

POLICE FORCE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AS A FORM OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT CULTURE IN POLICING IN SCOTLAND

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This doctoral research is aimed at investigating performance management practice in UK police forces from the perspective of organisational learning theory.

Background

During the past decade, the development of performance management within the UK Police Service has been predominantly focussed on the use of centralised control mechanisms by the Home Office. This has been aimed at increasing the centralised control of police activity in England & Wales. The resulting tensions between the centralised control of performance management and the local focus of the National Intelligence Model has been shown (Collier et al., 2004).

In the face of an increasingly challenging financial situation in Scotland, the need to demonstrate the value for money that policing provides has resulted in a move towards the creation of a performance management culture there. However, a transformational and collaborative approach has been adopted by the key stakeholders - the Scottish Executive, HMIC, the Scottish Forces, the Police Conveners' Forum and ACPOS. This is in an effort to avoid the damaging affects of target driven performance widely experienced within the public sector.

The theory

Unlike the Learning Organisation literature, such as Senge (1990), Goh (1997), Garvin (1993), which is prescriptive and visionary in nature, the Organisational Learning literature of Cyert and March (1963, 1992), Huber (1991), Argyris and Schon (1978) amongst others, is predominant scholarly and sceptical in nature.

While cognitive and behavioural schools of thought exist, Organisational Learning can generally be seen as the outcome of combining three elements: acquisition of information, storage of knowledge, and application of understanding. As well as an outcome, Organisational Learning can also be understood as a process that describes the flow and conversion of information into action. The 4I's model of organisational learning identified the role of individuals, groups and the organisation in feed-forward and feedback information flows (Crossan et al., 1999).

Performance Management involves performance measurement through the use of metrics that indicate the relative performance, the interpretation of that information to create an understanding of its meaning, and the use of that information to guide decision making about changes required to better deliver the organisations aims or strategy.

The key role of knowledge artefacts in transmitting policing performance information in the right format to the right people has been identified (Collier et al., 2004). Likewise, the importance of properly supporting decision making is key to the success of changing organisational behaviour (Greve, 2003).

The method

Using the existing 4I's process model of Organisational Learning proposed by Crossan et al (1999) as a starting point, and combining the perspective of performance management as proposed by Neely (Neely, 2005, Neely et al., 2006), a multidimensional framework for organisational learning has been proposed.

This framework will provide the structure for a series of case studies within a cross section of four forces in Scotland, with comparison provided by forces from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Following case study methodology (Yin, 2003, Stake, 1995), evidence will be gathered from interviews with senior officers through to front line officers, observation of performance, and tasking and coordinating meetings, as well as the collation of documentary evidence that demonstrates theories in use by forces.

The evidence gathered will be collated and analysed using content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2004) supported by NVivo software. Using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) , the characteristics of performance processes in use will be identified and the catalysts and inhibitors for the successful conversion of information into action identified.

Based on this evidence, recommendation will be provided on the creation and use of performance indicators, the best means of effectively communicating performance information to decision makers, and the areas where training can most usefully be directed.

Conclusion

The examination of the literature clearly identifies performance management as an organisational learning process although the existing body of knowledge does not follow through on the implications. The creation of a new model of organisational learning that can be applied to performance management practice is a significant step toward the clarification of the nature of both subjects.

The case studies proposed will provide a considerable body of evidence representing a key time in the development of a performance culture in policing in Scotland and is intended to capture the range of behaviours in place as well as the dynamic of ongoing change.

The outcomes of the research are relevant and timely and will provide a body of knowledge that can support further development of performance management in support of organisational learning within forces.

Personal

Steve Ritchie is a member of Grampian Police and has 27 years experience of policing. He has played a key role in the developing strategic performance culture within Grampian Police and manages the Strategic Planning & Performance Unit. He has also played a key role in the developing performance culture within policing in Scotland, having been a member of the Scottish Policing Performance Framework Project team, the secretary for the Performance Management Business Area Development Sub Group.

This research is being undertaken on a part-time basis and is supervised by Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University. The case study section of the research has just commenced.

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