

## SHAPE OR ADAPT: THE FUTURE OF POLICING

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Are police shapers or adaptors? Are police able to shape or control their future or do they adapt to outside community and political changes or pressures? This study explores whether police are able to shape their future or whether they adapt. The study examines how police and policing has reacted in the past ten to fifteen years to the rapidly changing operating environment. As a result, seven strategic areas are proposed for police agencies to consider as a basis for analysis. The proposed framework is likely to enable police to become more resilient in the face of further uncertainty and enable them to shape or adapt, depending on the level and nature of the uncertainty.

**Keywords:** Police reform; strategy; planning; police organisation

### INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain is reported to have once said: “I’m concerned about the future because that’s where I’m going to spend the rest of my life.” Using his thought on the future as a springboard, one could ask: Is policing in the holistic sense, capable of shaping the future of society, and therefore the environment; or is policing incapable, and as a result, made to adapt instead?

According to Courtney (2001) shaping and adapting strategies may take many forms; shapers generally attempt to get ahead of uncertainty by driving industry change their way, while an adapter, by contrast, takes the existing and future industry structure and conduct as a given. This study examines both of these perspectives and comes to the conclusion that if the police were a shaper of the environment we would have a society that has radically different values than what we currently have in aggregate. While the police should have a voice in policy development, they are, and philosophically should be, an organisation that adapts to changes in society.

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How powerful is police bureaucracy and to what extent is it able to run its own political agendas and influence public policy? Finnane (1990) argued that there are sound historical reasons for considering why police and police administrators should be very active agents in the political process that affect the conditions of their work, particularly in areas such as police powers and the criminal investigation process. An interesting question is whether police should simply enforce the law and implement policies of government, or should they actively participate in, and influence the policy making process?

Gorringer (2001) argued that all public sector bureaucracies influence policy in some way – either by providing advice in formulating policy or by implementing the policy according to bureaucratic interpretation. However, Smith (1994) contends that if “one assumes that a bureaucracy is concerned for its own survival then it can be concluded that a bureaucracy will use its power of implementation with its discretionary aspects to further the interests of the bureaucracy” (p. 187). Part of this power, according to Smith, is that which concerns the prevention and disruption of new ideas.

#### WHO ARE THE POLICE?

The key distinguishing feature that makes police unique among public as well as private institutions is the general right to use coercive force (Bailey, 1990). It is also this general right to use coercion that makes a very large part of the police role immutable in the face of rapid social, political, economic and technological change. In other words, what police make available to society is the specific capacity for decisive action that stems, to use Egon Bittner’s (2005) phrase, from the “distribution of negotiable coercive force” (p. 161). That is, police can “handle” all sorts of “problems” falling broadly within the phrase “something-that-ought-not-to-be-happening-and-about-which-someone-had-better-do-something-now!” (Bittner, 2005, p. 161).

The resolution to a problem may involve the use of arrest or may comprise of nothing more than telling someone to move along or to calm down. The point is, that like the police annual budget, a very large proportion of police activities are uncontrollable in a strategic or planning sense, and that many of the ‘problems’ consuming police resources and inhibiting greater flexibility and creativity occur because of the defining characteristic of police work.

In order for police to try to identify what the future may hold, a useful approach may be to identify the options available, and to speculate as to what

can be done using their current level of resources. The current economic environment makes this especially important. It is important to understand that all efforts to appreciate, modify or adapt to the future social environment are predicted on the notion that long-range planning by police is designed to achieve two outcomes. Firstly, to ensure organisational survival and growth; and secondly, to facilitate social intervention, which includes such police outputs as crime prevention and control, and problem solving.

Whether this approach is desirable for the police and for the public is far from clear. The desire to impact on the future may appear self-evident, but complacency with the here and now, combined with a failure to recognise that police institutional rigidity is a barrier to planning and effectiveness has often been underestimated. In addition, police in general, do not have a history of developing strategic plans that provide the type of intellectual skill, experience and capability required for either environmental diagnosis or social forecasting.

#### POLICE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Even if there is police and public agreement over the need for police to assume a shaping role and that they undertake strategic planning, the question remains as to what end should planning be undertaken? Strategic planning for the purposes of adapting quickly and flexibly to whatever happens in the social environment is different from tactical or operational planning for an intervention. Operational or tactical planning is designed to modify the external police operating environment in predictable ways for a specific time period or reason.

An assumption in this discussion is that it is desirable for police to be pro-actively involved in efforts to transform contemporary society; a very contentious and debatable proposition given the historical record of police insensitivity, indifference, alleged corruption, and violence in the communities that are most likely to be the primary target of any planned intervention. Carried to an extreme, what would ultimately emerge would be a society based on what police think is the model citizen. In short, the police would become the state but without the necessity of standing for periodic re-election (Reiner, 1986).

The alternative to police being a shaper of society is that they are an adaptor to society. The perspective that police are an adaptor can be seen from reviewing the evolution of police organisations over the past 10 to 15 years. Over this period, police agencies have evolved rapidly in reaction to changing legislation and government-imposed reporting requirements. The focus of the

1980s on community policing and problem solving has shown significant success and is compounded by increased levels of police involvement in local safety and crime prevention initiatives, reassurance policing and addressing the reality and perceptions of community safety. Police success in criminal investigation, community and road safety has broadened to enable them to assume lead roles in emergency planning and management, whole of government responses to issues such as family/domestic violence, terrorism and international development assistance and advice.

The environment that police currently operate within has changed extensively in the past 10 or 15 years, not least the past five years. The threat from organised criminal activity increased in the 1990s under the combined effects of globalisation, based on innovations in communications technology, including the internet, and post-Cold War instability. These changes have been compounded by the ease with which such groups are able to exploit the global financial systems to facilitate fraud and money laundering. This means that transnational and domestic organised crime syndicates are more and more able to operate in a borderless world beyond the reach of traditional law enforcement and this has resulted in high-tech and identity crime emerging as a significant new criminal threat.

Criminals will continue to take advantage of developments in technology to develop new areas of criminal activity, operate remotely from the location of the crime, and evade law enforcement action. However, as criminals operate across jurisdictions, so indeed do police, through taskforce arrangements, and intelligence and information sharing. To increase the police capability to respond, they will need to further develop the level of skill of criminal investigators, and improve access to state-of-the-art technical support.

Conventional police organisational management is viewed as one of adapting to service delivery demands. Moreover, the usual command and control approach to management has evolved to become one of corporate governance and performance accountability, driven by government imperatives, community involvement, and partnerships with businesses and local leaders. Statistical comparisons of work areas that have been designed to assist in resource allocation and performance measurement are included in the new management approach. These statistical tools may be used to diagnose trends and manage knowledge, enabling awareness and adaptation of successful initiatives to be used in other areas.

## THE ADOPTION OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT BY POLICE

As an ever- increasing amount of resources were required to fund police organisations during the early to mid-1980s, and governments across western nations explored various methods that would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector organisations. New Public Management (NPM), which focuses on organisational inputs, outputs and outcomes, was introduced to a number of western nations in the late-1980s and formed the basis of police reform initiatives that were introduced in these countries from the 1990s through to the present day. While demand for resources grew during this time, it was generally perceived that the police were providing a diminished level of service (Manning, 2006).

The NPM approach arose from thinking about what is meant by the terms resource allocation, organisational performance and accountability. The basic thrust of the new management approach was to improve incentives for police to perform efficiently, and to provide a framework that would establish efficient and effective police organisations. The comprehensive reform of police during this period was identified as being the era of a 'new policing order' (Cope, Leishman, & Starie, 1997; Gillespie, 2006).

The new era saw a specific emphasis placed upon the police to become more accountable to the community and to achieve government outcomes. In order to meet the concept of community accountability, which was seen as the central component of democratic governing of policing, a realignment of police structures and processes emerged (Gillespie, 2006).

The theory of community policing assisted the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australian police to understand and accept this new, comprehensive, management approach. Using the performance framework of the NPM approach enabled law enforcement agencies to encapsulate high level objectives, and to use relevant performance indicators as a basis for their organisational structures and for allocating resources. The ability of law enforcement agencies to set key objectives ensured that they focused their resources and their service delivery priorities on specific geographical areas and crimes (Loveday, 1995) and to achieve the social outcomes that the government considered important. Social outcomes usually include programmes that increase the living standards of the public by decreasing poverty, and decreasing

the occurrences of crime, as was the objective when NYPD introduced the Broken Windows approach to policing.

The adoption of this approach by police was a significant achievement when it was used in conjunction with a compilation of specific performance indicators at the individual officer, unit and station levels. The adoption of the new management approach by countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Scotland and England enabled their police agencies to measure their performance against the performance of other police organisations, and also enabled them to make comparisons within their own organisations over time.

### THE NEW REALITIES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The current policing environment did not exist ten or even five years ago. The interaction between demographic, social, financial and criminal variables has changed fundamentally. These changes have occurred at the local, state and national levels. While some researchers agree that these variables have influenced change in policing (Police Executive Research Forum, 2009; 2011), a number of other researchers claim that the tragic events of September 11, 2001, were the catalyst for the current changes (Davis, Pollard, Ward, Wilson, Varda, Hansell & Steinberg, 2010). Whilst 9/11 has had a profound effect on policing (White, 2003; 2004; Cortright & Lopez, 2007), more recent changes have been a direct result of policies introduced in the late-1980s and early-1990s. For example, the implementation of New Public Management approaches, and in the United States, the federal funding of the recruitment of community police officers and the internationalisation of the war on drugs has resulted in two opposing approaches to the delivery of police services (Kraska & Paulsen, 1999).

While a number of factors affect the policing environment, two principle factors have created the conditions for significant change in how policing is organized and delivered. The first factor is the depth of the 2007 financial crisis and the corresponding decrease in police agency budgets, and the second, is the globalisation of crime and the local police response to the occurrence of these events.

The second major factor affecting the policing environment is the globalization of crime and the response to its occurrence. Very little is known about the link between organized and local crime, but police must be able to respond to both. This is important because the globalization of crime impacts on local communities. It no longer makes sense to respond to some crimes in one

locality without referring to what is occurring in other localities or internationally. Furthermore, the number of agencies responding to the occurrence of crime has expanded from state and federal governments to include private security companies and voluntary organisations.

### ASSESSING FUTURE DIRECTION

The new operating environment has led to new functions for the police to undertake, including leadership, planning, management and risk assessment. The police workforce is now more gender and ethnically diverse, which brings a greater range of skills, education, and experience to the profession. The previous rules-based direction is giving way to principles based on the empowerment of employees.

In order for police to become more resilient in the face of further uncertainty and to be able to shape or adapt, depending on the level and the nature of the uncertainty (Courtney, 2001), they need to be able to respond to changing market needs. To respond to uncertainty, police need to critically and comprehensively analyse their organisations. This can be undertaken by using a broad strategic assessment process, such as the “7S” framework, developed by McKinsey and Associates.

An organisational analysis framework may be used to critically examine policing in the current environment. The framework is based on seven strategic areas: Leadership, Partnerships, Governance, Staffing, Technology, Information and Intelligence, Performance and Accountability. These strategic areas shouldn't be viewed as being mutually exclusive, but as being interwoven and each area having an influence on others. Adopting the results from an analysis using the framework suggested would potentially enable police to increase their adaptability and organisational flexibility in the current, increasingly dynamic environment.

1. Leadership. An increased level of demand has been placed on police to provide leaders capable of meeting the growing complexity of the criminal and political environment.

Leadership was originally a component of the formal structure proposed by Peel in the 1820s (Neyroud, 2011), but police have used more of a command and control leadership style since the development of the professional model of policing. However, the introduction of community policing has provided debate

and has led to the development of a more inclusive professional style of leadership, which is evolving in parallel with an important discussion about the nature of the knowledge and practice in policing (Neyroud, 2011).

Far from the previously stable environment, police decision makers are expected to lead their organisations in a world of diminished resources, increased transparency and media attention, changes to governance, transnational and organised crime, and workforce diversity. These environmental elements have caused pressure to be placed on the procedure for the identification and training of future police leaders.

2. Partnerships. Partnerships will be required at all levels and across sectors and jurisdictions, to provide innovative and efficient solutions to crime and to the demands made by both local and central governments.

Even prior to the development and introduction of community policing, the majority of police organisations knew that they could not prevent crime on their own and that robust partnerships and relationships were key to problem solving. Strengthening and maintaining partnerships has increased in importance in the post-9/11 policing environment.

3. Governance. Police will need to demonstrate that they have comprehensive and sound corporate governance arrangements in place, owing to the complexity of the challenges that they will face over the next ten years.

The provision of additional resources and increased powers coupled with the inherent political sensitivities that are often attached to policing issues will result in continued momentum for appropriate corporate governance arrangements.

According to Bayley and Nixon (2011), there is a growing realisation among police leaders, politicians and academics that policing is at a crossroads. This junction has been created by impact of the 2007 recession and the demand for more professionalisation of policing. As a consequence, police executives are facing extensive changes in their reporting and governance relationships, and as a result, the cost effectiveness of service delivery and police core services are being questioned (Neyroud, 2011).

4. Staffing. It people who enable organisations to meet their objectives and are an organisation's most valuable asset. The prediction of future labour market needs, recruitment, retention, employee development,

deployment, and industrial relations will be critical to the future success of police organisations.

An organisational staffing mix that represents the community, together with professional, appropriately-trained and deployed staff will be required to implement community policing.

Professionalisation is one of the major institutional and human resource issues facing policing. While professionalisation is principally being experienced in the United Kingdom and the United States, the majority of police organisations around the world are also debating the issue. Professionalism is intended to encourage the development of confident, accountable police services that have established practices and standards that are based on evidence. However, as Neyroud (2011) identifies, the debate regarding professionalism is an example in the shape or adapt discussion, as police can lead the policy development of their own professionalisation, or, if they do not accept this challenge, they will leave a vacuum where other parties may design strategies that police may be forced to meet or agree to.

5. Technology. This will continue to impact on police as they grapple with the capacity to utilise and respond to new components or to the new application of existing technologies. This will include, for example, the need for real time access to information and for efficient processes for investing in the acquisition and development of equipment and technology.
6. Information and Intelligence. This will increase in significance as more data becomes available in electronic form. The ability of cross-jurisdictional police arrangements to allow for the access and exchange of data will become extremely important.

According to Ratcliffe (2007), and supported by Walsh (2011), the use of intelligence by police organisations appears to be broadening in scope and “is evolving into a management philosophy that places greater emphasis on information sharing and collaborative, strategic solutions to crime problems at the local and regional levels” (p. 1). Beyond the type of intelligence support needed for input for the development and review of corporate strategies and policies, a clear need exists to provide intelligence that will aid the organisation to achieve its organisational goals and objectives, and for it to implement its operational tasks.

7. Performance and Accountability. This is a critical factor in contemporary management best practice. The trend is towards an increase in more sophisticated and comprehensive performance measurement in a range of areas including expected levels of performance, effective management of human and financial resources and the maintenance of a corruption-free organisation.

Police organisations have traditionally been structured hierarchically to support the rules-driven culture and strict disciplinary code. However, police are examining the appropriateness and efficacy of the traditional or professional policing model for at least three reasons. The first is due to the acceptance and implementation of community policing. The second is owing to the inflexibility and consequent inability of the current policing model to meet the demands of service delivery efficiency and effectiveness in an environment described as volatile as in any competitive market (Densten, 1999, p. 45). The third reason is that the autocratic style of leadership and the strict enforcement of rules associated with the traditional model of policing is at odds with the expectations of a modern workforce.

Police organisations exist to achieve the crime prevention outcomes that will benefit the society or community they serve. The extent to which they succeed in achieving these outcomes may be termed organisational strategic performance. The importance of strategic performance has been recognised in literature, where a key theme is the difficulty of policing to establish and articulate clear goals and objectives. Rainy (1997) reports that one of the most frequently repeated observations of police organisations is that their goals are vague and ambiguous compared with those of private organisations. The lack of appropriate performance indicators, combined with political processes, often result in goals of police organisations being multiple, conflicting, and intangible (McLeod, 2002).

Police operate in an environment where the public demands efficiency and where police performance is intensely scrutinised by both the public and government. At the same time, the public also demands police effectiveness, timeliness, reliability and reasonableness, even though they may conflict with efficiency (Rainey, 1997). Different parties assess police achievements using different criteria. For instance, judges may evaluate police achievement on reasonableness and process concerns, while politicians or the media may use cost or timeliness.

The second issue is that a number of factors can influence the performance of police organisations in achieving crime prevention outcomes. These factors include the operational environment, political leadership, and internal leadership. Public opinion and pressure from interest groups and the media are often seen as compounding the problem (McLeod, 2002).

### CONCLUSION

Any analysis of the future may identify a number of broad trends that would be expected to impact on the state, federal or central government criminal justice sector agencies, including police. The traditional role of police has become more blurred with the police having an increased level of involvement in disaster management and national security, and the globalisation and transnationalisation of crimes such as terrorism, human trafficking and money laundering, and because they are more involved in multi-national and multi-jurisdictional responses. In order to meet these and other challenges, police need to develop a set of flexible, core capabilities around the traditional functions of community, road safety policing and criminal investigations.

The development of flexible, core capabilities needs to be framed within the arguments presented by such authors as Weisburd and Neyroud (2011), and Sparrow (2011), who argue for a systematic application of knowledge in policing and for greater attention to the development of police officers and their leaders at all levels. Indeed, both this discussion and the issues raised by these authors are essentially advocating police to be more self-directed and professionally capable to lead local service delivery to the public.

Although police are involved in the local, central or federal government policy development process, and one could argue, that they are capable of being a shaper, this process is extremely democratic and police often do not have the skills or the political ability in some areas, and are, hence, seen more as adaptors. As a result, police need to undertake an in-depth analysis of the seven strategic areas discussed above to ensure that they are capable of being either a shaper or an adaptor depending on the level and nature of the uncertainty faced (Courtney, 2001).

Such an analysis, with adequate democratic safety nets, would assist police so that they are able to undertake an active leadership role or assume a shaper role within its environment and in its core competencies.

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