The Culture of the British Police:
Views of Police Officers

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The findings of a longitudinal, qualitative investigation of the culture of British Police and the perceived meanings of 'quality' and 'quality of service' are explored. Themes emerging from the analysis of in-depth interviews with newly promoted inspectors and sergeants suggest that police culture is changing subtly from its traditional roots and open to embracing issues of quality of service. Police officers have their own views on quality of service which do not always match that of quality of service directives or mission statements. The findings inform on ways in which the culture of an organisation impacts on service quality initiatives and have implications for a wide range of service organisations.

The present study reports on a longitudinal qualitative study exploring the culture of British police from the perspective of police inspectors and sergeants. The purpose of the study was to explore police culture and the perceived meanings of 'quality' and 'quality of service' in the police context. By seeking first an appreciation of police officers' perception of their culture, we were able to better understand the ways in which culture influenced how quality initiatives were being received and interpreted. The findings have implications for service quality and culture in a wide range of service organisations.

In the early 1990s, the Police service began in earnest to talk of quality in police services and adopt terminology used in other service sectors regarding quality initiatives. The establishment of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Quality of Service Committee in 1993 is one indication of the rise in interest in quality issues and is set against a backdrop of similar initiatives. Performance Indicators driven by ACPO,

the Home Office, Audit Commission or individual Police Forces were given considerable attention in the Home Office Police Research Group's newsletters and reports. Performance Indicators published by the Audit Commission [1995] enabled comparisons to be made between police forces. Among individual Forces' initiatives were: introduction of quality circles in Gloucestershire in 1992; staff awards for good service in West Yorkshire in 1994; realignment of resources in Cheshire in 1994 following a public attitude survey; Dorset police publicity leaflets setting out the level of service the public could expect; development of interest among South Yorkshire Police in 1996 in the European Foundation for Quality Management model.

The study covers a five-year period from 1991 to 1996. It captures the initial years when quality initiatives were high on police agendas despite little thought being given to ways in which police culture might impact on such initiatives. Following a brief review of studies of police culture and quality of service, a framework for studying police culture is adopted. In-depth qualitative interviews provide insights into police culture and the way in which culture influences officers' perspectives of quality initiatives.

STUDIES OF POLICE CULTURE

Over the last two decades, numerous researchers have explored police culture and found similar themes. Role conflict and ambiguities coupled with a general distrust of the police by the public were some of the complexities found by Manning [1977]. Junior officers valued the excitement of 'real police work' which they defined as the visible aspects of police work such as arrest and chase. Senior officers, deprived by their position of taking part in such activities, were more concerned with projecting a multiple image of police activity. Manning suggests that many common-sense notions of police work, such as its ability to prevent crime or induce a sense of public well being, function to maintain police morale and the officer's sense of personal efficacy but are not representative of actual police goals.

Holdaway [1977] reviewed changes in UK urban policing incurred by the professionalism of the police service and the introduction of 'Unit Beat Policing'. 'Managerial Professionalism' founded in community liaison, was the public image fostered by senior officers and the Home Office. Similar initiatives mark the 'post-Scarman' period [Reiner, 1991]. 'Practical Professionalism' founded in the routine policing of urban Britain failed to achieve its full potential through a lack of willingness on the part of constables to relinquish their cars and make informal contact with the public. Such a change in role moved away from their internalised

perceptions of police work and the way in which its goals should be manifested. Chatterton [1979] found constables created their own structure of 'real policing' and displayed a fair degree of autonomy regarding how they interpreted their beat and police duties. Such autonomy and discretionary power was tempered with a need to 'watch their backs' and have a fund of 'good stories' to explain their actions and lead to a 'shared understanding' with sergeants and inspectors.

A quasi-military culture with an immense apparatus of procedures was how Smith and Gray [1983] described police culture. Despite this, Holdaway [1983] found a structure where lower ranks were able to exercise autonomy within the structure. 'Real police work' was the subject of exaggerated stories and bravado among practitioners. Control, hedonism, action and challenge seemed to distance officers from the constraints of Force directives and the criticisms of the public. Contributions to the police debate by staff at the Police Staff College hints at the necessity for flexibility and adaptability to cope with demands being stifled by a culture which discouraged innovation and creativity [Thackrah, 1985].

Competing goals [Fielding, 1988], the notion of fighting crime as central to good policing [Holdaway, 1989], increased civilianisation in police forces which display almost 'tribal' distrust of anyone from 'outside' [Young, 1991] feature in analyses of police culture. A sense of 'mission' with the police force being a way of life [Reiner, 1992] is a common thread of police culture. Social isolation and a sense of solidarity are similar concepts with an apparent gulf between 'street cops' and 'management cops' [Butler, 1992; Reiner, 1992]. ACPO were quoted as saying, 'Police culture is extremely powerful and overlooking its importance is frequently the cause of failed attempts at organisational change' [Police Review, 1994: 13].

QUALITY OF SERVICE

The term quality of service features extensively in research and management literature since the late 1970s. Permeating many definitions is the idea of a match between expected quality of service and that provided [Lyth and Johnston, 1988; Parasuraman *et al*., 1985; Wyckoff, 1988]. Common to most writers are views that it is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate quality of service than goods quality and that evaluations involve both the processes of the service delivery and the outcome. ACPO [1990] in the 'Statement of our Common Purpose and Values' tries to provide a view of the basis on which the highest quality of service could be built. The statement hints at the diversity of views that must be taken into consideration. The police force has more of a diverse range of customers and stakeholders to satisfy than most professions. Victim, accused, 'man-in-

the-street', politician, other emergency services, taxpayers are all customers and/or stakeholders. Needs of external customers and internal customers, in terms of officers themselves, may diverge. The police are expected to serve all 'without fear or favour'.

ACPO [1993] concentrates on internal quality issues such as leading people, communication, internal organisation, managing resources, systems, procedures and strategy. Chief Officers report their total commitment to quality, although research has found that performance indicators were viewed as reducing quality of service to 'bean counting' [Waters, 1996]. While 'care and service' were currently a predominant intention of police policies, tangible products of programmes were seen as more elusive. Within the 'canteen culture', quality was seen as just another management initiative. Beneficial effects were, though, being perceived on internal quality with a greater awareness of devolution of authority and culture change [Waters, 1996].

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF CULTURE

While definitions of culture abound, as Handy [1993] argues, culture is something that is perceived and hence cannot be precisely defined. At the Police Staff College the definition of culture suggested by police academic staff is that offered by Schein:

> a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problem of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members in the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems [1985: 9].

Schein suggests three interacting 'levels' of culture – artefacts and creations which are often visible but not decipherable, values testable by social consensus and basic assumptions which are taken for granted, invisible and preconscious. To these levels Lundberg [1985] adds values which may be expressed in the 'philosophy' or 'mission' of the organisation. At the Police Staff College, an adaptation of Johnson and Scholes' [1989] cultural web model is used to illustrate elements of an organisational culture. This has a central paradigm surrounded by and connected with the elements of 'stories and myths', 'symbols', 'power structures', 'organisational structure', 'control systems' and 'rituals'. Elements to do with relationships with the wider environment and values are missing.

A framework of culture offered by Deal and Kennedy [1982] encapsulates much of Schein's and Lundberg's models, albeit in simplified

form, and also contains the elements of relationships with the wider environment and values. They suggest five elements of organisational culture: the business environment; values; heroes; rites and rituals; cultural network. Taking any framework or typology of culture as a starting point for discussion may channel thinking along predetermined paths. While mindful of this, the current study adopted the framework offered by Deal and Kennedy [1982] as it enabled police officers to commence their thinking from a familiar starting point. All participants in the study had prior understanding of culture in terms of Schein's [1985] definition and Johnson and Scholes [1989] cultural web. The framework of Deal and Kennedy [1982] was one to which they could readily relate.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Much has been written on police culture and there is a growing body of research addressing quality issues [Boyle, 1999; Bryett, 1999; Heskett *et al*., 1997; Reynoso and Moores, 1995]. Despite this, perceptions of police officers of their culture and its potential impact on service quality have not been addressed. All those participating in the research were attending the South West Regional Training Unit's management development programmes for newly promoted Police Inspectors. Police Inspectors can be regarded as holding a pivotal role in the police hierarchy between 'management' and 'street cops'. The researcher undertaking the interviews was himself a police Chief Inspector and partially responsible for delivery of the programmes. A qualitative, exploratory approach was used to probe issues of quality of service and police culture. This enabled the diversity of views and interpretations to be captured and a rich picture developed from the meanings, interpretations and other evidence offered by participants.

Carrying out research with participants that one is at the same time developing, raises moral and ethical issues [Mirvis, 1985]. Both in-depth interviews and participant observation were employed throughout the fieldwork period of May 1992 to December 1994. At times, comments made by participants were rich sources of ethnographic data and yet contained attitudes needing to be corrected in the interests of management development. Where such instances occurred, original comments, interventions by trainers and any subsequent responses were noted as fully as possible. In this way, the researcher hoped to stay true to the original data. The dual role of researcher-manager meant it was inappropriate to adopt an air of detached naiveté during class sessions. Being able to challenge statements and encourage self-examination of attitudes did, if anything, provide correctness and completeness to the data. Observing and questioning assumptions implicitly taken for granted in a work organisation

and culture that had formed an integral part of ones life for 26 years was challenging.

At the commencement of each Inspector's Management Development course the nature of the research was explained. Assurances regarding individual confidentiality of data were given and all research notes were available for participants to read if they wished. Notes were descriptive rather than interpretative. Quotation marks recorded actual speech and the researcher's feelings and interpretations were included along with any tentative insights and interpretations. The process proved difficult – particularly in the initial courses. Demands of the Management Development courses tended to interfere with the recording of notes and use had to be made of coffee breaks to record and capture some data.

One intensive in-depth interview was carried out during each Management Development course. Purposive sampling was used to capture a potential breadth of significant background factors impinging on attitudes towards police culture such as education background, age range, police force and job roles. Only one woman and one member of a visible ethnic minority passed through the management development programme and they were included in the purposeful sample. Each interview was structured around a series of open-ended main and supplementary questions. Question content was informed largely from documentary publications such as ACPO Quality of Service Committee's 'Getting things Right'. The questions proved a starting point for discussion and for probing views and attitudes regarding culture and service quality. Each interview lasted between one to two hours and was taped and transcribed as soon as possible following the interview. Initial readings were undertaken without forming any markings or categorisation in order to allow the overall sentiments and tenor of the interview to speak for itself. Immersing oneself in the data and developing tentative categories followed from numerous readings and coding of the text [Rubin and Rubin, 1995]. Categorisation was subject to reanalysis and interpretation as more data emerged throughout the research process. A similar process was adopted with respect to participant observation notes. Patterns within the data and links between concepts and elements became apparent as analysis progressed. Interviews and analyses continued until no new patterns emerged and saturation of data had occurred [Rubin and Rubin, 1995]. At this point a total of 12 interviews had been undertaken. While the number of interviews was small, quantitatively, each case contained an immense number of observations and information from a single person. Qualitatively, the focus on a small number of single cases made it possible to explore in detail the relationship of a specific behaviour or attitude in its work context. Thus consistent and recurring patterns were worked out through a small number of intensive interviews [Kvale, 1996].

FINDINGS PERTAINING TO POLICE CULTURE

The Mission

Quotes such as, 'We've obviously got to serve our public, and … we want to work with the public as opposed to for them' sum up views on mission. 'To serve the public' was a dominant theme coupled with the idea of partnership with the public. The word 'service' was subject to a number of nuances. In the main it was being interpreted as providing a service rather than as a desire to serve *per se*. The mission was seen as being proactive, 'being out there, being seen, being active, turn over the crooks even if they're not doing anything, let them know you've seen them'.

Aspects of helping were integral to many of the interpretations of mission. 'We're there to help, no matter who or what the problem.' Responsibility for society coupled with a financial imperative were prevalent views. 'We're responsible for making people aware of what we can and what we do do.' Quality issues come through: 'the message they (force senior management) expound at every chance they get is that they wish to provide a quality of service … it's always reinforced'. Attempts to 'get it together' were noted in much participant observation data. Views were that lip service only was being given to assessing the environment: 'we should be very much more into customer demands. Not necessarily being able to meet them but at least consider them'.

Two-thirds of those interviewed felt that the function of the police – what the organisation actually does – had changed little over the decades. Protecting life, maintaining public order and tranquillity and allowing people to go about their business unhindered were seen as what the police were about. There was an acknowledgement that little things mattered. The way in which the 'phone was answered, the time kept waiting in reception, helping the old lady across the street, helping someone who has broken down'. Aspects of quality of service were implicit in much of the discussion. 'You can't measure success (achievement of the mission) in response terms, in solving crimes, crime figures. You have to measure it by the satisfaction of the public in the way they're policed.'

From participant observation it became clear that while police officers will vocalise the importance placed on serving all, the reality of putting into operation such ideas could go against internalised values. An example of this was when a participant was describing to the class the 'diversion' policy in his force designed to keep juveniles out of the courts for as long as possible. A ground swell of opinions from other participants left him in no uncertainty that the majority of his colleagues found such policies counter to what they saw as their function and mission. 'What about the victim, who our lads and lasses have to confront every day, and explain that their

burglary or what ever may have been detected, but little Johnny won't be going to court, in order to give him a second chance.'

Aside from difficulties of serving the needs of all clients, the diversity and range of activities was frequently discussed. Crowd control at matches and raves, traffic problems, increased paper work to service the Criminal Justice system and dealing with 'domestics' were just a few of the diverse roles noted. Views such as 'I think in the 1990s we need to look very seriously at whether we are performing tasks that we don't need to' were common.

Organisational Values

Inspectors viewed as important a variety of values. Among the more frequently stated values were: honesty, morality and integrity; providing a good service; value for money; a desire to help. Others included: commitment; self-discipline and restraint; courtesy; empathy and sympathy; fairness and impartiality. Loyalty, consistency, trust and a sense of humour also featured.

The degree to which participants' espoused values were felt to match those of the organisation was explored. Some considered their values matched those, stated in some form or other, by Chief Officers. Others argued their values were reflected in published annual objectives. Two respondents claimed they knew from the ACPO Statement of Common Purpose and Values which values were appropriate, although both had difficulty articulating it. A few felt that their Chief Officer had not made it known which values were appropriate or had 'left it all to this statement (of Common Purpose and Values)'.

Participants felt most members of the organisation shared the values of the police service. The view was expressed that what could differ was the degree of emphasis on particular values or differences in priorities. 'There are still some officers who believe their priority is solving crime, but how they go about it takes second priority.' Some felt that while most officers espoused police values a few officers were at variance with them. Six of those interviewed considered their boss or a previous boss had influenced their internalised values. Such influences were commonly referred to as happening at an early stage in one's career. Others thought their values had been internalised from their upbringing and general socialisation. Peer influence and that of senior management was also acknowledged. Training, particularly that given to probationary officers, was a further acknowledged important transmission of values and police culture.

The realities of police work was highlighted as 'tarnishing' values – particularly those of young recruits. The greatest perceived influence was the 'canteen culture'. 'They learn their values eight hours a day, spending long periods of time sitting in cars watching how other policemen do their

job, eating with them, socialising with them.' Dangers of 'canteen cultures' with youngsters being influenced by 'old cynics' and picking up outdated values were repeatedly alluded to.

'The Inspector is always "Inspector" or "Sir"'. 'They asked me one day, "What would you like us to call you?" and my reply was "Sergeant will be fine".' Such comments are symptomatic of the existing rank based culture of which participants were a part. 'Constables and sergeants are quite close. It wouldn't be frowned on for the sergeants to go out for a pint with the boys after work. It's frowned upon for the Inspector to go out drinking with the boys after work.' Formality was not seen to be as strict or rigid as it used to be and differences between individuals or units such as small specialised units were talked about. As one participant noted, 'the fact that we are discussing this is a sign of the times. A few years ago we wouldn't have dreamed of doing anything else than use titles'.

'Heroes' and 'Villains'

Respondents were asked to identify police members who they perceived as having made an outstanding contribution to the Force and similarly those who they perceived as having had a negative effect. The variety of heroes chosen was as numerous as the interviewees. Themes commonly running through the descriptions of heroes were features such as: dedication to the community; those who had enhanced police reputation; those who had commanded operations brilliantly; those taking over difficult situations and turning them around. Interestingly, three interviewees could not identify any 'hero'.

There were several clusterings of reasons for perceiving people as 'villains'. One clustering emerged around the theme of indiscipline, corruption and getting themselves into 'bother'. The discredit and adverse effects of such behaviour on other police officers and the public's opinion was noted. Another cluster was around 'dinosaurs' and 'donkeys' – those in senior management who were out-of-touch or anachronisms and those who were plodding along. Intransigence, inflexibility and failure were common aspects displayed in some of the descriptions of 'villains'. People who made 'a charade of listening and taking views into account' and then came up with a 'preconceived idea, which would take about 4lbs of semtex to move them' are illustrative examples of this category.

Officers who had abused their formal position power by such means as blocking individuals' promotions or advancements unfairly also ranked amongst examples of 'villains'. In similar vein, those who bullied, were out of touch or unnecessarily authoritarian were cited. Two interviewees were unable to think of specific examples of anyone having an outstanding negative effect on the force that was worthy of note.

Interviewees saw 'heroes' being recognised in various ways. Promotion was seen as formal recognition although some qualified this by emphasising that such recognition also depended on vacancies. There was an acknowledgement that promotion was not always what the individual wanted or in their best interest. 'Being given the opportunity to do the job you like' was mentioned as a form of recognition, as was nomination for a formal award. Personal or public thanks and praise were also mentioned together with being placed in a position where one can use one's personal talents and abilities.

'Rites and Rituals'

Ceremonies, rituals and special events traditionally celebrated in the Force fell into two broad categories of formal and informal. Of the formal events, nine out of 12 interviewees mentioned the ceremony attached to Police Long Service and Good Conduct Medal, presented on 22 years of service. Awards for bravery and Chief Constable's Commendations were mentioned by over half the participants. Four respondents mentioned 'Officers' Mess' functions such as dinners. The formality and ceremony was valued as being nice for the family and 'an official recognition of an officer's courage … it's not only nice for that police officer, but I think its an acknowledgement of all police officers'. One respondent dismissed ceremonies of Long Service Medal as 'we usually get the rent-a-crowd out of Headquarters to celebrate … I think it's a waste of time, to be honest'. Others expressed the view that they did not automatically attend functions unless it meant something to them.

Informal ceremonies included 'leaving dos' when someone got promoted. The general feeling was that although such events still took place, 'they're not anywhere near the scale they were five or six years ago'. Retirement functions featured strongly where 'they might put a barrel on (i.e. have a free bar or pay for a barrel of beer) and that would be circulated throughout the Force. That applies particularly to someone who's moved a lot'. Impromptu 'wind down' after special events or 4pm–12am shifts were still popular along with 'tea breaks on early turn at 6 o'clock. Induction ceremonies for new recruits were referred to as 'not on the same scale as they used to be, some of the jokes would be frowned upon, but certainly practical jokes are still played on new people'.

The Cultural Network

The way in which information, which might help support police culture, is spread around the organisation and the type of information spread was explored. Each interviewee was asked to think about key events in the history of their Force. They were asked to outline the events and meanings conveyed for them and others by the way in which the events were

discussed. Six interviewees mentioned major disruptions outside of police control. For instance, the Miners' Dispute in the mid-1980s, the bomb at the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton, the rise of football violence. Four events related to Force reorganisation and four to legal changes. Other events identified included: technological change; changes of Chief Officer, amalgamations of forces.

Key events portrayed a variety of meanings to interviewees. Some events were seen as leading to a more professional service. Major external events such as the troubles in Northern Ireland were seen in this category as well as some of the individual changes that had taken place in the Forces including the appointment of new Chief Constables. The effects on individuals were discussed. The amalgamation of four police forces 'meant I could be posted anywhere in the two counties. I had a young family, just starting school'. The meaning of many other events was interpreted in a parochial way. For instance, major disruptions such as Political Conferences were seen as depleting Home Force resources. In another case, an interviewee mentioned a particular event was 'so well organised and went so well ... it had a big impact, because I think as a Force we really achieved something from that operation. Our previous Chief put us on the map'.

Legends and stories were, it was commonly agreed, spread by word of mouth. 'The police force is very incestuous by the fact that somebody always knows somebody. If you want to find out something, you know who to phone up.' Promulgation of police values from senior officers was, though, largely seen as being communicated by the written word. Events did not seem to be being interpreted as a way of influencing police values either directly or indirectly. 'The Force print shop would prepare A4 size posters and send it around with the Force Goals, the corporate plan for the next five years or whatever it happens to be.' Cascading ideas through the hierarchy and matters such as conferences, briefings and meetings were mentioned by half of the respondents. On the whole, they felt such communication methods were only effective in smaller units.

Lack of communication was highlighted both in interviews and participant observation. One interviewee said, 'Communication from the Divisional Commander to the man on the ground is, I would say, virtually non-existent – poor'. During classroom sessions, a fairly typical remark was 'the Force is not good at communication'. While the words of messages such as 'Policing by Objectives' or 'the Direction of the Force' might be reaching the rank and file, it was generally agreed that what it meant was not being communicated. The 'grapevine', 'canteen culture', 'Serious Rumour Squad' or 'certain people in the know' were how the majority of respondents kept in touch with what was going on.

Organisational Climate: Support from Senior Officers

During interviews, the majority said they had good support from their senior officers. One or two qualified this with remarks such as 'they're supportive of me as long as it's not threatening of them'. However, during participant observation, a somewhat different picture emerged. There was disgruntlement at 'having to do stuff you've never had to do before – often it's the superintendents' work – their letters etc.'. Others complained of no clear guidelines on matters such as how to operate budgets and that their superiors were not doing as much as they could to 'ease new relationships'.

QUALITY OF SERVICE

To those interviewed quality of service signified 'serving the community' 'value for money' 'just doing the best you can with the resources available' 'the public getting the service they fund us to supply'. Half of those interviewed perceived quality of service to include internal quality, 'service to the people within the police force, in other words the way we treat each other'. One mentioned, 'the value added, it's the bit that makes the customer come back to you'.

The majority of those interviewed mentioned that the manner of contact with the public was important in quality of service. 'How we actually come across to the public is perhaps more important than what we actually do' is a telling comment. The public's perception of quality of service was seen as significant. 'I think quality of service is something which is tested by our "customers" in order to see they get what they consider to be a good valid response, as to whether the things they report are being dealt with correctly, and as to whether they, in fact, are satisfied with the action we have taken.' Seven of the 12 interviewees felt that 'my' approach and attitude were important in quality of service. 'It's very important that the police service is portrayed to the public in the manner in which I deal with them.' A view expressed from participant observation was that 'Inspectors tend to become quality checker. Probably because you have more time to chase up this aspect'.

All interviewees considered quality of service of high importance and priority. They mentioned actions their Forces had taken. One expressed the view 'chief constables in their various mission statements have decided that we should go down the quality of service issue, they've given very little training as to what is quality of service, other than issuing mission statements'. Several interviewees echoed this opinion. Others felt that individuals had their own idea as to what quality of service meant: 'its very much left to the individual police officer to determine his own level of

quality of service'. 'A lot of it is down to the individual officers. If they're committed to the ideal of providing a quality of service then you're half way there.'

Half of those interviewed felt there was a genuine commitment to quality of service. The remainder made statements such as 'various information sheets have been circulated but I don't recall any particular training actually on Quality of Service'. 'There was a quality of service document followed by the corporate plan document and … it's in a different language, they've used too many terms and phrases which are alien to everyday folk.' Communications regarding quality of service were often seen as directives or too reliant on mechanistic measures. 'We think we're measuring quality of service but we're not, we're actually measuring 'how often?' and we've got no real mechanism in place to measure 'how well?'.

The issue of internal customers arose. One interviewee mentioned that at their station, one of the inspectors had concentrated on 'what we would expect as internal customers, because internal customers have to expect certain standards. We haven't called them service level agreements, because that frightens people , but that's what they are, on standards of 'hand-overs', on answering the telephone, the state the canteen will be left in, all those sort of areas'.

Lack of time was perceived as one of the major difficulties in trying to deliver quality of service. Pressure and a constant shortage of time were frequently mentioned. Pressure seemed to be coming from too many tasks requiring attention, some of which the police officers themselves might not consider as equally important, and pressure through lack of physical and manpower resources. Similarly, 'They are very often dealing with very difficult people, those that might be anti-police, those that are violent, those that are drunk or on drugs, and this makes it (quality of service) difficult'. The realities of police work were seen to influence attitudes adversely over time. Recruits were described as 'coming in squeaky clean from day one, all the way through to their foundation course, and you can see a very definite change in attitude in each individual course as they progress through the two years. The right attitudes, the keenness, the enthusiasm, the dedication and everything else we require ... begins to wear thin. It grows stale ... as a result of the job they do out there, it doesn't help.'

Additional Aspects of Police Culture

Various issues surfaced during the participant observation and interviews that did not fit into the framework of Deal and Kennedy or into any conceptualisation of 'quality of service'. Four main themes emerged. The 'belt and braces' or 'avoid risk at all costs' attitude was one dominant theme. This referred to the expectation within the police culture that every

possible step should be take to ensure that nothing goes wrong. It can almost be considered the antithesis of risk management. This stance filtered through from the gathering of evidence for appointments to dismissal cases. Coupled with the approach was an awareness of each rank checking on that below to ensure nothing was going wrong.

The 'need to prove oneself' was another theme. Moving from tactical to strategic roles was a case in point. Moreover, the need to demonstrate to the 'troops' that they could still 'crack it' prevailed among many respondents. Others took the view that senior officers 'should stand back – not play on the streets'. A further theme to emerge related to the lack of guidance when moving between job levels. 'It's the same with any move in the organisation: they assume you are at the top of the learning curve and can step straight into the new job.' Finally accountability emerged strongly as a theme. 'Even the bobby on the street is more accountable than he ever was.'

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to explore perceived meanings held by police officers of 'quality' and 'quality of service' in the context of police culture and quality initiatives. The culture of the police, as evidenced through the study, appears similar to that found by studies more than a decade ago. Relationships and interpersonal communication between the ranks were quite formal. There was evidence that the formal bureaucratic decision-making process impeded effective decision making. Partly through the formality of the hierarchy, communication was an issue. The quality and completeness of downward communication was perceived as poor, although the opportunity for upward communication was thought to have improved considerably in recent years. Senior managers were described as not being very good at communicating either the philosophy of the Force or values regarding quality of service to those who interfaced with the public.

Indications of the organisation's introspective and self-protective nature emerged when organisational values and cultural network were considered. The greatest perceived influence on attitudes was seen as the 'canteen culture' and the manner in which working closely with experienced officers for long periods of times socialised new recruits into the culture. Aspects of a 'blame' culture were found. Police officers who had had a negative influence on the Force were more readily cited than those who had a beneficial effect. The 'blame' culture also manifested itself in the reluctance of many respondents to take risks and the desire to avoid failure in case it might give rise to blame. Findings regarding support were somewhat inconclusive. Some respondents felt senior officers gave little or no support to middle managers and remembered mistakes. Others considered senior-

subordinate relationships to be supportive. Lack of support could perpetuate a 'blame' culture.

The concept of providing a service featured strongly in participants' interviews. Dimensions of the concept related to 'helping', 'being seen', 'being proactive'. Interestingly, prevalent cultural values did seem to conflict at times with the espoused values and mission statements of the police. This was evidenced both in interviews and through participant observation. Espoused police values of 'serving all' did in some instances work against internalised values of having to serve all walks of public life such as criminals and those at demonstrations likely to deliberately breach the peace.

Many police officers had their own views about the importance of quality of service to the public and sought to improve it. Quality of service tended to be perceived in a parochial manner pertaining to the visible aspects of quality. The manner of contact with the public provided a key dimension. Aspects of this dimension pertained to issues such as 'response time', 'time in waiting rooms' and quality offered to individuals. The more nebulous aspects of quality of service, including financial aspects, were mentioned by some respondents. Interestingly, areas tending to be omitted from perceptions of service quality related to expectations of customers and the fit between expectations and service provided. Compliance with standards did not feature strongly in perceptions of quality. A number of respondents made reference to quality being more than measurable standards such as success in response terms and the solving of crimes. They perceived quality of service as relating to the satisfaction of the public in the way they were policed. The finding that respondents were questioning what they regarded as mechanistic, measurement-based imposed rules of Quality of Service is interesting. It indicates that members of the Force are changing subtly from the culture of 'stick with the rules' to one of questioning rules, having their own opinions and using their initiative. While difficult to make firm conclusions from the mixed messages coming from the interviews, it appears there was a move away from meeting the needs of the organisation in circumstances where there was uncertainty. To a degree, this appeared to be happening by default through lack of direction from senior management and the organisation. Instead, some members of the Force appear to be basing their decisions on what they perceive to be important for the customer.

Overall, the study found a police culture that is slowly but surely evolving from its strong roots. Not much progress had been made in adapting to becoming more customer orientated. Slightly more progress had been made in giving members of the Force who did not conform the benefit of the doubt, although a 'blame' culture still pervaded. Openness, both

within the Service and towards 'outsiders' was still rare and the service was still self-contained and introspective. Reduction in the rigidity and levels of hierarchy was due to outside influences and had impacted on equality within the Service. The organisation was still rule bound and attempts at individual initiatives were taken cautiously. It would appear that the Force is more ready than in the past to adapt to new customer demands and to issues of quality of service. However, while the culture is changing in an appropriate direction for such initiatives, the Force does not appear to be placing sufficient emphasis on communicating the ethos or interpretation of quality of service to its members.

By its nature, focus and purpose, police and policing remain conservative but the study has shown an organisational and professional ethos which is in a state of considerable change. Increasingly, the police are having to conform to agendas that reflect approaches to management more familiar to the private sector than to the public sector. Issues of quality and quality of service feature strongly in these agendas. Police officers tend to join the Force at an early age and spend the majority of their working lives within the Force. Inevitably, initiatives such as quality of service are interpreted in the light of existing knowledge, attitudes and socialisation in the Force. The culture of the police force permeated their interpretations of the police mission and organisational values. Such interpretations coloured their views on the meaning of quality and quality of service leaving a dichotomy between police inspectors' views and official mission statements and information sheets. The necessity of carefully communicating and interpreting the meaning of quality at an operational level, so it is fully understood and becomes a shared reality, is apparent. The study highlights the manner in which individuals' perceptions of the culture of their organisation impact on their interpretations of quality and quality of service and has implications for a wide range of service organisations.

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