous changes in corrections for 40 years include shifts in goals—i.e., emphasis toward and away from a "lock-'em-up" approach that breeds despair, inefficiency, and excessive costs [5]. In the absence of public-private partnerships, the CYA risked continued criticism for ineffective rehabilitation of young offenders, overreliance on retribution and unmet reform expectations and excessive costs of prison management and operations. Financial issues of implementing the joint ventures and political pressures were difficult for Mills to manage. Financially, setting up the workshops, and maintaining the program, meant ensuring marketable and fair wages to the wards. The joint ventures had to earn a profit, and the young offenders had to gain marketable job skills to assist in their rehabilitation and post-release success. To generate resources, Mills formed alliances to sustain and expand ventures and fulfill the CYA's job training mandate and serve hundreds of young adult prisoners at receiving education and work training in the ventures. The public discourse about ventures and their financial resources was answered by the way partnerships were structured.

Mills developed a brochure outlining various venture models, along with the roles and responsibilities of both the prison and the business involved in operating the so-called "privatized workshops" within prisons. In the *customer model*, businesses buy goods made in prison-based workshops. An example of this is the printing company run by a private firm at the Utah State Prison in Draper. In the *manager model*, businesses oversee enterprises within prisons. A case in point is the program managed by Price, Inc. in Florida. Partners preference was for the *employer model* as young "inmate-employees" can manufacture goods in privately managed prison-based businesses or workshops. The businesses oversee the recruitment and training of the workers, pay market wages, and make deductions as per state-imposed contractual agreements. The California Youth Authority (CYA) favored the employer model, and financial resources from the business partners (covering setup costs and wages). Corrections also preferred this model due to its ability to address ethics and accountability concerns, especially since the workers received market wages. Barkley, a partner from Trans World Airlines and the onsite business manager at the CYA Ventura School, found that providing resources for these projects and firsthand training for the ward participants was beneficial for their future success. Mills's was not alone in envisioning a CYA goal attainment: teach, train, and inspire young offenders to change their life. The legal and financial considerations are intertwined with ideology and management philosophy. Reform-minded administrators championed a shift away from the punitive 'warehouse' corrections model to meaningful education and work provided in the joint venture models [9,10].

CYA Culture: Divergent Misunderstandings

The California Youth Authority (CYA) aimed to reintegrate ex-offenders into society, necessitating a supportive culture for workplace literacy and job-skills training. However, cultural differences arose as businesses sought profit, while corrections aimed for cost-efficiency and goal attainment. There were conflicts such as delays in deliveries and resistance to releasing inmate-employees on time [10]. Trust was built through understanding cross-sector collaborations, with training from the National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA) and compliance monitoring by the US Department of Justice. Laws helped establish accountability guidelines, including wage deductions for room and board, family support, victim restitution, and forced savings. Evaluations showed reductions in recidivism following the implementation of various programs [7,12]. Recent initiatives focused on partner training and cultural considerations to enhance accountability in modern inmate labor programs. In the 1990s, Mills faced political pressures from multiple stakeholders' business (small business associations, prisoner rights groups, others), labor unions, rival manufacturers, and minority groups. Opposition to joint ventures solidified due to fears of unfair competition. Mills open dialogue with stakeholders was the reassurance they wanted for positive joint venture outcomes. ventures. Managers decisions to use a marketing campaign to address political and economic concerns by linking to prisoner reform, through testimonials at legislative hearings and public forums. Jesus, a former venture participant, working for the Trans World Airlines as a reservations clerk, expressed happiness at securing a job and helping his family upon release [10]. Mills's approach received endorsements from authorities associated with joint ventures in other states. However, these challenges require careful planning, business resources, cultural shifts, and strong management to ensure sustainable ventures. Mills viewed assuaging politicians' concerns as a necessary to manage challenges and evolve the CYA culture more friendly to ventures. The aim was to help managers in the ventures undergo character changes to partake in the process of rebuilding the lives of young adult inmates [10,19].

CYA Evolution and Implications for Inmate Rehabilitation

Prisoner reform politics, linked to budget implications, involve decisions about ways to effectively use private sector services in corrections, which can ignite political debates. Mills, a corrections manager, advocated for prison evolution through effective management of goals and cultural differences. Joint ventures, despite challenges, have proven effective in transforming corrections and reducing recidivism rates. A 1983 study highlighted the greater employment needs of minority wards and socio-economic factors linked to literacy as factors for underachievement. No disputing the importance of understanding risk and protective factors [5,9] in individual inmate reform. Mills's story demonstrates

CYA's accountability to various stakeholders. Mills appearances before the California Legislature and stakeholder forums related to efficiency of in-house government-operated workplace literacy and vocational training programs as well as joint ventures in the CYA. In 2004, California consolidated the state adult and young adult prisons into the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, which was the *biggest justice reform*. A reflection on factors previously discussions regarding political budgets, scrutiny for overreliance on incarceration and rehabilitation failures. This choice of when and how to use the private sector in corrections (e.g., contracting out food services, education, training) can spur heated political debates. Political issues require attention and activism, and corrections managers (Mills), can remain resolute in the hope for prison evolution by effectively managing goals and cultural divergence. Joint ventures play a crucial role in the transformation of corrections and its work and rehabilitation ethos. Despite the challenges, independent research confirms the effectiveness of these programs, showing the lowest recidivism rates on record. Looking ahead to the prospects for youthful offenders after release, in a 1983 study, CYA researcher Fran Berkowitz reported that "minority wards have the same employment needs as whites but to a greater degree" [10]. Mills continued to collaborate with various community groups and argued that socio-economic status and literacy were factors for underachievement among minorities with emphasis on the importance of understanding roles and responsibilities in successful collaborations in CYA prisons. Demonstrating the CYA's accountability to the public, victims, stakeholders, and staff members.

Method and Summary Findings

This qualitative study [11], explores the implementation of joint venture partnerships in correctional facilities, focusing on the California Youth Authority's (CYA) rehabilitation program for young offenders. Statistical information is from quantitative sources in EBSCO and JSTOR. The research, based on interviews and document analysis, interviews, and provides insights into the program's goals, cultural differences, and divergent objectives [10]. Key findings include:

1. Accountability Model: Mills conceptualized the venture program as an accountability model, requiring partners to understand their legal, financial, and ethical roles for successful collaborations.
2. Wage Deductions: Accountability was maintained through wage deductions, addressing political concerns about budget and prison population management. The deductions: 15% room and board, 20% taxes, 40% forced savings for inmates upon release from prison, and10% victims' restitution. The joint venture programs requirements are to volunteer to participate and agree to forced savings as part of the accountability for their crimes and helping family and victims.
3. Benefits of the Program: Mills highlighted the program's benefits, demonstrating the CYA's accountability to the public, victims, stakeholders, and staff members, which underscores the positive impact these programs and potential of rehabilitating young offenders.

4. Conclusion

This study explores strategies to manage legal, financial, political, and accountability factors which influence the goals and culture of the California Youth Authority (CYA). Despite criticism and institutional shortcomings, this agency was able to manage goals and cultural considerations under the reformist leaders. Frederick Mills envisioned a future where young offenders are rehabilitated and prepared for responsible societal roles. Through collaborations with private businesses, they provided these individuals with opportunities for personal and professional growth. The CYA's approach underscores the power of rehabilitation over retribution, offering hope and practical skills to young offenders through prison-based work programs. However, without these skills, released young adults face unemployment and potential re-incarceration. Mills had to navigate complex procedural guidelines to operate joint ventures effectively, raising the question of whether correction managers like him can transform prisons from mere holding facilities to productive workshops. The narrative of youth offender rehabilitation and joint ventures in California corrections is a tale of challenges, dilemmas, and hope.

5. Reflection Questions

1. How did the choice to implement joint ventures resolve cultural issues to make it possible for young offenders to gain valuable skills and hope for successful reentry into society?
2. What challenges did Mills confront to implement the CYA goals: teach and train, which caused political consternation? Public (stakeholders) concerns?
3. Why did Mills think that collaborative management can help managers attain goals?

Explain the Mills concept of joint ventures as an accountability model. Identify pros and cons of an accountability model?

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