

Developing the 'right' police for community policing

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In recent times, the evolution of policing has seen the traditional concept of military-style hierarchical management challenged by more flexible, teams-based management models.

In this paper, presented at the 10th National Neighbourhood Watch Conference in September last year, the AFP ACT Policing's **Chief Police Officer John Murray** considers the place of the militaristic management style in a community policing context, outlines characteristics of the 'ideal' community police officer, and discusses the broader relationships between police and the community in preventing crime.



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The move from a traditionally reactive style of policing to community policing has required a significant shift in the way police undertake their work. Formerly, policing was seen as being essentially reactive and best managed with a militaristic managerial style. Policing today, and certainly in the ACT, has moved away from the military model and now adopts a dynamic and flexible style more in line with conventional private enterprise. However, not everyone would agree

with this shift and would see the need to maintain a strong emphasis on command and control in policing which is the central characteristic of militarism. This short paper demonstrates that adopting militarism as a dominant managerial philosophy will not be conducive to successful community policing initiatives, and specifically, Neighbourhood Watch. The paper also highlights the ideal characteristics of a community police officer.

Whereas community policing requires a policing approach that demonstrates openness, service orientation, innovative/creative thinking, and problem solving, these characteristics are not likely to be developed in a militaristic managerial model. Research has generally shown that this is a style which at worst will tend to give rise to an operational police culture which is action oriented, cynical, suspicious, reactive and, most importantly in the context of community policing, insular and isolated from the general community.



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When working effectively, community policing will reduce the fear of crime, help organise neighbourhoods to reduce local crime, improve ethnic relations and control more serious crime. Ideally, it involves the whole community and as a consequence increases the likelihood of more crimes being prevented and detected than would be through traditional means of policing. Community policing is the dominant philosophy underpinning crucial programs like Neighbourhood Watch.

For community policing to be successful, what then are the ideal characteristics for police?

'Ideal' characteristics of a community police officer

Police forces/services that have embraced community policing refer to the cornerstone of the concept as being the collaborative partnership between the community and the police that identifies problems of crime and

disorder and essentially involves all elements of the community in providing the solution to these problems. To examine the challenge this presents to police forces/services and the men and women who represent them at the front, I have worked towards determining the 'profile' of the ideal community police officer.

Community policing is founded on mutually beneficial ties between police and the rest of the community. I use the phrase '... police and the rest of the community' deliberately. You will often see this relationship described as 'police and civilians'. Implicit in that of course is the idea that police are not civilians. This, however, is not the case. Civilian means 'non military' which obviously includes police. Language is important, and in the context of community policing, should connote mutual cooperation rather than demarcation. The fundamental principle of community policing is that while police obviously provide leadership and direction, community policing is based upon cooperation between equal partners in the community.

Self-perception of a police man or woman's role and the consequent relationship to the rest of the community is a critical aspect in the successful implementation of community policing. Ideally, he or she should see him or herself as an integral part of the community and not distinct from it – and certainly not superior or above it. There is nothing new in this: one of Peel's original principles which remains is,

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An imperative for all community policing initiatives adopted by police, no matter what form they take, is the involvement of the community. There is no variation from this theme. The hallmark of community policing is community engagement on the premise that to be effective in the control of crime it is not sufficient to rely entirely on the police. So, to be effective in community policing, police must accept and support the idea that the community has a role in areas which have traditionally been their sole domain. Accordingly, there must be a genuine commitment by police to the ideal that the community will have some contribution to the way they do their job. As Moore and Whetnall (1994) note after referring to eight separate studies into the implementation of community policing programs in the United States:

“Without meaningful involvement of patrol officers in the planning process, participation by all city agencies, and true community involvement, community policing will fail to realise its potential” (Moore and Whetnall, 1994).

While many authors have referred to the variety of law enforcement programs that are called, ‘community policing’ common components are consistently referred to and include:

- reliance on ‘community based crime prevention’ through the use of citizen education, neighbourhood watches (and similar techniques) as opposed to relying entirely on police patrols to prevent crime;
- reorientation of patrols from being primarily an emergency-response force (chasing calls) to a greater emphasis on ‘proactive’ techniques;
- increased police accountability to the citizens they serve; and
- decentralisation of command and police authority, with more discretion allowed to lower-ranking ‘generalist’ officers, and more initiative expected of them (Skolnick and Bayley, 1988).

This can be seen to be a significant shift from traditional policing. The introduction of community policing followed what were seen as the limitations of traditional policing with its predominantly reactive stance towards



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crime control; its nearly exclusive reliance on arrests as a means of reducing crime and controlling disorder; its inability to develop and sustain close working relationships with the community in controlling crime; and its stifling and ultimately unsuccessful methods of bureaucratic control (Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy, 1990).

As Moore and Whetnall (1994) point out (referring to the work of Sparrow, Moore and Kennedy) community policing introduced new possibilities including:

- the potential for crime prevention as well as crime control;
- creative problem solving as an alternative to arrest;
- the importance of customer service and community responsiveness as devices for building stronger relations with local communities; and
- ‘commissioning’ street level officers to initiate community problem-solving efforts (Moore and Whetnall, 1994).

Another key element in the success of community policing is the community’s perception of accessibility and openness. How a police force/service is portrayed, therefore, emerges as an important matter. There is little doubt that the most progressive forces/services will promote philosophies, missions and strategies that use words like community consultation, openness and joint problem solving, and they will be quite genuine. This promotion is important – it not only conveys the organisation’s commitment

to the community at large but also determines to a large degree how employees act (Robbins and Coulter, 1999). The stronger the message the more influence it will have over its employees. It is critical, therefore, in promoting the concept of community policing, to place due emphasis on service related principles of openness, consultation and the development of confidence and trust.

Oliver and Bartgis (1998) found that police attitude and behaviour will be a major determinant of the success of community policing. They argue that although community policing is a collaborative effort between the police and the community, line officers have the capability of ignoring, circumventing or sabotaging the desires and expectations of the community. How police leaders meet this challenge, therefore, is not just an important issue but a critical one.

In terms of an ideal profile for a community police officer, what emerges from these findings is that to be successful, police men and women involved in community policing must:

- have a genuine belief in the force/service's commitment to community consultation and problem solving;
- be committed to the notion of equal partnership with the community and be open and accessible in the provision of the service;
- be thoughtful, creative and innovative in promoting solutions to problems and crime prevention generally;
- enjoy greater freedom to exercise discretion at the lowest level of policing so as to incorporate a problem-solving mentality as an alternative to arrest; and
- have excellent communication skills so as to be able to develop a rapport with the community, and in turn, win respect and trust.

Training and development and the shaping of culture

If we consider the history of police recruit and in-service training we can note that there were certain assumptions about the relevance and role of police which gave rise to the shape of curricula and practice. Traditionally, there was an assumption that a militaristic disciplinary process should be used in both training and management. Training, it must be said, figures in the shaping of police culture and since culture develops over time,

it is important to consider how training has been reshaped over time.

Today there is some controversy on what should stay and what should be changed in police training. Indeed some police forces/services proudly cling to traditional ways of training and are resistant to 'new and untested' ways of doing things and consequently retain a strong militaristic style. Today important questions arise: if police forces/services are to meet today's expectations of community policing, how, or to what extent should traditional training change? And what part does militarism or quasi militarism play in this?

Obviously some forces/services, because of the peculiarity of their environment will still need to maintain a command and control or military bias in their training. However for most police forces/services in relatively peaceful jurisdictions in the developed world, the emphasis has shifted significantly and more of the scarce training time is used to develop personal and intellectual reasoning skills.

A bias towards militarism in training will certainly play a big part in shaping the police culture. The closer training is geared to quasi-militarism, the greater the tendency to have an 'us [police] versus them [community]' element in the culture. Few police forces/services would adopt the traditional full military model but it is worthwhile considering its tenets and then having an objective look at one's own force/service to see the extent to which they are still applied. When adopted in full, a classic military model:

- relies on one way communication – from the top to the bottom;
- has authority linked to rank;
- requires unquestionable acceptance of directions from a superior rank;
- involves no consultation in decision making;
- incorporates discipline within a rule based system on the assumption that the employees cannot be trusted and should be punished when they breach the rules; and
- does not seek nor encourage initiative.

None of these conditions is conducive to developing a culture which is appropriate for community policing with its expectations of openness, innovation, problem solving and freedom to act. The move from traditional policing to a more progressive style has been either as a result of a natural evolution or the result of a conscious program for change. In

either event if the contemporary demands of a community based policing service are to be met there will be the need to shift the culture towards service orientation. I believe the extent to which the traditional culture is able to be shifted will be directly proportional to its

success in implementing then maintaining a community policing model.

The following table shows my appreciation of the changing trends in policing. Clearly, insofar as ACT Policing is concerned, there are distinct moves away from the military model.

Table 1: Changes in policing

TRADITIONAL	CONTEMPORARY
<p>POLICING AS A CRAFT/TRADE</p> <p>Policing has traditionally been regarded as a vocation where the skills are learned ‘on-the-job.’ It assumes that after being taught the practical skills at the academy the ability to do the job will be learned from an experienced officer in the field. Here the culture is simply passed on from one generation to the next without any outside influences. The ‘craft’ which was taught relied on militaristic principles and manifested in such things as drill, command and control and a strictly enforced punitive disciplinary process.</p>	<p>POLICING AS A PROFESSION</p> <p>Especially over the last 10 years there has been a conscious drive for policing to be accepted as a ‘profession’. What profession means in that sense is open to different interpretations, but it will usually involve developing a body of knowledge of policing (like the recognised professions of medicine/law), a requirement for higher and better education, a strict code of ethics, and working to values rather than just rules. Police culture instead of relying solely on past practices/behaviour is influenced by broader influences of society and research/learning.</p>
<p>AUTHORITARIAN APPROACH TO POLICING</p> <p>Here there is an emphasis on strictly enforcing the laws without being concerned about causes of crime, prosecutorial discretion is limited, being less concerned with preventing crime, and generally telling the public how policing is going to be conducted. Research into the traditional street-level culture suggests there has been a tendency for authoritarianism, defensism, cynicism and action-orientation which together result in a general distancing from the community.</p>	<p>PROBLEM SOLVING</p> <p>Here there is an emphasis on understanding what contributes to crime and there is a conscious commitment to joining with the community in determining how to prevent crime. This identifies programs like Neighbourhood Watch as a critical part in this process, the requirement of police to adopt a partnership approach with the community, and the allowance of that community to make contributions to policing the community overall. The move from authoritarianism to this community consultative style represents a significant shift in police culture.</p>
<p>QUASI MILITARY MANAGEMENT STYLE</p> <p>Early establishment of policing saw the need to have structures and managerial styles which were either entirely built on military lines or at least drew from their principles. In those days there were few other models to draw from. What becomes controversial is the extent to which this is appropriate today. With quasi militarism there is a culture which is typified by strict reliance on rank based authority, an expectation of unquestioned acceptance of direction from a senior officer, and one-way communication. A military type culture assumes that subordinate ranks have to be told what to do. The force was characterised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bureaucratic management • administrative management • maintenance management. 	<p>DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT STYLE</p> <p>The military model certainly has its place when command and control situations demand it. However, these situations are relatively few and a system of management which allows contribution from all ranks as to how the job is done is much more successful. This, in effect, suggests that the conventional private sector management styles, like team building and democratic decision making can work to the betterment of policing. A desired culture is one which empowers officers at lower ranks so that they have more authority and greater decision-making powers at the lowest possible level. Most importantly in terms of Neighbourhood Watch, it encourages initiative at a community level. The force/service is characterised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategic management • people management • management of change.

Table 1: Changes in policing (continued)

TRADITIONAL	CONTEMPORARY
<p>EMPHASIS ON PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES</p> <p>Traditionally there was an assumption that being physically strong was a pre-requisite for policing. Until relatively recently (varies across countries) this effectively excluded women from the workforce. Strict, and often ill-founded standards were insisted upon which effectively cut out large portions of the population. Emphasis in training was geared around fitness and developing upper body strength. Early traditional culture insisted on a physically strong male.</p> <p>INSULAR AND DEFENSIVE CULTURE</p> <p>It is not that long ago that police would defiantly claim that they were the only ones who knew anything about policing. ‘Outsiders’ and this usually included academics and the media who criticised (or even commented on) the police were regarded as unwelcome intruders. At public seminars whenever police felt they should comment, their contributions were usually seen to be defensive and insular. With a defensive culture within policing there is a tendency towards secrecy.</p>	<p>EMPHASIS ON INTELLECT</p> <p>Progressive forces/services are recognising that the key skills required to police a modern society are intellect and good interpersonal skills. Studies repeatedly show that upper body strength is required in relative few instances and furthermore with higher intellect and good communication skills there is less likelihood of conflict situations developing. A desired culture insists on a man or woman who is smart and a good communicator.</p> <p>OPEN AND CONSULTATIVE CULTURE</p> <p>In progressive police forces/services, individual police are encouraged to contribute to public debates on justice issues. The police contribution when well reasoned is a worthwhile dimension to the overall debate. This openness is critical for community policing initiatives like Neighbourhood Watch. A desired culture is one which allows the public to know how and why policing operates the way it does.</p>

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Challenges to Community Policing

Especially over the last decade the public sector reform movement across the developed world has caused governments to require police and other public service bodies to

demonstrate not just effectiveness and efficiency but also market place viability (a competitive spirit between the public service organisation and the general market and also between public service organisations). Specifically dealing with police, governments have required commissioners to focus on core business and encouraged them to relinquish ‘ancillary tasks’.

While acknowledging the need for greater cost effectiveness and greater efficiency, police leaders should be cautious of such directions: as a consequence of cost cutting, there can be a tendency to shift policing back to a reactive style of policing. When such pressures were felt in the United Kingdom, Redshaw and Sanders (1995), for example, noted, “If the police do not take an active lead then it is almost inevitable that police work will become centrally defined and led – where the only tasks that matter are those which can be measured [and] a basic crime-fighting force is not the only service the public wants” (Redshaw and Sanders, 1995).



An obvious consequence would be a diminishing link between the police and the rest of the community. Reiner has been strong in his repudiation of the proposed focus of governments that suggest the main job of the police is to catch criminals and he refers to this assumption as “an arrogant know-nothing attitude, blithely intent on ignoring any inconvenient facts” (Reiner, 1994).

Entirely relevant to the debate and the tendency to move towards a core function crime fighting mentality are the following facts:

- a focus on crime fighting based on a cost-effective way of delivering core services and relinquishing ‘ancillary tasks’ threatens the concept of community based policing – crime prevention which should be seen as the principal objective of policing will be undervalued;
- research shows that the notion that police are primarily law-enforcers is misleading;
- with the consent of the community police generally resolve conflicts by means other than the use of legal powers;
- the use of discretion rather than the use of the legal process can be seen to be a central part of policing by consent; and, self evidently,
- most crimes are not solved by good detective work or good forensic work – most crimes are solved by someone telling the police, either directly or

indirectly, and this is directly proportional to the relationship police have with the rest of the community.

Conclusion

Police leaders should be aware of the ‘ideal’ characteristics of a community police officer and be alert to the possible impediments in reaching these ideals because of a disproportionately high emphasis on militarism in training and management. They should also be alert to indirect forces from high-level economic and social state policy that may act as catalysts to shift back the emphasis to reactive policing. In the ACT, however, the message has been sent out loud and clear: through a substantial apportionment of funds towards crime prevention, the ACT Government has ensured that the correct emphasis in community policing will be maintained.

As I have outlined, great steps have been taken in the development of policing which have seen progressive forces/services move from a traditionally reactive style of policing to one which is duly consultative and cooperative with the community and genuinely concerned about problem solving and crime prevention. The road ahead is challenging, and as we work towards improving worthwhile programs like Neighbourhood Watch there are high expectations for police to move towards satisfying the ideal characteristics to do the job well.

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