New leadership for new environments: A synthesis of symposium discussions

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INTRODUCTION

The policing environment has changed considerably in recent years, and police organisations face new challenges from crime; new expectations from communities; and a new array of constraints implemented by governments across the world. Austerity is writ large in these challenges, and is a driver for much of the current police reform seen across the world. So too is the changing landscape of the policing task, from being one achievable only by the state run police, to one involving a range of players who are important in tackling the complex social problems that police find themselves called upon to address.

But what does this mean for police leadership? As our environments become more complex, with unpredictable elements, do we need a new type of leadership? And if so what does this look like and how can our organisations support this?

These questions and others were the focus of a one-day symposium held at the Australian Institute of Police Management. The purpose of the symposium was to bring together representatives from policing and academia to discuss the changing nature of policing and the leadership required to face this. The symposium was focused on three conversations: the new global security environment, the political environment for police leaders; and new leadership for new environments.

This document is a summation of those conversations[1] and as such it is merely a starting point for further debate.

THE NEW GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

This first conversation of the symposium was led by Professor Clifford Shearing from the University of Cape Town and Griffith University. Seizing the invitation to be provocative and controversial in his comments, Professor Shearing took us through the historical shift of police development from a pre-Peelian era of polycentric security governance, in which security was provided by a range of providers, to the uni-centric model of the state police, and back again.

He argued that the police were developed to put an end to the complex and inadequate systems of polycentric governance, and provide a government controlled monopoly of security. Taking the beginning of the Metropolitan Police Service in 1829 as the start of this monopoly, Professor Shearing noted that the move to uni-centric policing was extremely successful, leading the terms 'policing' and 'the police' to become inextricably linked. A uni-centric policing model thus became part of the police's DNA, and provision of safety and security by non-police was seen as a threat.

Recent years have seen an erosion of the security monopoly and an explosion in private security. Government policy increasingly favours polycentric forms of governance, and as such the terms *police* and *policing* have been uncoupled. The police are now only one node among many within increasingly complex arrangements for governing security.

> *"Central to the argument was that the police were developed to put an end to the complex and inadequate systems of polycentric governance, and provide a government controlled monopoly of security."*

This new environment presents a challenge to police leaders around the world. Police leaders must establish a role for the police within these new, and still emerging, environments, and negotiate this with government and other security providers. For police organisations - with their 1829 uni-centric DNA - this is not easy. But a quote from Bill Bratton's book *Collaborate or Perish* (Bratton & Tumin, 2012) provides a sense of why this is important.

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[1] The symposium was held under Chatham House Rules and as such - with the exception of the keynote speakers - participants have not been quoted.

*Where everyone is connected, the game changer is collaboration…the power of the many, to do together what we cannot do alone…**who controls the crowd knows how to play the game** (location 108 – emphasis added)[2]*

There was a view that in the past police had been 'precious' about their role, and that what was happening now was a conversation about what aspects of policing and security needed to stay with the police.

Participants relayed that the conversation in several forces had moved from *what are the services we should deliver*, to *what do we **need** to deliver*, and are there other ways of achieving these? This had been accelerated by some governments who had moved various aspects of security from police to private providers.

AIPM Executive Director Warwick Jones in conversation with Professor Clifford Shearing and Deputy Commissioner Steve Gollschewski

Through the UK experience, we can see the influence that outside factors can have on the police over the years. In the UK the size of the state police grew exponentially across the late 1900s, under the Thatcher government, and largely without an external yardstick to guide this growth.

One view was that the growth in police was associated with the political goal of policing (and breaking) the unions; and once complete the police still had a large number of resources that were no longer needed. Targets were created to utilise these resources, and it was this that drove policing rather than there being targets that required these resources. This swept up a lot of additional functions into policing, and reinforced the 1829 mentality of the police being responsible for all aspects of security.

The new (austere) environment has meant that police need to think about reappropriating responsibility and which other agencies and providers might be better placed to provide certain services. But it is not clear who now defines a policing role. Should it be the

2 Bratton, W. J. & Tumin, Z. (2012). Collaborate or perish! : reaching across boundaries in a networked world. [Kindle DX version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com.

government, the police, or the community?

This led to a conversation about the changing nature of society and whether there is a shift in how the government exercises power through the police. A potential tension occurs in understanding and articulating where the police want to find their relevance against how nation states want to define their own existence through policing and communities.

> **"The question for police organisations and their leaders is where do we have an edge? Where do we have a value that other people are going to find difficult to do?"**

If the problem of security has shifted from creating pacified urban spaces as was the case in 1829, to managing *global flows*, the question for police organisations and their leaders is "where do we have an edge? Where do we have a value that other people are going to find difficult to do? Who should the police be in this new polycentric environment, and what are these new securities that create this new environment?"

If Bratton and Turin's observation is true – who controls the crowd knows how to play the game – there is clearly value in police defining their place in the new environment, rather than having it defined for them.

It was noted that some police forces in Australia are doing this, and are pre-empting government reforms that have been imposed on forces elsewhere by driving change from the inside. There is often resistance to such change internally and externally (including among the public and in the media). The culture of an organisation can be resistant even if the leadership has moved to thinking about the organisation's role in another way.

Addressing this is an age old concern. Can interventions at the lower ranks assist, or should organisations capitalise on natural attrition in middle management? A limiting factor remains that police organisations bring all officers into the organisation in the same way - through the bottom - and as such the replication of culture and DNA needs to be considered in recruitment and training.

The external environment, in as much as it demands change, also demands consistency. Public expectations of the police are difficult to change, and the public can be as (if not more!) conservative regarding change than the police. Which leads back to thinking about who drives what the police do? Is it the community? Is it government? Or is it the police? Do police want to react to change, or do they want to define their place in the new poly-centric environment,

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT OF POLICE LEADERS

The second conversation of the day was led by Professor Philip Stenning from Griffith University, who explored the relationships between commissioners and their "political masters" (mainly police ministers), and the implications of these relationships for their respective roles.

Thirteen relationship *pressure points* were identified as - in the eyes of former commissioners - likely to cause tensions (see Box 1).

Professor Stenning noted that the challenge for police leaders was to understand these areas of potential conflict and develop ways in which to address them to prevent or successfully manage it.

A general guide for negotiating the boundaries between the political and the policing realm has been the supposed dichotomy between "policy" and "operations". This is not as clear cut as it might first seem. While resourcing (numbers of police) is a policy issue, and there is consensus that government should stay out of operational decisions, many issues lie in the grey area.

Professor Philip Stenning

For example, opening and closing police stations can be contentious because of a debate about whether this is a policy or an operational issue. There are historical examples of ministers announcing force restructures without consultation with the commissioner, and a lack of clarity about whether this should be a police, a political decision, or a joint decision.

If the relationship between a commissioner and their minister is fractious what impact does this have on a commissioner's ability to move an organisation into a new space? If a commissioner risks being 'kicked out' unless they comply with government wishes, then how can an organisation truly move into uncharted territory?

There are certainly performance agreements between governments and commissioners, but how much should a commissioner be driven by this, or by the broader

1. Disagreements about the appropriate boundary line between their respective roles
2. Claims of overstepping boundaries
3. Poor performance
4. Failure to meet accountability expectations
5. Politically partisan behaviour
6. Misconduct
7. Loss of confidence
8. Failure to appreciate local traditions
9. Personality clashes
10. Over-or under-responsiveness of community demands
11. Insensitivity and indiscretion during election periods
12. Outshining the minister and "stealing the limelight"
13. Ideological differences about the role of the police

Box 1.

needs of the organisation? Are there commissioners who have met government-set organisational KPIs and fulfilled their performance agreements, but left the organisation without addressing endemic strategic issues? could this a survivalist mindset in a managerialist world? Can this relationship with the commissioner and the minister hold the organisation back and can police commissioners only do their job when they come to terms with the fact that they might be dismissed?

This led the group to question whether the role of the office of commissioner was the right organisational leadership for today, or whether another type of organisational leadership would work more effectively and allow the organisation to progress with due reference to – but not unhelpful control from – the politics.

It was noted that some public safety organisations (e.g. the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in Melbourne) had gone down the road of creating boards with a CEO to manage the organisation, rather than a single commissioner. This had been a mixed success. Perhaps there will invariably be a pull to identify who is in charge, it is part of our organisational culture to be led by one individual. But maybe this part of the system is inherently weak, and makes external influence much easier to effect.

Is it better to think about the office of commissioner as less about the individual and more about the team that s/he has around him/her? If individual leaders think more about the collective team that directs the organisation, are some decisions more easy to affect?

As an extension to this if we have multiple nodes of security, and those nodes interact and operate at all levels of an organisation, there is increasingly an opportunity for those at the front line, at the bottom, to practice leadership. Yet we continue to focus on the capability of formal leaders at the top, rather than leadership distributed throughout the organisation.

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR NEW ENVIRONMENTS

The third conversation of the day was led by Professor David Day from the University of Western Australia, and the AIPM Professor in Residence 2014. Picking up on preceeding discussions, Professor Day noted that, traditionally, most views about leadership had been leader-centric. They focused on what 'style' a leader had and how this style impacted on others to get them to do the leader's bidding.
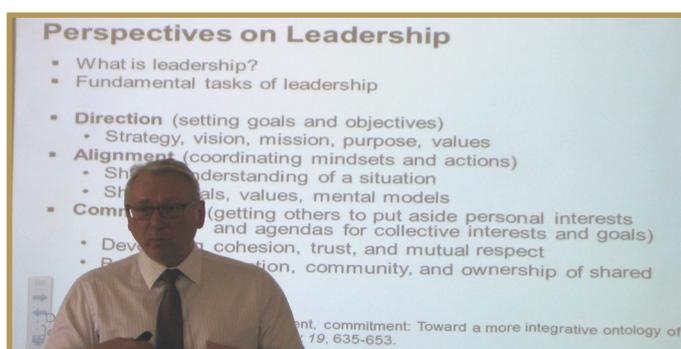
Professor David Day

This is valuable to a point, but in new environments where the world is complex, what happens when the leader does not know what to do? Thus there is a need to conceptualise leadership in ways other than as the property of the leader.

Professor Day proposed that of more value in a complex world is a notion of *functional leadership* which is to say that leadership can come from anywhere - and not necessarily solely from formal leaders. Leadership in this sense provides three overarching functions: direction, alignment, and commitment. Achieving these is not uni-directional from formal leader to followers; it is multi-directional and by allowing others to influence the formal leader, they are invited to participate in the leadership dialogue.

Increasingly in a polycentric world alignment is a key function of leadership, and we were reminded that "... when team processes are aligned with environmentally driven task demands, the team is effective; when they are not, the team is not." (Kozlowski & Ilgen, p. 78)[3].

In part this alignment function may be the role of the
3 Kozlowski, S. W. J., & Ilgen, D. R. (2006). Enhancing the effectiveness of work groups and teams (Monograph). Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 7, 77-124

formal leader, but it can also be fulfilled by any individual in a team looking to answer the question: "what is it that the team needs, and how can the team function better?" The individual then works to "complete the system" rather than direct activity and actions, and the system itself works together to create leadership as an outcome of its interactions.

Another way to think about this is that complex environments mean that leadership is too important to be left to any one individual, and there is need for teams - and teams of teams - aligned around a specific issue to achieve progress. The challenge is to *align* the work of multiple teams and coordinate action and progress.

Traditionally we look for a single, formal, leader to do this for us. But of greater value in moving ahead is developing a relational dialogue from people who represent each team in a multi-team space.

By developing leaders, and developing leadership capacity not just within a team, but between teams, leadership is viewed as an **outcome** of the system, and not an **input** from an individual.

The question for the group was whether this leadership - that may stand counter to the authority of the formal leader - is possible in policing. The public, politicians and the organisational DNA require that there is someone to take responsibility when things go wrong, and we look to formal leaders to do this. This is not limited to policing, of course, and society looks for a "scape goat" for failure: be it on the sporting ground, or in the boardroom. The difficulty is when this responsibility leads to micro management and instead of a formal leader thinking in terms of "what does this system need to progress?" s/he thinks in terms of "how can I control this system so that things do not go wrong?"

Whilst responsibility never moves from the formal leader, micro-management and "not letting people do their jobs because you are afraid they will screw it up" derails functional leadership. To be a good formal leader and to make progress in complex situations you need to take responsibility **and** trust people in the system to do their jobs. Leadership as an outcome is dynamic. Formal leaders need to do both leading and following, and recognise that their role is to enable, not direct.

> *"micro-management and "not letting people do their jobs because you are afraid they will screw it up" derails functional leadership."*

Developing this in organisations can be difficult. It was noted by discussion participants that middle and

lower ranks can get to a stage where they say "we don't care what direction we go in, we just want to be told". This demonstrates the dependence found many organisations on being given direction by the formal leader, rather than for it to emerge from the system.

Command and control is deeply held in policing and some may argue that while functional leadership might be appropriate for policy making, day to day policing relies on giving and responding to orders. A contrary view is that complex environments require a new approach.

Moreover inherent in the front line policing function is the notion of discretion, and the ability (and logistical need) to deal with events as one finds them and away from the view and direct control, of the supervisory ranks. The extent to which command really equals control is debatable then. The challenge for frontline staff is holding on to that discretionary approach when the hierarchy is around, and resisting the temptation and genetic pull of the organisational 'DNA' to be dependent on the top.

Working in complexity and in multi-agency teams presents a challenge to policing and other organisations in negotiating who is in *charge*. Oftentimes when multiple agencies convene around a particular issue - for example child abuse - organisational dominance can take second place to dealing with the welfare of the child at the front line. The multi-team team coalesces around the issue, rather than around one's organisational DNA.

However as this collaboration and partnership moves up the organisation, the importance of organisational interests and KPIs becomes more pronounced. Which leads to the question of how much our organisational bureaucracies are undermining efforts to work in multi-team teams to deal with complex social problems? A shared intent to do good and shared goals at the coal face may not reproduced at the organisational level, and when "no one is in charge" whose goals take precedence?

Which gives rise to a debate about how we instil shared goals and create shared leadership across organisations without taking charge. Police do not need to, nor should they, take responsibility for everything, although it is tempting in a (largely successful) hierarchy to say "I'm controlling through rules" or "controlling through being recognised as the lead agency".

What communities and complex social issues are really in need of is collaboration, and the first step towards that may be helping to build resilience and capacity in other stakeholders – agencies and the community – which police can then draw on when addressing complex issues that require shared leadership. What is clear is that if we need a new type of leadership that recognises it as an outcome from a system rather than the style of a particular leader, then we need to develop this in ways other than we currently do. We need to shift the focus from developing individual leaders, to developing leadership in multi-team systems

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

New environments call for evolution. Holding onto the old ways of doing things and the old DNA is counter-productive. It can limit the effectiveness of formal leaders in directing change, and is reinforced elsewhere in the system through recruitment, training, internal and external expectations and the promotions system. Changing this DNA requires instead interventions and advances (adaptive mutations) at all levels of the organisation, and a collective (if initially leader-driven) shift in mindset from a formal to a shared leadership approach. This includes thinking up, down, inside and out.

But when organisations consider their resources in addressing complex problems do they invite ideas from across the organisation? What about outside? Can we crowd-source solutions to crime? To what extent does our organisational bureaucracy limit our ability to be innovative? As organisations do we focus on the risks of sharing information with stakeholders, or the possibilities that this may lead to?

> *"there is a need for these leaders to develop, in turn, their organisation's leadership capacity so that organisations can move to a shared leadership response."*

So how do we move forward with this, and as an Institute charged with developing leaders and leadership, how can the AIPM create better value for our stakeholders? Developing leaders is only part of the issue, and there is a need for these leaders to develop, in turn, their organisation's leadership capacity so that organisations can move to a shared leadership response. Individual leaders can bring change, but in doing so must rethink their role from one of being on one's own, to being surrounded by the leadership capacity of their own, and other, organisations.

APPENDIX 1

Further Reading

Below are a selection of readings identified by Professors Shearing, Stenning and Day, for those readers interested in exploring the area further.

Bayley, D. & Shearing, C. 2001. *The New Structure of Policing.* Washington: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.

Council of Canadian Academies. *Policing Canada in the 21st Century: New Policing for New Challenges.* Ottawa, 2014.

DeChurch, L. A., & Marks, M. A. (2006). Leadership in multiteam systems. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(2), 311-329.

Drath et al. (2008). Direction, alignment, commitment: Toward a more integrative ontology of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 635-653.

Morgeson et al. (2010). Leadership in teams: A functional approach to understanding leadership structures and processes. *Journal of Management*, 36(1), 5-39.

Sparrow, Malcolm K., Ph.D. Managing the Boundary Between Public and Private Policing. New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. 2014. NCJ 247182.

AIPM Professor in Residence - November 2015

The AIPM is pleased to announce that the 2015 AIPM Professor in Residence will be Professor Betsy Stanko OBE.

Professor Betsy Stanko is Head of Evidence and Insight, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, London. In her first life, she was a professor of criminology, teaching and researching at Clark University (USA), Brunel University, Cambridge University and Royal Holloway, University of London (where she is an Emeritus Professor of Criminology).

For her full bio and to find out how you can be involved in the Professor in Residence events program please visit our website.

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