

The 'Police Change Manager': Exploring a new leadership paradigm for policing

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Abstract

The pace, complexity and extent of change in policing are unyielding. Therefore, police leaders must be capable and effective leaders of change. This article provides an exploratory analysis of the experience of police leaders who are responsible for delivering transformational and enduring change, through data collected during a recent study in an urban English police force. The findings show that although positive steps are being taken to improve the way in which change activity is managed and implemented, there is still some way to go. A disconnect was identified between those who are leading change within the headquarters function and their capability to do so. The need to 'lead for today' while also 'leading for tomorrow' is identified as a key tension at executive level. The article tests the hypotheses that leading change is a specialism of police leadership that should be recognised as such. Implementing the role of the 'Police Change Manager' is proposed as the approach by which a more capable and successful change function might be established. The article concludes with recommendations for maturing the approach to change in policing and proposes opportunities for further research.

Keywords

Police reform, change management, police leadership, criminal justice reform, organisational design, organisational culture

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Research context

In October 2010, the UK government undertook a root and branch review of public sector spending. In response to the enduring financial turmoil of the previous 2 years (Elliott, 2010), this 'Comprehensive Spending Review' led to an unprecedented re-evaluation of spending across the public sector. With the exception of the National Health Service and overseas aid budget, reductions in the region of 20% over the 5-year term 2010 to 2015 were the norm across all key government departments (HM Treasury, 2010). Opponents of this approach maintained a consistent and vehement position that the much sounder economic strategy for stimulating growth and reducing the national debt was to spend and invest, rather than adopting the cautionary approach of cutting public spending so drastically (Hennessy and Kleinman, 2008). This reduction in public spending, which persisted through the general election of 2015 and the distractions of the Brexit referendum of 2016, mean that the delivery of core public services now looks

markedly different to that of 2010. Even with a very cautious easing of public sector pay restraint, occasional positive rhetoric emerging from the UK Treasury and some shoots of optimism in relation to infrastructure investment projects, the overall direction of travel remains one of further restraint for many years to come (HM Treasury, 2017; Kentish, 2018).

Whether in community mental health provision, adult education, policing or youth outreach work, the delivery of these core public sector services has had to be remodelled and reconstructed in such a way as to meet statutory responsibilities while reducing activity in areas that were affordable in times of plenty but that, in the current context, are simply unaffordable. This wholesale redesign across

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much of the public sector has presented significant opportunities, as well as noticeable threats. With payroll costs being a heavy burden on public sector organisations, the primary response to budgetary restraint has been to reduce headcount and prioritise what the remaining personnel are doing (Travis, 2017b). In the main, this means focusing on statutory requirements and those areas that pose the most risk – to the public and to the reputations of those agencies concerned (BBC, 2015; Dearden, 2017).

The work to remodel public service delivery has placed a significant responsibility upon senior leaders within all of the organisations involved. Beyond the enduring responsibility of day-to-day operational delivery, these individuals have also been charged with a renewed responsibility of leading change on a scale that, hitherto, has not been encountered. The enduring timescale over which this change is being delivered has meant that, for almost a decade, change is consistently on the agenda. It could be suggested that there is nothing new in this and that all public sector bodies have always been working to evolve and improve. However, this article argues that this was ordinarily manifested as short- to medium-term activity, in response to the demands of the day, seeking a manageable level of continuous improvement. Even in the context of seismic influencers within policing such as the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999) or the Sheehy Inquiry (Kirby, 1993), it is argued that the transformational nature of these watershed moments was not comparable with the scale, cost or complexity of changes to policing since the comprehensive spending review of 2010. The change activity witnessed in recent years is of a different order and has, for that reason, placed demands upon public sector leaders that are without precedent.

Introduction

This article provides an exploratory analysis of the experience of police leaders who are responsible for delivering transformational and enduring change. Within the context described above, it is argued that today's police leader must be as competent in leading change as they are in leading crime investigations or the response to public disorder. A hypothesis is presented that argues that change management is a new command specialism in policing. In the same way that a Public Order Commander or a Senior Investigating Officer require skills and experience to manage risk, solve problems and engender support among subordinate officers, this article contends that the 'Police Change Manager' occupies a role that requires a specific set of skills and experiences that carry a similar responsibility.

Successful outcomes for those commanding front-line policing activity will include managing the expectations of stakeholders, protecting organisational reputation and

leading diverse teams to achieve complex outcomes within the constraints of time, cost and quality standards. It is argued that a 'Police Change Manager', in delivering transformational change, will be working to the same exacting strategic standards – albeit situated in an alternate context and therefore requiring skills and experience that are similar to, but distinctly different from, those who are leading front-line policing activity.

The research that follows identifies that a common approach is to appoint operational police commanders into change management positions, with some support from external experts. However, it is argued that recognising and professionalising the role of the 'Police Change Manager' is the proper way to achieve excellence in police transformation. Through a blended experiential skill set involving the application of change theory, coupled with extensive experience of police leadership, successful change outcomes are more likely to emerge.

This article is presented in two parts. First, a broad review of the policing context is provided, to aid understanding of the current drivers for delivering change. Second, the article presents the findings of recent research conducted in a large urban English police force. Through semi-structured interviews with police managers/leaders engaged in change, the current approach to transforming policing is explored, with a focus on lessons learnt for making improvements to change delivery in law enforcement organisations.

It should be noted that scholarly discourse is frequently drawn to differentiation between those who hold 'management' roles in organisations and those who are viewed as being 'leaders' (Adair, 2004; Bennis, 2003). Although popular literature draws a relatively clear distinction between the leader who will articulate the guiding vision and the manager who will transact the outcomes required, this binary view is not necessarily so clear within the context of change. In this setting, the attributes required of leaders and managers are, in some cases, more closely aligned than might otherwise be expected (Caldwell, 2003). Indeed, within the context of policing, the rank of inspector is considered to be a middle-management tier, at most. However narrative emerging from the service, particularly in the context of recruitment, identifies proven leadership (not management) skills as being key to reaching that rank (College of Policing, 2017). To navigate these idiosyncrasies of language, this article identifies that the participant population of sergeants, inspectors and superintendents should all be considered 'leaders', who hold both leadership and management-related responsibilities to design and deliver change. It is the executive level of the organisation (which also took part in the study) that holds the strategic visioning responsibility to shape organisational direction. Ergo for the purposes of this article, presupposing a difference

between leadership and management responsibilities need not be a distraction that constrains the progression of the arguments being made.

Drivers for change

Change in policing is not happening without good reason. The environment within which policing is operating is new and laced with complexity. Political, economic, social and technological factors are forcing the service to look critically at how policing is delivered. The agenda for change is being built accordingly. As alluded to earlier, policing in the UK is under pressure. The number of officers serving in England and Wales is now at a record low. In March 2010, there were over 140,000 police officers working across the 43 forces in England and Wales. By March 2018, this number had reduced to less than 123,000 officers. This is recognised as the lowest number of warranted officers since comparable records began 22 years ago (Dearden, 2018). Simultaneously, crime is rising at a rate not seen since national crime recording standards were introduced in 2002. In the year to September 2017, a 14% increase in the number of reported crimes was recorded, with an increase in violent crime driving much of the spike in recorded offending [Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018; Travis, 2017a].

Arguably, these numbers tell only half the story. Additional pressure is also being placed on policing by virtue of the changing nature of crime, including managing vulnerability, in all its forms. Reported inadequacy in mental health provision means that the first response to people in crisis often remains the domain of the police service, while missing people are another example of non-crime incidents that bring considerable demand (Campbell, 2018; Smith and Shalev Green, 2016). The national College of Policing supports the view that these key drivers of demand are problematic for the service and that resilience is being further tested by more frequent instances of officers being mobilised between forces, to provide additional support in times of extraordinary demand (College of Policing, 2015).

There is no greater driver of extraordinary demand than terrorism. The short-term requirement to mobilise people is perhaps the most visible sign of this demand. Subsequent disruption caused to business-as-usual activity is significant. Arguably, the more enduring pressure that stems from these seismic events is the financial impact. For example, the London Bridge terror attack in June 2017 cost the Metropolitan Police Service in excess of £10m. Although additional funding from central government is meant to be available in events such as this, accessing it is problematic. As noted by the London Assembly;

because of the size of the Met's budget, it effectively cannot apply for Police Special Grant. The rules state that an extraordinary event must cost over 1 per cent of a force's total budget before any grant can be given... For the Met, any individual event must cost approximately £30 million to qualify. (Greater London Authority, 2017: 18)

Greater Manchester Police have experienced similar difficulties in trying to secure additional funding from the Treasury in the aftermath of the Manchester Arena bombing of May 2017 (Pidd, 2017).

In considering the efforts of local political leaders to secure additional capital for their respective force areas, it is useful to reflect upon the complexities of police governance and the politicisation of policing as a further driver of change, to which police leaders must respond. The introduction of locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) by the coalition government in 2010 provided a democratically elected layer of scrutiny and control of policing that had arguably been missing under the previous police authorities model (Bailey, 2015; Home Office, 2010; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2014; Lister, 2013; Loveday, 2013). The utility and effectiveness of this new approach to police governance is not part of the discussion here. However, it is clear that the introduction of PCCs has forced police leaders to work differently, particularly in the context of securing support (and funding) for their operational change agenda. Whether seeking investment to procure new digital assets, build new police stations or alter recruitment and retention policies, local political scrutiny is now ever-present (Mayor of London, 2018; Smith, 2015).

The political drivers of change and the destabilising impact of reduced funding for policing are further complicated by the professionalisation agenda that is also being pursued. Much of this work is now being led by the College of Policing. Modern-day professionalisation of policing has been 'work in progress' for much of the last decade. The *Review of Police Leadership and Training* (Neyroud, 2010) and the *Independent Review of Police Officer and Staff Remuneration and Conditions* (Winsor, 2012) were both watershed interventions that have shaped the service to look critically at its modernisation agenda. Fast tracking of internal talent and direct entry into leadership ranks are examples of recent activity being pursued (Smith, 2016). The headline objective in 2019 is full mobilisation toward implementing the Policing Education and Qualifications Framework (PEQF). This strategy sets out to establish a modern curricula that will cover all professional development from recruit constables all the way through the ranks to the Chief Officer cohort in England and Wales (College of Policing, 2018). Further, the

National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has a stated ambition that 'by 2025 policing will be a profession with a more representative workforce that will align the right skills, powers and experience to meet challenging requirements' (NPCC, 2018). These efforts to further improve capability within all ranks of the police service introduce additional complexity to the change agenda – in terms of delivery of the professionalisation outcomes themselves and ensuring that such deliverables emerge from a sound evidence base.

When considering the crime demands that are placed upon police forces in England and Wales, the temptation is to focus upon 'new demand'. This includes cyber-related offending, in the form of financial crime and web-enabled sexual exploitation of children. Indeed, it is true to say that there is significant demand here, in terms of volume and complexity. However, there remain significant (and in some instances increasing) levels of offending in more traditional domains. Police records identify that burglary (2%), robbery (22%) and public order offences (30%) all showed an increase in 2018 (ONS, 2018). The challenge from a change perspective is to identify and adopt new ways to deal with familiar offending while also responding to new crime demands. In respect of the former, scrutiny of police efforts to deal with crime more efficiently has recently been extremely vocal, largely due to police willingness to close (or 'screen-out') crimes where there is a belief that solving the case is unlikely. Indeed, it has been reported that in calendar year 2017, London's Metropolitan Police Service screened-out just over 34,000 crimes within 24 h of being reported, compared with just over 13,000 the year before (Marsh and Greenfield, 2018). The prevailing discourse here is that the speed with which such investigations are being concluded demonstrates undue simplicity within the crime-screening process, rather than a reliable mechanism for injecting efficiency into making these decisions. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it is a helpful demonstration of how scrutiny of police process is ever present and how the service must have a robust mechanism to defend changes that are made to policy, based on data and hard evidence. Defence of such approaches will frequently be the domain of the 'Police Change Manager'.

It may be helpful to think of traditional acquisitive crime as 'old demand'. In the same way that cyber offending, child sexual exploitation, human trafficking and historical allegations of sexual abuse can be viewed as 'new demand'. The point of contention here is that, from both the old and the new, demand on policing is increasing at a time when there are fewer officers, less money and more of the extraordinary events (for example, terrorism) taking place simultaneously.

This short discussion of the drivers for change in policing is provided to give a broad sense of the types of issues that are on the change agenda within policing in England and Wales. It is designing and implementing credible and enduring responses to these challenges that is the domain of the police leader and, as argued by this article, the 'Police Change Manager'. That response will remain focused on the prevention of crime and disorder, maintaining public safety and bringing offenders to justice. Albeit, there is an argument that a wider definition of the policing purpose should now be sought, to better articulate the breadth and complexity of expectation that now rests with the police service in England and Wales. Against this mountainous task, the frequently proffered response is that technology is the answer. Often that will be the case. However, new technologies are, of themselves, change events of significant magnitude and so must be managed accordingly. Rather than a quick fix for solving the ills of the past and providing much needed reform, digital transformation is arguably the most complex change that can be attempted (Syal, 2013).

The change management profession is widely recognised as a discipline in its own right, and the demands placed upon those who are required to lead change are reflected across sectorial boundaries. It is tempting to offer a broad analysis of generic change management issues, to situate the research in the wider context of the change profession. However, this article deliberately does not enter into this discussion. Instead, its purpose is to consider change specifically in the context of the police service and draw conclusions within that setting, for the benefit of law enforcement professionals.

Method

As identified previously, the purpose of this study is to test the hypothesis that change management is a new command specialism in policing. In the same way that a Public Order Commander or a Senior Investigating Officer will require skills and experience to manage risk, solve problems and engender support among subordinate officers, this article contends that the 'Police Change Manager' occupies a role that requires a specific set of skills and experiences that carry a similar responsibility. Research was conducted with a large, urban English police force during September and October 2018. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted, providing approximately 10 h of data, with the intention of conducting an exploratory analysis of the experience of police leaders who are responsible for delivering transformational and enduring change. The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed manually after the event. The participant population was drawn from mid-senior (sergeant and inspector ranks), senior (superintending

Table 1. Interview participants.

Participant ID	Rank	Role descriptor
L1	Chief Superintendent	Senior change manager and warranted officer with operational leadership responsibilities
L2	Superintendent	Senior change manager and warranted officer with operational leadership responsibilities
L3	Superintendent	Senior change manager and warranted officer, working full time in change management
L4	Executive board member	Executive change leader. Civilian employee
L5	Inspector	Middle manager and warranted officer working full time in change management
L6	Superintendent	Senior change manager and warranted officer, working full time in change management
L7	Superintendent	Senior change manager and warranted officer, working full time in change management
L8	Sergeant	Team leader and warranted officer, working full time in change management

ranks) and the executive level of the case study organisation (see Table 1). All participants had formal change-related roles within the organisation, rather than simply being positions they had assumed. The semi-structured interviews were focused broadly around a requirement to secure data against four main areas:

- experiences of change leadership;
- design of outputs to deliver the required change;
- implementation of the change; and
- review of benefits and transition to business as usual.

To protect the anonymity of participants, gender and length of service have been withheld. It is recognised that eight participants is a relatively low number of people from whom to gather data. However, it is argued that the seniority of the participants and their particular roles in the case study organisation mean that they are influential people who hold significant control and influence. As such, they are well placed to participate in this study.

The semi-structured interviews explored the change management experiences of the respondents, in terms of their own understanding of leading change and of their experience of being led through change by those senior to them. To progress the hypothesis identified earlier, the concept of the 'Police Change Manager' was presented to each respondent, to test the utility, relevance and potential value of introducing such a role in the host organisation. Each interview was assigned a unique identifier, to protect the identity of the participants and to provide a mechanism by which interview responses could be traced.

It should be noted that the scope of this research does not extend to seeking front-line (police constable) experience of leadership behaviours or a detailed analysis of the organisational outcomes that stem from the implementation of change. The research is deliberately constrained to a small subset of change leaders in the case study organisation, to draw preliminary conclusions and act as a catalyst for further study.

During and after data collection, an ongoing process of analysis took place. This was conducted manually. It is

recognised that a qualitative researcher has two options from which to select an analytical method. These are either manual or automated. Deciding which approach to take is a matter for the researcher and will depend upon the volume of data collected, the resources available to conduct the research and the ontological perspective of the researcher (Miles et al., 2014). It is also argued that:

Data analysis is the most difficult and crucial aspect of qualitative research. It is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing. (Basis, 2003: 143)

To this end, it is argued that manual data analysis is significantly more desirable than a computer-aided approach. It is only by the researcher engaging with the data in this manual way that a true depth of understanding can be achieved (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Silverman, 2013). It is accepted that there are two common methods that can be employed in analysing and presenting qualitative data; by presenting the results in a coded/categorised way or providing the reader with extensive quotation of the information (Bliss et al., 1983). For the purposes of this article, it is argued that the second of these approaches provides the most comprehensive method of both understanding the data and affording the reader the opportunity to digest the rich experiences identified through the research.

Findings and discussion

The data gathered through this research demonstrated that participants were willing to engage in conversation and offer considered solutions to the challenges associated with delivering change on a significant scale. It was clear that much reflection had been undertaken by participants prior to interview and that there was an ongoing narrative within the organisation as to how best to organise with purpose and precision, so that successful change outcomes can be delivered. Analysis of the data led to the identification of the following key themes:

- Suitability and preparedness to lead change;
- Executive involvement in change;
- Design and delivery.

Respondents were able to offer rich and insightful commentary that allowed the research to progress and the hypothesis to be explored and challenged. Direct extracts from the interview transcripts are included below, where this testimony assists in demonstrating and illuminating the arguments being made.

Suitability and preparedness to lead change

Seven of the eight participants had experience in an operational policing environment, with experience levels ranging from 4 to 29 years in the police service. All of these officers had been engaged in the delivery of front-line services, both as operational officers and, more recently, in leadership roles. It was noted that there was a perceived lack of formal criteria by which the participants had been selected to take part in change activity, as was observed by one officer;

When I first moved into the [change department], I was very positive about it. I hadn't applied, but was told that operational credibility and intellect was needed. But the set-up was not as it is now. Then it was chaotic. I didn't know what I was doing. . . . Very quickly we had to come up with benefits, cash savings. . . . I didn't feel capable of doing it. [Interview L1]

Another participant supported this view of being unprepared for taking on a change management role and was found to have felt uncomfortable when being asked to undertake a role of such importance. As was argued;

[I was] unprepared walking into that environment. There was no concept of any transition from one to the other. Operational one day, change management the next. No transition plan. No sense of what you will need to know to be able to operate in that environment. I was parachuted in, with no idea how to operate in the new world. [Interview L3]

The contention that operational leaders may not possess the necessary skills and experience to lead change was a frequently visited conversation during the interviews. Although some participants took the view that this lack of experience was genuinely problematic, some were less concerned. As was recorded:

Operationally, you draw on things you've done before. Up here you don't have that framework. But you just draw on

your experience of what you've done previously, and you apply those skills here. It takes a while to adjust and learn the new environment, but I'm not sure it's about training and formal courses. [Interview L5]

The contention that a more formalised 'Police Change Manager' role may be of use in the service was discussed during the research interviews. One officer observed that spending too long leading change, with no operational responsibilities, might be problematic. It was argued that this could lead to an individual not being close enough to the normal day-to-day business of the organisation. The same participant suggested that there should be a constant cycle of involvement in change, moving between operational and change roles every few years and certainly as a mechanism to demonstrate competence for promotion. Another senior officer argued;

I think to be a successful change manager, you have to be really open, you have to share stuff, you have to involve the business in the design – otherwise it will be rejected. I think a BCM [business change manager] has to have some operational knowledge of the business. I think you have to know the business, or at least be prepared to go out there and learn it. Part of being a BCM is being honest about what can be achieved. You have to be smart. You have to be a good communicator. You have to be open and share stuff unless there is a really good reason not to do so. Communication is a skill that is particularly important for a change manager. Whilst this is important in operational leadership, there is just a lot more of it in change – it is all about communication. [Interview L1]

This officer placed a great deal of importance on openness and communication, in the belief that trust between the person leading the change and those on the front line is ultimately a key determinant of success. In an attempt to secure evidence to better understand the hypothesis of this article, relating to the formalisation of the 'Police Change Manager' role, it is apparent that there is a recognised need to both understand the organisation and to possess communication skills of the highest order.

In the context of the police change agenda that was described above and the financial imperative that is driving much of that change, the perceived lack of capability and readiness to lead change effectively is of concern. Further, it was observed that the practical gaps in knowledge and understanding led to a lack of confidence to deliver improved policing outcomes. The research identified a dual responsibility that was placed upon police leaders in the context of delivering change. It was argued that one leadership dimension was in

relation to the formulation of new business processes and revised approaches to delivering desired outcomes. This could be described as ‘thought leadership’. The other dimension that was frequently referenced was in relation to leading people. This included those officers and staff embed in change teams as well as the wider cohort of front-line officers who were considered to be the customers of the change programmes. As was recorded;

It is my job to design this thing and work out how we are going to be better at what we do in the future. I’ve had no training and it’s hard to work out where I fit in the wider structure of the project. [...] this undermines my ability to lead the team with clarity and purpose. I’m fine with ambiguity, but I need to be able to provide clarity to my team, I am not able to do this. [Interview L7]

The concern about operating within an environment of ambiguity is perhaps better understood by considering police occupational culture. It is widely argued that it is a normal expectation of police officers to operate in an environment where there is control and understanding of expectations. It has been argued that transformational leadership, of the sort required in a change setting, within policing environments, may be contrary to police culture (Cockcroft, 2014). Further, this sense of operating with much uncertainty may be at odds with another frequently identified cultural dynamic; that of machismo (Silvestri, 2007; Smith, 2016). This was further demonstrated by one participant, who argued;

Because I was unprepared, I felt vulnerable. [I had] 25 years’ experience and was at the top of my game... I then had to start on the back foot. I didn’t understand the language. The outcomes were unclear. No real idea of roles and responsibilities. Scope and parameters were unclear. [Interview L3]

Arguably, the sense of ‘vulnerability’ described here and the backward step in terms of understanding and capability are at odds with the cultural dynamics identified as being the norm in policing.

In being selected to take a leading role in delivering transformational change, a number of the respondents had been told by their superiors that they had been chosen due to their intellect, creativity and enthusiasm. It was apparent that such traits had been identified by the executive team as being essential for the delivery of change. Beyond this subjective appraisal of perceived character traits, no formal application and assessment process had been established to place leaders into the change environment. The research also identified that these traits, which were deemed to be important to be

a successful leader of change were not necessarily commonplace within police culture. As an executive leader was to observe;

We are still not a learning organisation. It [remains] cool to be cynical and [our people are frequently] scared to be creative [and] scared to be innovative. [Interview L4]

This participant went on to identify the problems that are caused by the existence of a blame culture in policing and the “shadow” that is caused by the presence of misconduct regulations. The contention here was that this presents a problematic cultural dynamic, which may undermine any ambition a senior leader may have to work in change management. Leading change is a risky business into which a police leader can move their career because expectations are high, but the operating environment is fluid and immature. While clearly the risks in the operational arena are, at least superficially, more prevalent, it is argued that (at least in some instances) the operational environment is better understood, and more robust controls are in place to manage delivery and minimise the chances of failure.

Executive involvement in change

The day-to-day leadership of the change programmes in the case study organisation is at the senior management level (superintending ranks). However, the executive (chief officer) layer of the organisation is also heavily involved in change, be that as the sponsoring authority for programmes of work to be commissioned or in providing governance and strategic oversight as the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). The research identified similar issues in terms of both the capability and capacity of executive leaders to oversee change activity. It was apparent that the research participants had high expectations of the executive and felt there were opportunities to further refine competence at this level. As was argued;

As a collective authority at executive level, there is no proper understanding. [This is] because business-as-usual activity will always, without exception, trump the change activity. The hierarchical perspective [is also] unhelpful. [Interview L3]

This officer was particularly concerned about the level of deference shown to seniors. Observed as ‘submissiveness’ this was seen to be problematic in the context of change. This was supported by another participant who noted that:

Deference is simply a blocker to creativity. It stifles our ability to have challenging conversations and get better as an

organisation. The moment a good suggestion is pre-fixed with Sir or Ma'am, the person with the idea is immediately on the back foot. Of course [deference] has its place in fast-paced, command and control environments, but in change management it is simply unhelpful. [Interview L7]

The argument that 'command and control' behaviours were unhelpful within the context of change was further identified, as follows:

As a strand lead, I should have been helicoptering over the whole thing . . . nudging it in the right direction and working to keep partners happy. But because of the way the rank structure worked, I quickly became a conduit for action management and transactional activity that didn't need to come through me. [Interview L2]

In terms of the organisation's agility and responsiveness, further concerns were identified in relation to interactions between the different layers of the executive. As was argued;

On an individual basis, there are some good examples of capability as SRO. But when they need to reach beyond their direct area of responsibility, it is very difficult for them to influence laterally or upwards. [There are] too many layers and too much bureaucracy. [Chief Officers] reach into parts of the organisation that they shouldn't, this slows down decision-making. We will reap the rewards of getting better. We will do more change and therefore be able to do it better in future. We just won't catch up with the cyber criminals if we keep moving at the pace we are [Interview L3]

The contention here appeared to relate to the ordinary lines of communication and rules of engagement that work successfully during the course of normal operational activity, but prove problematic when the demands of change management introduce competing complexities into the operating environment. The ability to manage these, within existing cultural norms, have proven difficult:

It felt as though there were critical incidents going on, but it wasn't critical and didn't need to feel like that. We were all working flat out, working really late – but this was not critical operational stuff. It shouldn't feel like this. It should have had a steady battle rhythm to it. A lot of it depended on the leadership of the SROs. SRO capability is really crucial. A development programme was put in place for them. It was really testing, they said it was good. They have now invested in that stuff for SROs, it wasn't in place [originally] though. [Interview L1]

This was further supported by another participant who noted;

We've come a long way in terms of maturity. Where we were 4 years ago was frightening compared to where we are now.

We still have significant gaps in capabilities and roles and responsibilities. [It is starting to] make sense, but we are not there yet. [Interview L3]

It is evident from much of the testimony provided above that the change capability of the case study organisation has evolved considerably in the past 4 years or so, since the transformation activity commenced. A number of respondents noted the improvements in training, structure and control, which now make for a more mature change function than had previously been experienced. However, differing views were offered as to whether this subsequent evolution of capability made earlier failings acceptable or if embarking upon the change effort prior to establishing a more mature approach was a failing upon which many current and future difficulties in delivery may be based.

Design and delivery

Beyond reflections on change leadership in the organisation, a key measure of capability is arguably in relation to the way in which new ways of working are designed. The delivery of sustainable positive outcomes (or business benefits) is the ultimate goal. Although the aforementioned findings in relation to 'leading people' is perhaps the most obvious focus when considering leadership of change, it is equally important to consider the other leadership dimension that was identified earlier in this article: that of 'leading design'. The research summarised above demonstrated that the participants had a clear view on what effective or ineffective leadership behaviours look like. This was not the case in relation to design related responsibilities. As was argued;

I have been in [policing] a long time, but had no experience of design. [The change programme] was run by an officer who had no particular experience of it. There was lots of pressure to deliver benefits, but it was also very vague. No clear plan. [I was] assigned a number of strands from which it was asked that we cut posts. I remember having to fill out templates and set up workshops, but not really being clear on what we had to deliver. It was incredibly transactional, not strategic at all. I didn't know how to come up with the savings in a sensible way. [Interview L1]

This was a familiar position from across the research participants, a broad sense of not really knowing what they didn't know. The only point of clarity was that their knowledge and experience didn't feel right. A primary finding here was the lack of understanding of what an effective design approach looks like. This meant that the respondents did not feel suitably qualified or confident to challenge upwards when the validity of requests from above was in doubt.

In terms of how this lack of design capability impacts on the quality of delivery, the most prevalent response from respondents was that they saw an emerging disconnect between the design that was emerging from headquarters and what the front line thought the change outcomes should look like. As was observed;

When I used to speak to people on [one of the technology change projects] they were so separate from what the organisation actually wanted from its change teams. I could see they were doing similar things, between technology projects, but with no linkage. [Interview L1]

It was observed repeatedly that research participants felt uncomfortable at the way in which design activity was emerging, particularly in the early stages of the organisation's change evolution. The arbitrary way in which cost savings, mainly through headcount reduction, were being allocated across the different design leads for realisation was a cause of particular concern. In the context of change being a response to the difficult financial environment, it was found that this was understood by research participants, but that this did not justify the approach. It was argued that a more considered analysis of the operating environment would have identified more reasoned and defensible design opportunities for cost reduction.

Further, it was found that autonomy to undertake design decisions at senior manager level was frequently a point of tension. In keeping with the earlier discussion as relates to the difficulties that unhelpful levels of deference provided through the hierarchy, this was evidenced in relation to the progression and sign-off of design decisions.

Notwithstanding the leadership and design challenges identified, a number of change initiatives have reached the point of deployment into the case study organisation. It was found that local change leaders, charged with deploying new solutions in their respective departments did enjoy an encouraging level of autonomy to challenge and critique the solution they were asked to implement. Where the local change leader had experience of working in the central change and design team, it was found that they were more likely to challenge the approach being taken. It was found that when a local change manager had moved into a headquarters change role there was an element of surprise as to how complex and challenging the work was.

This identified movement of senior leaders between change management roles in headquarters versus change management roles in local command units was found to be a particularly beneficial dynamic. Arguably, this is supportive of the broad premise of this article: namely that there is value in establishing a career pathway that includes

a healthy degree of exposure to change, particularly in the context of more complex change events that require a leader with detailed experience of both design and delivery responsibilities.

The presence of a change leader who was able to understand and translate centrally directed change design, to ensure successful delivery at a local level, was identified as a key aspect of delivering successful outcomes and ensuring local support for change from the front line.

Conclusions

This article has provided an exploratory analysis of the experiences of police leaders engaged in change and considered the potential value and utility of professionalising change leadership, through identification and appointment of recognised 'Police Change Managers'. Experiences captured through this research demonstrate that existing leadership capabilities, in the context of change, are frequently not of the standard required. There is no formal selection process to identify change leaders. Following appointment, the training and continuous professional development available are limited, albeit some improvements in this area are now being seen.

Although this article opened with a broad summary of the drivers for change, it is almost impossible to demonstrate adequately the full breadth of the reform agenda. Beyond the internal appetite for change that the service is pursuing, the external crime picture continues to evolve. The governance of policing remains ever demanding and ever more complex and public expectation remains unfulfilled. The concerns articulated by the respondents to this study, albeit caveated by some reassuring progress to professionalise approaches to change, are not about to reduce. Further funding cuts are on the horizon. The police service will need to be even more agile to meet these new, as yet unidentified, challenges.

It is argued that change is a constant that will require leadership expertise as well-developed and as credible as can be found in homicide investigations, in the command of firearms deployments or in the geographical oversight of complex and diverse inner city communities. Even the most competent police leaders, cannot just 'do change'. It is a specialism that requires a subtle understanding of design possibilities, of communication, of stakeholder management, of finance and of working across multidisciplinary teams in ambiguous environments. This research has identified that a 'Police Change Manager (or Leader)' will need to have a sound understanding of operational policing, but must be given the time and opportunity to build a new skill set to lead change effectively. At a transactional level, these new skills will include business analysis, business process design, determination of use cases

and requirements definition. Senior leaders of change will need to be competent in the development of communication strategies, business cases and be capable of navigating the complexities of commercial procurement activity. These new skills will take time to develop. Role models, at the executive level, must be in place to coach and develop these new 'Police Change Managers'. This particular requirement may prove problematic, in that a number of executive leaders have not held senior transformation positions themselves and so the need for external support here will be key.

Opportunities exist to further reflect on change capabilities in policing, not least through replication of this study (or similar) in other police agencies, to further explore and analyse the experiences of police leaders who are engaged in change. This research has not sought to extend data capture beyond a small cohort of police leaders involved in change activity. This was deliberately so, to determine a baseline research position from which to build further data and knowledge. However, particularly insightful data could be secured by engaging with external change experts who have worked alongside police leaders in transformation environments. This will include independent contractors and those engaged through management consultancy organisations. Their perspectives on the utility and effectiveness of current change leadership in policing will be particularly insightful. A detailed analysis of benefit realisation is also proposed, to provide quantifiable measures that can demonstrate the impact of change programmes in policing.

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