

Challenges, issues and change: what's the future for UK policing in the twenty-first century?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This paper aims to review calls on the UK police service to respond to the dual challenge of increasing governmental/public demands for improvements in police efficiency and effectiveness in the likely context of decreasing real time increases in financial resources. Specifically it aims to highlight the reform of police organizational structures, a greater focus on performance management and people development initiatives as areas that have the potential to bring about significant benefits for future UK policing.

Design/methodology/approach - Using the results of Government-sponsored research and other secondary data the approach is to explore the potential for implementation of new approaches to policing. **Findings** - There would appear to be a consensus between the Government and the police service of the need for reform. The mechanics of successful implementation, however, face institutional, cultural and financial obstacles. **Research**

limitations/implications - The complexity of policing and its interaction with government and the public requires significant analysis. The success of future initiatives can only be judged through analysis following implementation. **Practical implications** - The paper identifies that there may be tangible areas of policing activity that could benefit from the implementation of new techniques such as the "lean" principles of management as a means of focusing on more cost effective ways of utilising future police resources. **Originality/value** - This paper draws together and contextualises specific areas of police practice that could benefit from new ways of working and posits improvements in efficiency for the future.[PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

FULL TEXT

Best Paper Symposia: UK and Swedish perspectives on topical studies in public management

Edited by Harry Barton

Introduction

Since the late 1970s, successive UK governments have placed significant emphasis on improving the operational effectiveness, efficiency and cost of delivery of UK public services. Specifically the more businesslike approach to public administration often referred to as new public management (NPM) has led to public service reforms that have focused on performance improvement and providing better value for money ([38] Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Newman cited in [33] McLaughlin *et al.*, 2002; [6] Boyne *et al.*, 2004).

Within the UK police service such reforms have been duly undertaken and yet the application of NPM principles have not realised the key performance improvements that might have been anticipated ([28] HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2004). As a consequence the UK police service has increasingly become the focus of scrutiny, with the current labour government intent on reform ([23], [24], [25] Home Office, 2008a, b, 2009).

One of the key elements of this reform programme has been a particular emphasis on improving the overall police performance management regime ([19] HMIC, 2005; [16] Flanagan, 2008; [4] Berry, 2009). Which to date, despite the availability of significant amounts of police performance data is still seen as in need of significant improvement ([27] HM Treasury, 2006).

Given this context the UK police service faces considerable challenges as we near the end of the first decade in the twenty-first century. The future strategy that the UK police service may adopt to meet these challenges has been

the subject of a major Government sponsored research project focusing on the police. This report commissioned by the Home Secretary, but independently undertaken by Sir Ronnie Flanagan the former chairman of the Association of Police Officers (ACPO) entitled *The Review of Policing - Final Report* ([16] Flanagan, 2008) sets out a series of recommendations emerging from work conducted under a number of key central themes: Threat, harm and risk; structures to deliver; improving performance; developing the workforce; freeing up space; delivering in partnership; involving local people and strengthening accountability. This Report and the subsequent UK Government's Green Paper ([23] Home Office, 2008a) therefore set out priorities for the future of policing in the UK.

The purpose of this paper is to explore three of these key themes that have the potential to have a significant impact on the future delivery of UK policing in the twenty-first century. These themes include corporate governance, central structures and systems; improving police force performance and developing the police workforce.

Corporate governance, central structures and systems to support twenty-first century policing

Repeated Government's both labour and conservative have attempted to introduce radical reforms to the police service ([20] Home Office, 1993, [21], [22] 2001, 2004). New laws have been enacted (2002, Police Reform Bill), external scrutiny bodies have been established and clear objectives in terms of operational performance have been set.

Performance indicators have been widely used in an attempt to improve individual police forces efficiency and effectiveness and as a consequence of the Police Reform Bill (2002) a "Police Standards Unit" was established within the Home Office. This was tasked with monitoring the performance of the different Force areas against the Government policing targets. This Unit, in conjunction with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Association of Police Authorities (APA), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Superintendents Association, sought to consolidate some of the key principles of police performance management.

Practical ideas and tips for implementing an effective performance management regime across police forces were included in these principles. This resulted in the publication of *Managing Police Performance: A Practical Guide to Performance Management* ([37] Police Standards Unit Great Britain and Accenture, 2004) and more recently *Police Performance Management: A Practical Guidance for Police Authorities* ([26] Home Office Police Standards Unit and the Association of Police Authorities, 2006). As a result of these guidance publications, the government hoped that overall policing performance across force areas would improve.

To an extent this has been achieved; however [9] Collier (2006), succinctly highlights the current situation: The notion of police performance needs to be unpacked into what is done; how it is done; and the results of what is done.

Much of the difficulty in achieving this, however, would appear to lie at the feet of successive governments and their attempts to develop appropriate methods of performance assessment. Almost unavoidably much of the work to date has been focused on financial indicators. To a large extent this can be explained by the fact that central government is the primary source of funding for the service where the total provision for policing revenue grants in 2008/09 will be £9,227 million, an overall increase of 2.9 per cent from 2007/2008. However, by 2010/2011 year on year increases are set to fall to 2.7 per cent. Small as this figure may appear there is an implicit assumption that "significant cashable improvements in efficiency & productivity over 2008-11 will therefore be central to delivering the Police Service's mission" ([24] Home Office, 2008b).

Financial indicators aside current determination of police performance in England and Wales is assessed by what is known as the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) and HMIC baseline assessments so as to provide a common assessment of all 43 police forces. This approach enables both quantitative and qualitative assessments to be combined to provide an up-to-date appraisal of how a force is serving the public in comparison to its most similar force (MSF). The intention of such an approach is for forces to be able to identify both areas of strengths and areas for improvements. Where improvements are deemed necessary, such forces have been

supported, since 1 April 2007, by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). This organization has been created to support self-improvement across local police forces particularly in relation to performance improvements.

The role of the NPIA has increased in importance with the introduction, in April, 2008, of a new police performance framework. The UK Home Office development of the Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) framework is an attempt to simplify and reduce the number of measures by which the police and others are judged in terms of their success in crime detection and improvements in community safety. The framework will cover policing and community safety issues in a balanced way by focusing on the most serious crimes and criminals. It will harmonise with related frameworks and contain indicators and targets that are shared between inter-agency partners. The first of these assessments was published in April 2009, reporting on the financial year 2008/2009. Given that the ultimate goal of all of the organizations involved is to help police forces to deliver improvements, there is a recognised need for greater clarity of purpose. [16] Flanagan (2008, p. 17) recommends that the "Home Office, HMIC, ACPO, APA and the NPIA should clarify and re-design their roles and responsibilities to remove duplication and sharpen incentives and accountability for performance and productivity".

To an extent this is already happening with an acknowledgement by the UK government of the need for a "softer touch" in terms of the amount and degree of performance monitoring and measurement that police forces will have to undertake in the future. That is not to say however that at police force level performance measurement will not continue to be thorough. It is at the National level where future requirements will result in just two key performance indicators being collected and analysed by the Audit Commission and these will monitor public perception of "trust" and "confidence" in the local police force.

Although the role of the Audit Commission may reduce in respect of the UK police service HMIC will receive greater statutory responsibilities for ensuring that constabularies are managed efficiently and effectively and will have greater power to intervene within forces that are seen to be underperforming.

Clearly, however, this will take time given the complexities and national remit of the organizations involved. What however is more immediate and will impact policing at the "local" level is the introduction of "comprehensive area assessment" (CAA) in April, 2009. This is intended to provide the first holistic, independent assessment of prospects for local areas and quality of life for people living there. It will put experience of citizens, service users and local taxpayers at the centre of the local assessment framework and recognises the importance of effective partnership working.

The intention is to look across councils, health bodies, police forces, fire and rescue authorities and others responsible for local public services and will add a new dimension to inspection and review of the police service. The new assessment regime will focus on value for money through resource assessment and performance management. Assessments will aim to ensure local accountability; bring together auditors' and inspectors' views for a rounded assessment of effectiveness; inform and focus improvement planning; and support public engagement and empowerment through reports on progress in improving priority services and value.

Organizational assessments will summarise how well an individual police force or more specifically operational command areas manage finances, governs its business, manages resources and manages performance, with leadership, capacity and capability needed for future improvements.

At a local police force level statutory roles have in recent times been undertaken by independent police authorities whose remit is to ensure that individual police forces are efficiently and effectively run. They also propose the police budget and, working with individual forces, set annual priorities and targets and monitor police performance against them.

Improving police force performance

In line with all other public services, the UK police service has increasingly become the focus of scrutiny, with the current UK government intent on reform. Underpinning all of the intended legislative changes has been the Government's emphasis on improving the performance of public services, and on the police service in particular. To date it has relied to a large extent on performance measurement as a proxy for comparing individual police

forces, this has not however been without its critics with the "police" consistently complained that inter-force comparisons were "unfair." As a result the notion of most similar force (MSF) groups as a mechanism for comparison has been adopted in recent years, in part due to the wide variations in geography and demographics it is not possible to construct national league tables for the 43 police forces in England and Wales. Thus, with the movement away from national league tables, the only elucidation of the relative performance of a police force is with respect to its MSF group.

In order to achieve this two assessments have been developed. The first concerns the performance delivered by a force over the last year when compared to that achieved by a group of most similar forces (MSF). A second is made by comparing individual police force performance year on year. Through the use of such assessments it is therefore possible to summarise an individual police force's performance across the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) domains based on the statutory performance indicators and HMIC baseline assessments. Such information can then be used to rank police forces in terms of their overall performance (within their MSF group).

In terms of other techniques utilised to investigate police performance there have also data envelopment analysis and stochastic frontier analysis ([49] Thanassoulis, 1995), which have used a range of measurements, input and output, to base their performance studies on. A related comment was outlined in the government-sponsored [44] Spottiswoode (2000) report identified the need for more efficiency based measurements. Conversely, the [19] HMIC (2005) has adhered to the more output only driven performance measurement approaches. [14] Drake and Simper (2005) succinctly describe the appropriateness of whether to employ input and output (efficiency) or just output (performance) criteria (see also [10] Dadds and Scheide, 2000; [12], [13] Drake and Simper, 2003a, b). [1], [2] Barton and Beynon (2006a, b) investigated the ability to model the rank performance of a police force with respect to its MSF group, including the identification of the minimum changes in its sanction detection levels that would improve their perceived performance ranking. The technique utilised in these studies was the PROMETHEE outranking method of multi-criteria decision making ([7] Brans and Vincke, 1985; [8] Brans *et al.*, 1986). The identification of prescribed minimum changes to improve a police force's performance ranking, a feature of the uncertainty based analysis with PROMETHEE ([30] Hyde *et al.*, 2003; [29] Hyde and Maier, 2006).

Despite the availability of techniques for measuring performance, on reviewing current police performance management, [16] Flanagan (2008) makes a number of recommendations. Among these he concludes that; Forces should focus effort on high potential areas for improved productivity, such as demand management [...] procurement, and flexible working ([16] Flanagan, 2008, p. 34).

Within this context he also calls for a more "lean" thinking approach throughout the Police Service. The notion of the police ever being regarded as a "lean enterprise" may to observers both within and outside of the police service seem a fanciful aspiration. However the application of "lean thinking" to the public sector has an emerging academic literature ([42] Radnor *et al.*, 2006), with substantial operational and organizational benefits seen to materialise from adoption of a "lean thinking" approach ([35] Papadopolous and Merali, 2008). Although to date the most cited examples of lean application have been within the health services ([41] Radnor and Walley, 2008) there is much evidence that in other public service environments improvements in service performance, improved processing times and achieving "better value for money" have resulted from such lean interventions ([18] Hines and Lethbridge, 2008).

Within [16] Flanagan's (2008) report the adoption of a "lean" variant in the form of "QUEST" is identified as an opportunity "to engender and embed a culture of continued improvement, where culture change is the essence in successful process improvement work" ([16] Flanagan, 2008, p. 32). Although in its early phases, the results from the adoption of this new process improvement initiative across three "pilot" police constabularies (forces) are encouraging with preliminary results showing marked improvements in performance across a variety of areas: Lancashire Constabulary - 96 per cent customer satisfaction with a new system of surgeries and scheduled appointments.

Thames Valley Constabulary - Berkshire East Beat Crime Unit (BCU) saw a 10 per cent improvement in response

times for "urgent attendance", and a 6 per cent increase for "immediate response".

Avon and Somerset Constabulary - eight-day reduction in time to contact reported victims of assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

Such emerging empirical evidence ([43] *The Sharp End*, 2008) is encouraging. But what has been learned? It is likely that within the pilot areas there was little previous experience of process management, nor any history of process improvement or improved capability. Nevertheless, the results would appear positive. What is less clear from the evidence presented is the effort in time and resources put into the pilot areas. Clearly employee engagement has had a major impact on the success as evidence suggests that effective "lean" implementation is predicated on the construct of people, notably "front line staff", to make it happen ([32] Liker and Meier, 2006). It would therefore seem justified that the utilisation of the workforce (police) and their development should be the focus of the final area for review.

Developing the police workforce

The importance of effective HR practices for influencing employee attitudes and improving worker performance in ways that are beneficial to the employing organization, is widely recognised ([39] Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). In the context of police "workforce reform" this is recognised:

Workforce reform involves joining officers and police staff in a strategic framework providing clear career pathways through accreditation of skills and competencies, whilst improving demand management and workforce planning, particularly in relation to recruitment and deployment, in order to mitigate risks and ensure operational resilience ([16] Flanagan, 2008, p. 40).

In order to achieve this [16] Flanagan (2008) makes the case for a robust system of HR management running throughout the Police Service viewed as necessary to ensure that strategic manpower objectives are met. This would be in line with much current thinking on the subject whereby it is suggested:

[...] strong HRM systems can enhance organisational performance owing to shared meanings in promotion of collective responses that are consistent with the organisations strategic goals ([5] Bowen and Ostroff, 2004, p. 213).

This is particularly important in an organization such as the police where the impact of discretionary behaviour in support of the organization, sometimes referred to as organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) ([3] Bateman and Organ, 1983; [15] Ehrhart, 2004), has such an important role to play in public perception. The more effective internal "people management" becomes, particularly in the key area of leadership behaviour, the greater the likelihood that managers (particularly front line managers) will be able to influence employee attitudes and behaviour:

[...] it is officers and staff that make policing happen. It is individuals that build relationships with communities, and provide reassurance to victims of crime, and seek to bring the perpetrators of crime to justice ([16] Flanagan, 2008, p. 39).

The most often studied high performance work practice has been that of empowerment ([51] Tsai, 2006; [11] Delaney and Huselid, 1996). While there have been many definitions of empowerment these generally include the notion of decentralisation of decision-making authority and responsibility to lower level employees so that they have discretion to act on their own to think strategically and to be personally responsible for the quality of their tasks and to improve the organizations functioning ([34] Mills and Ungson, 2003; [36] Pardo del Val and Lloyd, 2003). As such empowerment is conceptualised as a set of managerial practices focused on delegating decision-making authority ([47] Spreitzer *et al.*, 1999).

It is recognised however, that whilst management (police) can create a context for empowerment, employees (police officers and civilian staff) must choose to be empowered ([40] Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997). As such empowerment is not something that management does to employees, it is rather a mind set that employees develop regarding their role in the organization; a form of intrinsic motivation termed "psychological empowerment" ([50] Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

Psychological empowerment is a motivational construct leading to increased intrinsic task motivation manifested

on behalf of employees in a set of cognitions relating to their work role ([34] Mills and Ungson, 2003; [48] Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997). These cognitions include meaning, (value of a work goal judged in relation to an employees own standards and ideals) competence, (employees belief in their capability to perform activities with skill), self-determination (employees sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions) and impact (the degree to which an employee perceives they can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work) ([48] Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997; [45] Spreitzer, 1995; [50] Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Together, these cognitions reflect an active rather than passive orientation to the work role, whereby the work situation is not seen as "given" but one that can be shaped by their actions ([46] Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999). Employees thus develop a feeling of empowerment which can enhance the value of their work, increase job satisfaction and contribute to work productivity and success ([31] Koberg *et al.*, 1999).

It is important that first line managers within the police understand how to develop a feeling of empowerment amongst their subordinates. Prior to the implementation of any specific empowerment interventions police "managers" have to encourage their sub-ordinates to feel that they have power over significant aspects of their work, and identify how they may be able to develop a sense of ownership in their work and in their force. This, it is suggested, leaves employees optimistic, involved, committed and able to cope with adversity where they feel a sense of responsibility and capability and are able to work independently ([17] Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). To a large extent the work environment in which both police officers and civilian members of staff operate has until relatively recently been unrecognised as having the potential to de-motivate staff. Understanding the role of psychological empowerment in the development of the police workforce is likely to represent an important opportunity for twenty-first century policing within the UK.

Such challenges are recognised throughout the police service and the responsibility to drive forward an innovative and creative people management agenda is being undertaken by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). In an ambitious ten-year strategy the "workforce modernisation" plan seeks to develop a programme of sustainable business change which aims to increase overall police productivity through improvements in workforce planning and design.

Conclusion

Attempts to introduce new public management (NPM) have not proved as successful within the police as it has in other public services. Successive governments have "wrestled" with the police to bring about reform and yet stubbornly change is slow. The most recent report on the police ([16] Flanagan, 2008) offers a number of practical propositions that consolidate and refine a number of strategic decisions that both the police and policy makers would appear close to agreeing on. This paper has focused on three key themes that may have a significant impact on the administration, monitoring, management and operational capabilities of UK policing in the early part of the twenty-first century.

The first theme addresses corporate governance, support structures and systems. Within this [16] Flanagan (2008) rightly identifies that there needs to be further clarification of the roles of key players who interact within the police system. As a result of his recommendations the UK government would appear to have accepted that the role of regulation and monitoring of the police requires a "lighter" touch and that the amount of data provided by the police centrally will be reduced. That is not to say that internal scrutiny will not continue however. At a National level there will in the future be only two key performance indicators and these will be an assessment of "trust" and "confidence" in the police. This work will be undertaken by the Audit Commission, who will devise suitable metrics for analysis. In terms of the remainder of the overall audit regime responsibility to a large extent will remain with HMIC who will assume greater responsibility for supporting the police service through the NPIA.

At a local force level there is already a clear move to decentralise much of the central control from the Home Office to local police authorities and "elected mayors". Increasingly Chief Constables will find themselves accountable to locally elected representatives. A significant example of this was the "forced" retirement of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police - Sir Ian Blair in October, 2008.

The second theme explores approaches for "improving police force performance" and [16] Flanagan (2008) offers

new initiatives, such as the adoption of "lean" principles to both organizational and operational activities. Such new initiatives promise practical innovations in terms of embedding a culture of continual improvement throughout the police service.

The third theme focuses on the need for "developing the police workforce" and discusses mechanisms for driving forward an ambitious people development agenda which it is argued will require the implementation of robust HR practices. Such an agenda will be led by the NPIA through its ten-year workforce modernisation plan. This looks to develop a programme of sustainable business change aiming to increase police productivity, through improvements in workforce planning and design.

Taken together the "Report" and the recommendations contained therein offer the potential for a new approach to policing for the twenty-first century. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the key actors involved within UK policing, new approaches to improving police force performance and a positive "people management" agenda should enable the police to more effectively respond to the challenges of the early part of the twenty-first century.

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