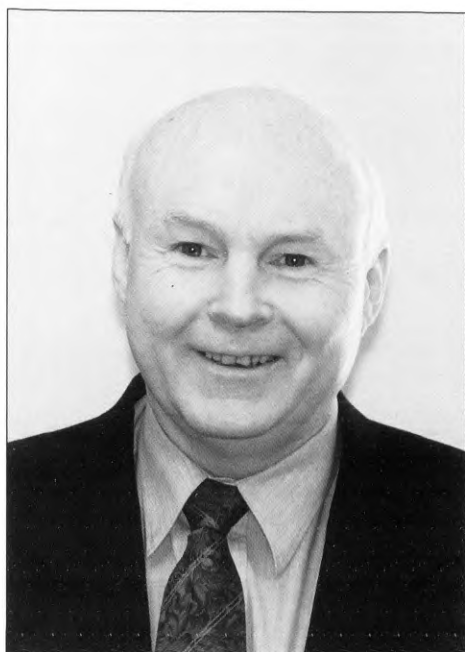


Eastern Region manager's paper proposes revamping role of middle management



Eastern Region General Manager, Bob McDonald, received the Police Commissioners' Award recently for the 1996 Police Executive Leadership Program. The award recognised Mr McDonald's paper titled *Understanding and Redefining the Role of the Middle Manager in the AFP's Team Concept of Management: The Revamping of a Vital Management Position in National Policing*. Announced at the Board of Control meeting of the Australian Institute of Police Management on September 10, the award is granted annually by the police commissioners of Australia, New Zealand and the South-West Pacific. It was made for an 'outstanding contribution to Australasian Policing'.

A slightly modified version of the first part of the thesis is reproduced here, while the entire document is available from Mr McDonald. The paper has had wide acclaim in the AFP and other law enforcement organisations, however, its status is that of a discussion paper.

This paper concentrates on the effect organisational changes currently taking place within the Australian Federal Police have had and are continuing to have on the rank of superintendent — the middle managers within the organisation.

The superintendents within the AFP are presently caught in the middle of some of the greatest transformational change ever undertaken by a policing service in Australia. This change has been brought about by factors such as globalisation, the impact of technology and the perceived need by the AFP itself, particularly in its national policing role, to concentrate more on serious fraud and organised criminal activity at the national and international level.

The AFP, having previously flattened its organisational structure, has now discarded the traditional command-and-control paramilitary

structure for the empowered team concept of management, and in doing so, has created a whole new outlook on the role to be performed by the superintendents.

The changes being experienced by superintendents in the AFP have left many confused, with a feeling of having been let down. The same changes have also brought about a belief by these officers that their loyalty to the organisation has been for nought and a one way street. Instructions flowing from the top of the organisation are often deemed to be ambiguous and convey mixed messages, leaving a feeling that executive management has deserted the superintendents and has placed more confidence and trust in the lower levels of the organisation. This paper examines these problems by way of a comprehensive literature review and a number of workplace interviews in an endeavour to explain

why these middle managers feel the way they do; and, what must be done to redefine such a vital management role.

The results to emerge from this study show that the AFP, even though it is the first policing organisation in Australia to fully embrace this concept, is embarking on a course of action that is consistent with the views of a large number of organisational and management theorists. The conclusion can be drawn from the evidence uncovered, that the AFP in undertaking such transformational change is soundly placing itself in a competitive position to meet the uncertain political, social, economic and rapid technological challenges of the next century.

The same results convey a strong message that the traditional role of a superintendent in the AFP, as a middle manager, has irrevocably changed. Those in this position now have to change their attitude, reconstruct and revitalise their new role within the organisation. In many cases, this will entail learning new skills, particularly those focused on people and performing tasks at a level or two higher than their traditional role.

Whilst recognising this, the paper by repeating a number of times the simple message '*managers will not empower others if they feel disempowered themselves*' also urges executive management to address a number of key areas in helping redefine and revitalise the role.

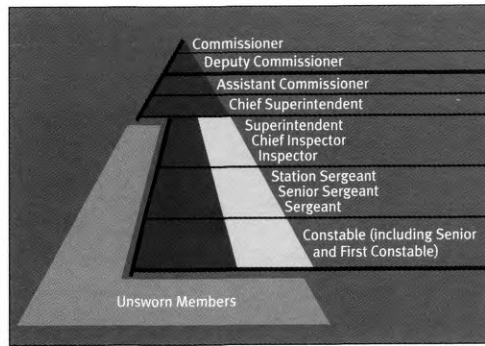
Finally, as a result of the research undertaken in this paper, the author in a very pragmatic way applies the theoretical findings to the AFP Operations Teams Model. What emerges from this exercise is a number of soundly based recommendations. These recommendations, if implemented, would redefine the role of the middle manager in the AFP team concept of management, and restore to this level of management a sense of purpose and pride.

After all, as the paper rightly points out, these middle managers have learnt the hard way what works and what does not. This rich source of operational wisdom, unteachable at business schools or institutes, must be captured and harnessed to the new direction of the AFP.

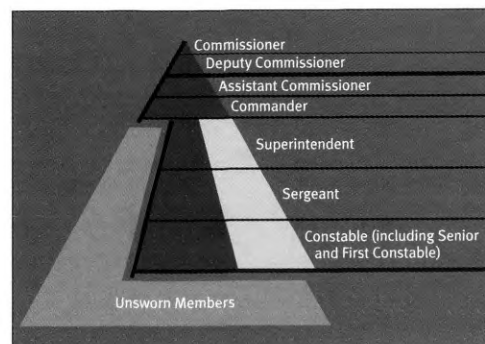
The problem and its setting

Background to the problem

In an effort to move away from a rigid hierarchical structure, the AFP in 1987, flattened its organisational structure by reducing its ranks from 13 levels to seven. Plans were also made for the devolution of operational and financial accountability to those at the workplace. A bold step and well ahead of other police organisations in this country at that time. Unfortunately, for



Before the 1988 Career Structure Review



After the Career Structure Review

The AFP in 1987, flattened its organisational structure by reducing the number of ranks.

reasons that are not entirely clear, the AFP failed to devolve to the extent it should have. It would appear that some senior managers were confident in devolving budgets and other responsibilities to subordinate levels, whilst other managers were found lacking in this regard.

In October 1994, following the appointment of a new commissioner, the AFP further examined its role in an attempt to identify its core business, future direction and how to become more effective in times of never ending and increasing social, political and economic change. A program was commenced with committees set up throughout the organisation for its employees at the lowest levels to participate in the design of the organisation they envisaged as being relevant and viable for the 21st century. What emerged from this process was a shift from the hierarchical structure of command and control to that of policing within the team concept.

Despite this general consensus, the team concept for policing is viewed by many within and outside the AFP as radical and impractical. There is no doubt that many within the Australian law enforcement community are watching the AFP with some interest before embarking on a similar or more modified version.

Under the AFP model, middle managers are now being asked to become either a team leader, depending on the importance and complexity of an investigation, or play an entirely new 'hands off'

“In this new role which is far removed from their conventional command and control function, these middle managers are being told to become a coach, mentor, adviser and/or facilitator to any number of teams.”

role as a coordinator. In this new role which is far removed from their conventional command and control function, these middle managers are being told to become a coach, mentor, adviser and/or facilitator to any number of teams. No longer do divisions, branches, units or squads exist within the organisation. Similar to what has happened in both the public and private sectors in recent years, these middle managers have also had to consider taking redundancy which was targeted at their level, not only to facilitate the change, but to also meet budgetary limitations within the organisation. It is with this background information that the problem, which this paper will address, can now be defined.

The problem

The middle managers primarily affected by this change are those members holding the rank of superintendent within the AFP. These members in the past are the ones who have played by the rules and worked hard to get to where they are today. They are typically high achievers, whose self-esteem is integrally linked to their professional achievements.

For years these managers have been virtual prisoners within the organisation itself, trapped by the demands of their superiors from the top, their subordinates from below, and their competitive colleagues in the middle. But more recently they are also caught in the middle of the most transformational change presently being undertaken in Australian policing. A change brought about by factors completely out of their control. These factors include globalisation, the impact of technology and the perceived need by the AFP itself, to service the Australian community by concentrating investigations on the more sophisticated or organised criminal activity at the national and international levels.

In October 1994 when the AFP commenced to further examine its role these middle managers were largely by-passed in this process with some even being told that they were not to be included because of their mindsets. Perceptions quickly

formed, and are still present today amongst some of these individuals, that they are viewed from on high as being no more than the ‘deadwood’ within the organisation. Some senior officers have also voiced their opinion that there is no longer a need for this particular level of management.

These middle level managers are people who are now mainly in their 40s or 50s, who joined the police service believing they had life tenure, which in yesteryears meant life-long and secure employment. The same people thought that through hard work and dedication they stood a good chance of being promoted, over a given period of time, to senior management levels.

Whilst life tenure came to an abrupt end in the late 1980s with the introduction of contract employment, and while still recovering from this and a flattened organisational structure which automatically slowed promotion, they have now been removed from their traditional management position in the hierarchy and are being told to play an entirely different role as a coordinator, mentor, coach and facilitator. This sudden change has left many of these managers with a feeling of ‘disempowerment’, while on the other hand, many of their subordinates are openly displaying confidence and authority because of the ‘empowerment’ process and the perceptions it projects.

To say the least, these middle managers are confused, feel let down and believe that their loyalty to the organisation has been for nought and a one-way street. They also believe that they are being asked to navigate in a rudderless ship without compass, charts or any form of strong leadership. The instructions or directions flowing from the top of the organisation are often deemed ambiguous and convey mixed messages. In short they feel that senior management has deserted them and are placing more confidence and trust in the lower levels of the organisation.

This paper will examine this very issue in an effort to ascertain whether this is something unique to the AFP and determine what must be done to redefine the role for this level of management. However, before this can be achieved and for completeness another set of sub-problems arising out of this organisational shift also need to be considered.

The subproblems

These subproblems relate to gaining answers to the questions of what the ‘team concept’ of management is all about and what the term ‘empowerment’ means. There is a need to answer these questions in order that a full appreciation can be gained of the role of the middle manager in this new policing environment.

The nature of the study

This study has been undertaken in two phases, the first being a comprehensive literature review – a review which was wide ranging and broad in its nature and one which, for completeness, looked at the area of empowered teams before concentrating on the role of the middle manager in this new organisational shift. The second phase involved a number of workplace interviews with key executive AFP leaders/managers, including a number of middle managers and a representative of the AFP Change Oversight Team (COT).

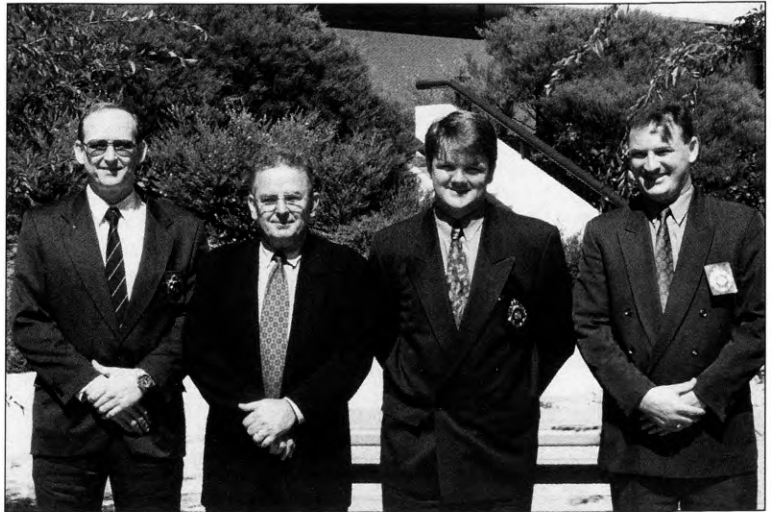
The review of the related literature

How did teams and the concept of empowerment emerge?

In what could now be considered as dated writing but still highly relevant, Handy (1981, p.381) argued that some key assumptions in organisational thinking had reached the end of their useful life. One of these assumptions, and the most relevant to the issue now under consideration, is that 'hierarchy is natural'. Handy (pp.385-386) in questioning this assumption brought out three key points which today form the basic argument for flattening organisational structures and forming empowered teams. These included a shift in management power recognising expert or personal power within an organisation; that the number of levels in a given hierarchy should be restricted to a number which can be self-justifying; and, that decisions must increasingly be taken with the consent of those who have to implement them.

Similarly, Keighley (1993) claims it is a myth that empowerment is a new idea. According to this author the idea of a self-directed workforce is both old and new, with experiments of this kind having been around for more than 40 years. It can be shown, according to Keighley (1993) that self-directed work teams have been used in industry since the late 1940s. Although, it has only been in the last decade that changes brought about by world events has forced increased worker participation requiring greater commitment and intellectual input into the workplace.

The forces at play include the need for quality improvement and customer service or focus. In respect to quality improvement, following the vast, continuing and ever changing technological advances, it has been found that only people can improve quality through commitment and the ability to design and implement appropriate systems. For these very reasons, organisations are now realising that their survival depends on the commitment and skills of their workers (Keighley 1993). These very same factors were predicted by



The original Change Oversight Team, from left: Jim Torr, Hugh Guilfoyle, Luke Cornelius and Jon Hunt-Sharman.

Handy in the late 1970s, when considering what new organisational paradigms were in the offering, held that the clues to change involved the communication revolution; fees not wages; tools not machines; and, the economics of quality (Handy 1981). Time has certainly proved this author correct.

Unlike Keighley (1993), Bramel and Friend (cited in Durford 1992, p.126) claim that autonomous work groups were a product of the political and economic environment of the 1960s. According to these authors this was an era of economic security and workers were reacting against unsatisfying work and challenging management for a greater role in the work place decision making. These same authors also argue that the economic insecurity from the mid 1970s witnessed a decline in creating such teams.

Even though there may have been a decline in the creation of autonomous or semi-autonomous teams from the mid 1970s, there now appears to be a renewed interest in empowering the workforce in this way. Whilst this could easily be associated with a return to better global and national economic conditions, the true reason is more in line with the findings of authors such as Handy (1983) and Keighley (1993). The impact of, and rapid advances in technology over the past decade and the economics of quality, as predicted by Handy (1981), although expressed slightly differently, are certainly drivers of change that cannot be readily dismissed. They also carry more weight than the economic conditions of a certain period or a revolt by workers attempting to achieve a better working environment.

Similar to Handy (1981) and Keighley (1993) other commentators such as Sims and Lorenzi

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