

Global professoriate *In Conversation*



Thinking about Leading with Leading Thinkers



Over the last decade, the Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) has welcomed many world-leading academic thinkers through its doors as part of the popular and impactful Professor In Residence Program. Recognising the incredible value that our conversations with individual professors has brought to the AIPM, in 2019 the AIPM created its Global Professoriate. Members of the Professoriate hold full professor roles at world leading universities. They volunteer their time with the AIPM to help us better understand police leadership against the backdrop of academic insights. Representing expertise across a range of disciplines - from economics, to policing, to social policy, to law, to psychology, to organisational systems, to criminology, to public health, and organisational change – AIPM has worked with each bilaterally across a range of learning, teaching, and research initiatives.

In 2021, we decided to take our engagement with the Professoriate a stage further. Making the most of our digitally shrinking world we hosted two roundtables to find out about and explore some of the things important for police leadership as we emerge from the global pandemic.

As you might expect when you bring together thought leaders from across the globe, the airwaves crackled with ideas. Of particular value was the collegiate way conversations were built on each other. We observed the knitting of ideas across disciplines. We heard the multiple perspectives and reflections being offered. And we listened as 15 leading academics wrestled with the live challenges we at AIPM are facing in leadership: How do we balance the need for diversity of thought in a hierarchical organisation?

How can we continue to respond to the demands of government, our organisations, and our communities, when everything is a priority, and everything needs to be done in a hurry?

Why have multiple attempts to change the face of policing stalled, and what opportunities are presented in the “reset” that covid-19 seems to offer?

Predicated by the cascading crises amplified by covid-19, policing was seen as being at a crossroads. The “certainties of the past (déjà vu) had been replaced by the uncertainties of the future (vu jade)”. Organisations and leadership were being called to accept their role was less like “riding a dressage pony, and more like holding on to a bucking broncho that is trying to throw you off”. Among the provocative responses shared was the need for policing to decouple from the criminal justice system and embrace its role in a “series of fluid assemblages” dealing with complex social problems.

How do you deal with that in policing organisations? Part of the answer lies in diversity, yet our conversations uncovered “ossified police organisations” unable to make the most of new and diverse sources of leadership talent because of an unrelenting commitment to the ways things have always been done. We heard that “unlearning behaviour” was as important as learning new things. And that this was not just a policing problem. Many organisations faced similar challenges and understanding “rewarded behaviours” was key to understanding individual motivations to change.

We discussed a world full of “shifting harmscapes” and the need to “reach across organisational boundaries” to solve problems in a post-pandemic world. We wrestled with how much police leaders should try to “shape the challenges of the future” and how much should they “like Sisyphus, just accept their lot”? After all, we have to balance concerns around “mission creep” and our “relentless resourcing pressures”, both of which remind us that the leader must also operate within the bounds of do-able reality.

The pressures on leaders to steer industrial-age organisations through digital-age developments led to discussions about individual and organisational “resilience”. Debating the difference between “resilience and anti-fragility” reminded us that language “creates our reality”. Are we resilient, or anti-fragile? Are challenges to be weathered, or are they to be learnt from? Will our organisations bounce back, or will they bounce forward anew? These are the conversations that will spill into our programs over the coming months, and will continue to inform our thought leadership work. What is certain is that there are no easy answers. But by engaging in critical reflection with trusted friends, who also happen to be world-leading academic thinkers, we can uncover new ways of thinking and being, which will help our organisations and our leadership grow.

If you have a thorny challenge you would like the next Global Professoriate roundtable to consider, or if you would like to know more about the thought leadership work of members, and the AIPM, contact us at thoughtleadership@aipm.gov.au

¹ For more info, read <https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/sisyphus/section11/>