

Police Reform

building integrity

Review by Brian Hartigan

Police misconduct – the subject of numerous royal commissions, internal inquiries, media scrutiny and public ridicule – a world-wide problem.

“Many of Mexico City’s citizens think their biggest law enforcement problem is the police” – *New York Times*.

“We must resolutely get rid of officers who have converted their service into a form of business” – Russia’s President Putin.

“Prime Minister Tony Blair’s administration has suffered another setback with the disclosure of an internal report charging that the war against crime in Britain is being damaged by corrupt police... resulting in failed operations, intimidation of witnesses and the exposure of informants” – *Washington Post*.

Police Reform – building integrity is a smallish book as modern academic tomes go, yet it covers such a vast subject in such great detail and from so many angles, one wonders how it all fits in such a package.

It’s certainly not, in the opinion of this un-sworn member, a book for everyone, however. It is, after all, an analytical, comprehensive and academic examination of a problem we are led to believe is rampant by media outlets only too happy to digest, dissect and otherwise disseminate a subject close to the heart of every citizen.

“(Police) deviance elicits a special feeling of betrayal. In a sense, they are doubly condemned; that is, not just for the infringement itself but even more for the breach of [public] trust involved.” – Maurice Punch, *Conduct Unbecoming: The Social Construction of Police Deviance and Control*.

This book is an academic work aimed at the wider police and police-related communities. But, of specific interest to the AFP, perhaps, is the inclusion of contributions from two of our own – Meredith Bassett and Michelle Karas.

Federal Agent Bassett, in a collaborative effort with editor Tim Prenzler, examines the use of complaint profiling and early warning systems – a very revealing chapter.

In principle, complaint profiling and early warning systems seek to identify, catalogue and assess factors

that may predict future misconduct and thus develop interventions designed to prevent such misconduct occurring.

While this is obviously easier said than done, it seems many agencies (particularly in notoriously litigious countries) are reticent to compile such records for fear files may be subpoenaed and used against the organisation. But, as Federal Agent Bassett logically points out, having such systems in place seems far more likely to protect an organisation from liability, showing as it does, a proactive attempt to maximise integrity.

Michelle Karas, AFP Psych Services, examines the difficult, yet obviously desirable, task of weeding out bad apples before they get into the barrel – the careful selection of new police recruits.

This is certainly not an easy concept given that not all bad cops necessarily start out that way. Indeed, the police environment itself exerts strong influence – for good or bad – on individuals. Individual experiences or events at any time during a career also have the capacity to change an officers’ values, attitudes or personality sufficient to modify behaviour. Ms Karas outlines AFP Psych Services’ research methodology for identifying and assessing applicant attributes which could make them more susceptible to the potentially negative aspects of the police environment.

Police Reform – building integrity is a book worthy of prominent place on the study table of any police officer, ombudsman, judicial functionary, politician or academic interested in studying, influencing or ensuring the continued growth of police integrity and, more importantly, the growth of public confidence in the integrity of our policing services.



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Tim Prenzler and
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