

Police Work

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All workplaces develop a culture. This culture can be defined as “ A system of shared values and beliefs within an organization” (Bassingthwaighte, 1995:9). Shared Values have been described as “Those ideas of what is right and desirable (in corporate and individual behaviour) which are typical of the organization and are common to most of its members” (in Bassingthwaighte, 1995: 9).

The culture of the New South Wales Police Force has been the subject of much debate for a number of years particularly prevalent since the Wood Royal Commission. In our role as a service provider to the community, we have been the subject of predominately negative media attention. The nature of our profession lends itself to the creation of sensational news item in all forms of the media. This has served to foster a greater solidarity within the workplace culture of Policing.

The learning culture within the Police force is one which is constantly evolving. It is now at a point where a high proportion of our recruit level and indeed middle and senior ranking Police education is provided by Charles Sturt University. In fact the New South Wales Police Academy, as it was formerly known is now the New South Police College and is a campus of UNE. This new found academic environment is one which has its own cultures and sub-cultures throughout the force.

By virtue of this paper I shall discuss a range of both positive and negative aspects of the relationship between our workplace culture and the learning and education that takes place. As in my previous assignment on workplace culture I shall link my discussion with the following core topics and issues:

- values and beliefs
- behavioural norms
- heroes and heroines
- stories and myths

- history
- unique language and symbols
- gender
- rites and rituals.

My aim here is to demonstrate the link between the Police force as a learning organization and our own workplace culture. This relationship ultimately enhances our performance as service providers to our customers, the citizens of New South Wales.

The professional conduct of members of the Police force is governed by a number of Policies. Documents such as the Code of Conduct and Ethics underpin our commitment as an organization to ethical, cost efficient crime reduction. Police educators are also bound by such policies as the Code of Conduct for Police Educators and as such share in the commitment of maintaining high ethical standards in the workplace. Since the Wood Royal Commission ethics and integrity based programs have been facilitated throughout the force to a greater depth than was the case previously. These programs are moulding and cementing our culture in integrity and ethical practices throughout the organization as a whole and the community are now beginning to see the benefits.

The Values and Beliefs that each of us hold are the result of our background and upbringing. Matters such as religious beliefs, our ethnicity, and values promoted by our parents and care providers all form the basis of our personal and professional adult lives. Police officers possess intrinsic values and beliefs about what is right, including a commitment to serving others and the ability to face and overcome adversity. In order to retain these values and beliefs a link must be created between the teaching and learning that takes place and the application of these ideals in the workplace, or as we say in our culture 'on the street'. The relationship between theory and practice is vital in Policing and could result in, or impact on, a life or death situation. In order for a positive outcome to be achieved all sworn Police and indeed unsworn Police educational staff must embrace this culture. If we are to achieve our goals of cost effective crime reduction then we must all share the vision. At present

the relationship between sworn and unsworn Police academic staff facilitates the promotion of this vision with the outcome of us all thinking and behaving as one. The values and beliefs promoted in our academe are simply a component of our culture, but are clearly evident in our day-to-day duties.

It is my aim to become part of this learning environment and share the values and beliefs that I hold with other staff both junior and senior to me. The outcomes of my policing experiences are a reflection of the values and beliefs that I have within.

Behavioural Norms relate to everything we do, ranging from the way we speak with each other, the way we dress through to our decision-making processes. Policing is a semi militaristic profession. We all wear the same basic uniform of dark blue trousers, sky blue shirts and black boots. We all wear hats and generally drive similar motor vehicles for our work. Academically we all undertake the same basic training on entry. Skills and behavioural norms that are learnt at this early stage will remain with us for our entire careers. If we choose to diversify into specialist areas, training although directly related to the specific area, is the same for each and every member of that squad or unit. For example all detectives are trained in the same fashion, highway patrol all undertake the same driving programs, and forensic Police experience identical learning processes, but the fact remains that we are all Police and are all bound by the same set of rules, laws and guidelines even if we branch out and specialise.

Police are all the same wherever we go. I notice that when visiting the college that even all student Police behave in similar ways. They struggle with new laws, processes, instructions and guidelines. It is a lot to take onboard at this early stage, but most seem to get through somehow. They are all full of questions and are keen to hear “ war stories “ from real cops in the field. More senior Police also have behavioural norms. Most aspire to higher ranks and thus pursue many courses and qualifications that will enhance their opportunities for the future. The Police Force is now a learning environment, moving forward and changing constantly. This change in culture is being embraced by those in senior management who promote the ethos of learning and developing oneself with the aim of fulfilling your potential.

Heroes and Heroines can be found throughout the force and indeed our educational systems. The fact that our profession has evolved to a point where we now consider ourselves to be part of a learning environment can be attributed to people such as the recently departed Commissioner. Prior to his arrival, our organization followed the path of learning from within. Our educational needs were not learner centred but from a hierarchical structure that decreed what our needs were. We were restricted to views from within our own organization failing to identify the many benefits available externally. The Commissioner changed this practice incorporating the tertiary level model that we see today for a large proportion of our training and development. This new structure is now reaping the benefits of producing more Police with degrees in various specialist areas of the Policing profession. A heroine, such as Victorian Chief Commissioner who- as a highly educated officer - has been able to reach such lofty heights, is to be admired. The New South Wales Assistant Commissioner is a fully qualified barrister at law, also holding masters level qualifications in Public Order Management. The commitment that these officers have shown and their devotion to personal enrichment can be used as a model for us all.

My heroes and heroines are the rank and file Police. My peers and in fact many subordinates, who strive for personal enrichment at tertiary level. These are the people who can successfully manage a professional Policing career whilst continuing with their education. To be able to successfully combine a happy and fruitful family life with professional and educational commitments is a difficult task, and one not easily achieved by many. Here is where we can see the shift in the culture of Police education and development. The very fact that increasing numbers of operational Police are embarking upon tertiary level education to compliment their practical skills and experience is reflective of a huge shift in our overall culture. At the start of my career it was highly unusual for operational practitioners to be actively participating in ongoing tertiary level education. No one could see the benefits and furthermore there were only limited, relevant programs, available externally. Thankfully our culture has evolved and we now see programs offering degrees in a wealth of skill areas applicable to the Policing profession.

The **Mythical** notions of the hard nosed Police officer with the big black boots are now gone.

Stories of prominent sports people being Police officers, but without any real education are from days of old. These people simply could not exist in today's hi tech world of computers and world wide information facilities. To be able to progress with society and meet its expectations of performance we must ensure that our skills and knowledge are at a premium and constantly maintained. This has not always been the case. I have heard tales of the old Sergeant obtaining his rank through longevity, simply because he had been in the job for long enough. Sure, he might have successfully passed a few exams, but these were not overly testing or requiring of large amounts of research and study. Most who sat the test passed the test. There was no sense of personal enrichment, no element of wanting to broaden one's skills or background. I believe that this is probably reflected in the promotional system of the day when this higher education was not required. How times have changed. Stories also of how the old academy was simply used for recruit level training with no facility for ongoing or specialist training.

A phrase I have heard is the "six week wonder" which refers to new Police who attended the Police academy at Redfern many years ago for six weeks initial training, were then issued with a gun and a notebook and sent out into the field. No doubt this was a daunting prospect for many. To be exposed to limited training and obviously ill equipped to meet the many challenges that society presents is fraught with danger. I believe that the skills used to overcome many situations might not have been "out of the text book" but in line with the needs of the day and none the less successful. Thankfully our evolving educational culture has brought us to the point where ongoing learning is not only a must do task but an enjoyable one as well.

History shows that our learning environment was slow to take shape. As referred to above in the "six week wonder" we saw how things were at the old Redfern Police Academy. The days when the most important thing was that you could shoot straight and march in line. Scant attention was paid to more serious issues of ethics, integrity and accountability, issues that society requires of its modern day protectors. Limited

focus was placed on fine detail of law, the professional preparation of briefs of evidence, the ethical interviewing of witnesses and suspects. These are skills that are honed in contemporary Police education at tertiary level where successful students strive towards a Diploma of Policing Practice. History tells us that years ago such Policing qualifications did not exist. To successfully complete Initial training at the New South Wales Police Academy you were considered to be a model of society, with a wealth of practical knowledge, how wrong society was in those dim dark times.

Today's program for new recruits is a comprehensive and lengthy process. Students must first demonstrate that they are capable of completing a tertiary level program even prior to entry. These people must understand that the NSW Police College, as it is now known, is a campus of the Charles Sturt University and hence a model educational environment. If successful with the Diploma of Policing Practice these people may then be offered a place with the Police Force, it is not automatic nor presumed. The entire program can take over several years and is an arduous combination of both theoretical and practical assessments. What a massive shift in culture from the old Redfern days !

There is no doubt that we as a group have a **unique language and set of symbols**. Operationally we could not survive without this language. Police have a need to retain such dialogue in the field in opposition to criminals' intent on breaking the law and physically harming Police in the line of duty. We also use a specific "jargon" in our general conversations. Terms such as "decamped" is used instead of simply saying ran away. The word "vehicle" is used instead of saying car. You may sometimes hear an officer say they drove in a northerly direction, but if a civilian person were to describe direction they might say it was towards the bank for example.

Our use of this language and set of symbols is also prevalent throughout our learning environment. In my current role as a trainer of Police officers, a portion of the program requires the student to learn and digest a lengthy series of authorised abbreviations and codes for use on the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) Without such knowledge the operator again could not perform this vital

support role for Police in the field. These abbreviations are unique to our organisation and not used in the public sector. It is vital from a teaching perspective that I create solid links between the theory of these codes and how they should be applied operationally. Without demonstrating how these abbreviations and codes can be used to their best advantage the learning process becomes extremely difficult with the student unable to find reason as to why and how they should be applied. I aim to constantly vary my teaching style to suit the needs of the individuals in this regard, showing due recognition of each person's different learning style. Some have strong memories, whilst others learn better by using the system and codes practically. I believe that my methods are a successful mix of recognised adult learning principles which is reflected in the high achievement rate of my students.

Women constitute fifty one percent of the population. Historically, this percentage has not been reflected in the gender breakdown of the Police force. The issue of **gender** is an important one to discuss with regards to our culture and how it has evolved over time. There is also a critical link between gender balance and the learning environment that now exists within the force. Traditionally Policing has been a male dominated profession due to society's attitude to the role of women.

Whilst it is true to say that Policing is a "body contact sport" society now recognises the vital role that females play in the battle for cost efficient, ethical crime reduction. Thankfully we have moved on from the times when it was just a man's job to the stage where females now occupy high ranking positions within the force capable of managing large amounts of staff in high risk tactical situations.

We are also fortunate enough that these women have chosen to share their wealth of knowledge and experience with those junior to them by way of taking up teaching and mentoring roles with the Police college. These women have a wealth of knowledge gained over many years of operational Policing and are now passing on some of those skills gained with those more junior. The success of Affirmative Action policies is reflected in the rising number of both female operational police along with the amount of qualified and experienced tutors, lecturers and mentors across all areas of the profession.

Here again we can see how our culture has evolved over time and hopefully in line with the community's expectations of us as service providers. Gone are the days when all instructors at the academy were all male and intent on a harsh discipline code as the best method of instruction. I believe the ever improving mix of gender, combined with our understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity is vastly improving our educational outcomes and this is reflected a more balanced and considered organisation.

One of the most dynamic and positive aspects of our educational process is that of the final Attestation or Passing Out Parade. This “rite or ritual” is the culmination of the entire recruit level educational program. The day is full of pomp and ceremony with sections such as the Mounted Police, VIP cyclists, and the full Police band all playing pivotal roles in ensuring that completion of the course is celebrated by all. Personally it was a wonderful day of pride and satisfaction. The Passing Out parade has a lengthy history and is well cemented in our culture. Each parade is well publicised in all forms of the media and is one of the most marketable aspects of the recruiting campaign.

Some less positive aspects of our educational culture involve the view held by some Police that those charged with furthering our education are doing so only in an effort to avoid street Policing. A minority of Police hold the view that staff who elect to forge a career in education are simply looking for the soft way out, with no shift work and no more criminals to face. I have found that generally these are the less motivated people who do not strive for personal enrichment on a broader scale. They appear intent on purely turning up for work what ever the time of the day or night is, going through the motions with no real enthusiasm or motivation and not contributing to our overall goals. Yes, I am disappointed with these people and find it a constant struggle to bring about a shift in their thinking. After nearly eighteen years I still find my profession challenging and rewarding and constantly convey my enthusiasm to my peers and subordinates.

The Police Service and more directly our educational framework recognise the importance of exposing our staff to JANIS'S Group Think theories as a method of avoiding negative views and beliefs held by the majority. This theory "alerts students to the potential for our strong culture to be used for negative purposes". It highlights the perils of "conforming to the majority view without any critical appraisal of the underlying assumptions or examination of contrary points of view"

(<http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/EPM/subjects>). As long as these theories are maintained and discussed then our healthy worthwhile workplace and educational structure can remain in place. I am a strong believer in these aims.

My discussion has considered a number of areas that are part of the Police culture and how this culture interrelates with our education and developmental structure. I have attempted to provide some thoughts on issues such as the relationship between this structure and matters such as values and beliefs, behavioural norms, heroes and heroines, stories and myths, history, rites and rituals, our unique language and set of symbols and the importance of gender balance. My views come from nearly eighteen years of operational Policing and more recently instructional duty. In this time I have witnessed and been part of many changes in policy and practice. I am fortunate enough to remain a member of a wonderful family of brothers and sisters which enables me to participate in activities of both a professional and personal nature. These activities reinforce that we all stand for what is good and right about society. It is about being mates, one and all, through thick and thin even with obvious built in parameters.

I have also aimed to discuss both positive and negative aspects of culture, but I retain the view that the positives are far in excess of the negatives and I believe that I have demonstrated this. I will remain a member of this family for many years to come and will continue to foster and encourage the positive aspects of our overall culture. This can and will be achieved in both open dynamic form as well as in the quieter more reflective situations. To be able to successfully integrate and introduce people into a new world of camaraderie where we all stand as one will be my contribution to the future of our most valuable resource, our people. In doing so I will maintain the fight against unethical behaviour on all levels of not only our organisation but the community in general.

Reference List

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