Abstract

Between 2015 and 2018 the Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) partnered with Queensland Police Service and the Australian Federal Police to explore new approaches to enhancing police leadership capabilities. Specifically, these partnerships addressed two of the policing’s most cherished professional capabilities – the role of police commanders in times of critical emergency and the changing of police culture – toward a more adaptive and inclusive approach of collaborative leadership. At the core of these activities, was the exploration of leadership capabilities, but in the context of public safety command and in the service of building collective leadership capability.

These partnerships have created emergent knowledge within Australian policing, influencing a renewed interest in the development of command capabilities and cultural change in a number of Australian police organisations.

The partnerships are the product of a collective form of leadership, both within the AIPM as the educational partners, within relevant jurisdictions as the learning organisation, and in the union between the AIPM and the agency concerned. The very model of co-development and co-delivery serves as an example for the attributes of collective leadership to be explored through the participant and organisational learning journey.

This paper maps the challenges and opportunities revealed through engagement with two jurisdictions: the Australian Federal Police and the Queensland Police Service. These partnerships, along with their educational and research outcomes, provide an opportunity to consider the limitations and application of generalist theories of leadership and management into culturally and contextually rich professional domains. It suggests education and capability development in complex environments are processes of exploration in the first instance, examination and explanation in the substantive phases, and exploitation to scale in the final phase.
3 Key Learnings:

Shared Journey + Emergent Knowledge = Professional Knowledge

Context

Today we are described as living in a VUCA world – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. We have come a long way from the days when management was the focus of our development. If we go back those 30 years management was about the choices we made in solving problems. We had a range of management solutions – the challenge for leaders was choosing the right solution for the right problem. Management books were full of solutions for our students to learn.

Fast forward 30 years and we no longer operate in a world with text books. The AIPM has developed a pedagogical philosophy which embraces the competing tensions and conflicts of complexity meeting with the structures and cultures of public safety organisations, and uses facilitation and some deep partnership with stakeholders to create unique learning environments.

However, AIPM program and stakeholder engagement are still constructed on some load bearing assumptions which have increasingly been bent out of shape over the years. Our formal leadership development pipeline is a little over 150 police participants are year, in support of organisations with over 80,000 employees. Little wonder, over the last five years we have seen a range of bilateral client engagement and bespoke activity which has seen our number of participants increase to over 1500 participants. Many of these engagements are about organisations trying to find new ways of moving forward, beyond the industry solutions developed decades ago.

So this then is the start of our story – two bespoke engagements between the AIPM and two of our clients. But the purpose of telling this story, is not to say how wonderful we are, how brilliant our design was, how skilled our delivery was, how much people learned, or how things changed.

The purpose of this story, is to use this experience to explore some of the mega-trends we are seeing in Australian public safety, to highlight how these mega-trends are influenced by our changing environment, to see how our educational and professional development frameworks assisted if at all, in solving their problems.
Building Better Leaders

Collective Leadership
From the concept of the heroic leader
To collective responsibility and capability in times of crisis

Emergent Knowledge
From codified professional knowledge
To rapidly changing new knowledge

Professional Development
From internal and external development providers
To co-designed – co-delivered learning experiences

Concepts
In Australia and New Zealand, we have great police leaders, just as we have great emergency management leaders, crisis leaders, and public safety leaders.

But we acknowledge the task of leadership in public safety is increasingly difficult. We need to be ambitious in saying, our assumptions and processes for developing leaders yesterday, may not produce successful leaders tomorrow – we have to aim for better leaders, if we want to maintain public safety.

Collective leadership – so much of our cultural attitudes and organisational structures are built on the assumptions and actions of a single individual. It sits directly at odds with the mountain of research supporting the concept of collective leadership as a recognised approach to creating success in complexity. Building collective leadership is more than just building the capabilities of a cohort, it is a provocation in the disruption of our established systems, our sense of identity, our way of understanding of how things are done.

Emergent knowledge – Lets just make the admission here, we didn't know what we were doing. But we were honest about this. In hindsight, our admission of vulnerability was an important component to building trust between the AIPM and our partners. We did not hold knowledge as a prerequisite to action – curiosity was our driver. In the process, we created knowledge as educationalists, and our clients created knowledge about themselves.

Professional development – Deep within all public safety organisations are a tangled web of cultural norms which constitute the internal processes of capability development, of how organisations reproduce themselves, maintain continuity of capability and results. Very few fully understand this labyrinth of cultural construction, and those who do, know not to poke it with a stick. In these engagements, we gave it a poke.
Lets' look at our two engagements.

Firstly, with Queensland Police Service.

Discussion with AIPM and QPS had commenced in 2014. Within QPS, there was a slow burn of concern of the need to be able to do things better. The 2011 floods and cyclones reshaped their extent of public crisis. There was a lot of exchange of academic research between the AIPM and QPS, there was the shaping of ideas, the reframing of command concepts, there were debates over language and experiments in new approaches. These early considerations questioned if there was an over-reliance upon single police commanders, as opposed to a more collective, systematic approach.

The 2015 Lindt Café siege created a questionable uncertainty as to whether Australia police had their command settings right. The siege demonstrated the individual and collective pressures for our public safety organisations in times of crisis within a short timeframe and geographically constrained event.

The 2018 Commonwealth Games provided QPS with an upcoming opportunity and catalyst for change which held both internal legitimacy and external criticality. The challenges posed at the Lindt café siege were extrapolated across the long timelines of the Games and the numerous event locations. It was acknowledged that the traditional elasticity of command systems could only be stretched so far. This elasticity is made up of our people, after all. QPS need to add depth to its command capacity.

So in 2017, QPS was primed to do something different in relation to command.

Our second partners were the AFP.

All organisations feel the pressure of internal friction as they respond to changing expectations. Pre-911 the AFP was a small Commonwealth agency of about 1800 staff. It had demonstrated great utility and flexibility in meeting the challenges of regional instability by deploying to East Timor and Solomon Islands. It was at the centre of counter terrorism capability development post 911 as it grew to over 6000 staff. The AFP became a central player in Commonwealth government bureaucracy as security became a central and defining political narrative. Peter Shergold, head of the Australian Public Service Commission noted “the good news for the AFP is it now finds itself at the centre of government, the bad news for the AFP is it is now at the centre of government”

Conversations about the capabilities of the AFP’s middle management commenced with the AIPM in 2013. There was an ongoing discussion about the challenges of meeting political alignment with operational effectiveness. In 2016 a renewal initiative saw the departure of many AFP middle managers with redundancy packages and 2017 of new cohorts of middle managers were promoted as their replacements.

So in 2017 the AFP was primed to do something different in relation to middle management leadership development.
There has been a step change in expectations and requirements in both organisational and operational leadership roles.

Our observation is this:

- The step change has been a long time in coming. It’s emergence required good observation, patience, and the shaping of events in order to create the conditions to do something different (there was some very good leadership at play here – the understanding, with crisis and challenge comes opportunity to create something different, and the skills, to draw attention, bring energy, commitment resources and legitimacy to make it happen).
- There is nothing unique to policing here – the same internal and external pressures creating the need for change are evident across all public safety organisations.
- Much of what we call informal command and leadership development within police organisations remains built around elements of a craft – long held assumptions and practices which have worked in the past.
  - We saw this in the assumptions held by commanders of their ability to process and understand recent situational knowledge, and convert it to meaningful and impactful intervention strategies
  - We saw this in the analogue language of command, disconnected with the speed and diversity of digital information flows
  - We saw this in the extended body of knowledge of policing, where doctrinal approaches to incident command tend to focus on the small isolated incidents, offering little for the scale and scope of an emerging Australian policing context landscape.
Second Insight

Collective Leadership

Contrary to thirty years of developing leaders, the focus is increasingly shifting to developing collective leadership.

- Both QPS and the AFP were interested in experimenting with new ways of building capabilities to address emerging and future needs.
- QPS was interested in building the top 84 of their commissioned officers
  - Rather than a reliance on a small number of ‘ace commanders’, they saw value in developing deep bench strength, built around collective understanding, rather than individual capability.
• The AFP was interested in building the collective capability of a new cohort of middle managers
  o The AFP was not interested in leaders who could quickly master the existing cultural and structural norms of authority,
    ▪ The AFP, in the shadow of critical cultural reviews, and the emergence of mental health as a serious workplace issue, were interested in building a leadership cohort capable of negotiating new ways of operation, of finding new ways of mitigating personal and organisational conflict and tension, of finding alignment between operational tempo and political expectations, of not mastering the old system, but building something new
• For both QPS and the AFP – the development of a cohort, either as the ‘top 84’ or a ‘middle management cohort’ – was as much a statement of cultural re-engineering as it was capability re-engineering
Third Insight

Co-Design – Using partnerships to build bridges from here to there

Designing, building and delivering responses was an exercise in co-design and co-delivery

• The most important asset the AIPM brought to these two problems was our own sense of curiosity, and perhaps our own recognition of the limitations of formulaic educational approaches.
• In both the AFP and QPS, we were matched by leaders who not only shared our curiosity, but leaders capable of influencing their own internal environment to bring people, money, attention and momentum to the problem at hand.
• However, co-design and co-delivery is not a clean process, it's not particularly efficient, it takes time to build trust, to explore options to manage risk.
Fourth Insight

Time and Space

Building collective leadership capacity takes time and space

The QPS initiative involved three phases over many months

- In the first phase – we examined at Commander as self – this was AIPM led and QPS in support
- In the second phase – we examined Commander in context – this was led by QPS
- In the third phase – we examined Commander in practice – this was led by QPS with AIPM in support
With the AFP

- The design was based over 12 months with the cohorts coming together for residential sessions four times totaling 12 days.
- In between the residential as series of workshops, workplace task, coaching sessions and peer mentoring conversations
Fifth Lesson

Look and Listen

If observation and reflection is among the most important individual leadership learning skills

Listening and sharing is among the most important collective leadership learning skills

Both the QPS and AFP experiments took longitudinal development approaches.

- Both were not based in theory, but within the structural, operational and cultural frameworks of their organisations.
- Both asked participants to look and interpret the way their organisations operated
- Both recognised, this approach has not been tried before, and they were, in effect, “attempting to build a plane at the same time as flying it”
- Both considered the role of leadership in building capability in both a command setting and an organisational setting
- Both engaged vertical slices of organisational leadership, creating meaning (and uncomfortable) conversations where new expectations and values of collective leadership were negotiated
- Both created emergent knowledge, and integrated the workplace learning environment (70%) with the tacit sharing learning environment (20%) through facilitated collective conversations about what was working and what was not.
- While observing the system, and listening to the cohort were important learning outcomes, many participants from both the AFP and QPS reported, an increased understanding of the importance for offering and accepting support from other members of the learning cohort. The ability to relate to peers as people was enhanced – the system humanized – the contours of long standing conflict related to silos and turf wars begin to fade
Both QPS and the AFP were keen for their project to involve a research component, to provide a process of external validation against the assumptions and design within the planning of learning objectives.

Yet we are conditioned to consider research and researchers as the umpires of our endeavours. Just as we value the certificate at the end of the leadership program, as validation of leadership capability, we eagerly look forward to the evaluation report as proof of the effectiveness of our design and delivery.

So just as the utility of traditional approaches to police leader development have been found to be diminishing, so too did we find less relevant limitations in the traditional research evaluation approach.

The initiation, design and delivery of a different approach to development, a focus on collective leadership rather than individual leaders, a focus on change rather than attainment, a focus on improvement rather than process – required also a different approach to be taken to research and evaluation.

What was going on here is akin to organisational theatre on the big stage. The participants within the program, are actors dutifully playing their part. AIPM program staff take up the director and conductor roles. Our clients take up the orchestral roles. It is the organisation, the stakeholders and the partners who constitute the real audience for any program.

Our traditional research approaches focus heavily on the cast, – to evaluate whether or not they have had a meaningful development experience. But like any play, the cast transfers the essential questions of the night, over to the audience to wrestle with themselves.

For educationalists, the research experience within these projects throws into question the value of explicit - codified - knowledge, validated at a point of time as if the environment where the research takes place is stable, when we know it is not. The same questions about the speed of change, and the relevance of systems and of traditional approaches, which hang over our public safety leaders, also hang over us, as researchers and academics.
Seventh Insight

The value of research

Research is an important element of trust within co-designed projects

Not as umpire but as co-contributor to learning on a shared journey

Rather than an objective umpire, the project needed a research partner as a co-learner. Someone who could bring insight through observation to the table; who could question both facilitators and organisational stakeholders and contribute to building knowledge on the run.

We were able to produce an academic research report for each of these development initiatives. The programs were evaluated using a set of accepted evaluation techniques, and those reports identify, qualify and quantify a range of beneficial outcomes.

But for both the AFP and QPS, the ongoing speed of external change and internal transformation, required them to make decisions about the ongoing delivery of these initiatives without the completion of a formal evaluation report provided at the end of the intervention. Based upon preliminary evaluations, feedback from participants, observations from senior executives and other internal signals, both AFP and QPS have continued these development initiatives into 2019.

In the shared journeys with QPS and the AFP, the role of the academic researcher is still to be defined. Insights continue to move change in the organisations in 2019. The traditional role of academic, as umpire or validator, quickly evolved to a member of the exploration team, who with observational skills, and an externalised perspectives – was able to help identify emergent knowledge, to help describe, to help share, to help understand and legitimise new knowledge, - frequently in the moment – to help the collective make progress.
Assessments have long played a role in defining and establishing an individual’s journey to becoming a police leader and commander.

Assessments assume best practice for known situations, and perhaps do little to prepare and help those facing unknown or seminal crises.

By changing the focus from assessment, to what can be learnt about police practice, created new emergent knowledge for both the AFP and QPS and through research in an interactive observational role.

By observing police in command roles during simulation exercises, rather than assessing them, better practice was identified.

Similarly by having AFP middle managers think about observing their system, rather than always thinking about being in the system, created insights which helped the collective understand their system better.

**Emergent understanding of new command**

- **Background conditions**
  - Adaptive behaviour
  - Command effectiveness

- **Self-awareness**
  - Flexing
  - Engagement

- **Implementation**

**Expertise** =
- Professional/subject matter
- Adaptive
- Technical
Both QPS and AFP staged large scale interventions to create energy in reshaping individual and collective expectations around police leadership and command. While both experiments have continued, both were expensive exercises. While the experiments have been successful, they have created their own challenges. In both QPS and AFP, there are horizontal slices of the organisation developed in this collective, longitudinal approach, while other sections of the organisation continue with more traditional development strategies.

Both the AFP and QPS recognised the next challenge is how collective leadership and collective command capability can be built over time, organically to continue to produce adaptive and effective leaders and command, capable of anticipating and responding to changing conditions. Part of this, is to confront the very self identity of police – and police organisations – to become more open to curiosity, to acknowledge the need for support, and accept the uncertainty of reaching out.

It is towards this end, we started to use the word ‘continuums' rather than programs – how do we create capability through culture and practice, not programs and courses?
Tenth Insight
Learning and leadership are culturally relevant

Collective leadership, emergent knowledge and professional development are internal activities of deliberately developmental organisations

Ultimately it was always about the AFP and QPS. The AIPM were bit players in a larger production within each organisation. The lessons learnt were very much about how the QPS operates as an organisational system, as a cultural system, how individual in the role as leader and commander exercise themselves, how individuals come together collectively to create new energy, new perspectives, new cultural norms, how they influence others, how they suffer defeats, how they achieve wins. All of it occurs within the cultural conversations of their organisations. Same too for the AFP.

Conclusion

Is the AIPM able to apply the same techniques to another police and emergency services organisation and achieve the same results? Not a chance.

Public safety in Australia and New Zealand is an outcome of the operations and cultures of proud, large organisations – some volunteer, some career. They are not easy to turn toward the ill winds of the future.

Our lesson from working with QPS and the AFP, is they need to be turned from the inside, with ownership from within, and the turn being the result of collective will and energy.

The role of the AIPM in all this, was like the Beagle to Charles Darwin, Charles Ulm to Kingsford Smith or Joseph Banks to Captain Cook - we supported the expedition of learning; we helped create, through co-designed professional development holding environments, experiments where new leadership could be trialled. We helped acknowledge and record insights, through feedback and discussion, which become emergent knowledge. We helped shape a small cohort of collective leadership, embarking on their mission to change their organisation.

A shared journey for all. A huge learning experience for us and the AIPM.