

Professor Norman Bonney, Robert Gordon University, reflects on a SIPR seminar on 'Leadership and Partnership' held in Aberdeen in April 2007.

Leadership

Leadership and partnership are commonly cited values and inspirational motives for police organisation and action but time to reflect on the meaning and implications of these influential ideas is usually too brief. Thirty officers and academics took time in Aberdeen on 20 April 2007 to consider these issues in more depth.

In his introduction to the topic of leadership, Professor Dennis Tourish of the Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University, emphasised the vast amount of literature and research that was available – 22,000 books on the topic are listed, for instance, on the amazon.com website.

Some of the advice in these sources is inconsistent with others and often they overemphasise the power and importance of top leaders. While leadership training is obviously important to highly ranked police officers and those on the upward track, it is also important to all officers and staff. In whatever position they hold, police officers will be called upon to exercise leadership in, for instance, a sudden and unexpected emergency. Good top leadership creates the conditions where all members of the police service, whatever their role, are empowered and enabled to make their fullest contribution to their organisation. Top leaders need to be trained and enabled to assist their forces to appreciate how they may need to adapt their organisation and behaviour to new challenges and new ways of working beyond those to which they are accustomed. While top leaders can make a difference to the performance of an organisation the best leaders are those that widely inspire other members to improve their individual contributions to the overall work of the organisation.

Chief Superintendent Colin Menzies, Grampian Police, pointed to a long history of public criticism of police leadership as evident in the Scarman and Macpherson reports and wondered if current police leadership training was appropriate to the new environment of policing with its emphasis on a considerable array of demanding tasks such as security, drugs, organised crime, community policing, and partnership working. He noted that there had been little research in Scotland into police leadership or leadership training and reported on a survey of a police force that he had conducted which showed considerable criticism of force leadership for lacking visibility, inspiration and networking and for generally not getting the best out of their work force or for facilitating change. Academics present noted, however, that the design of the survey might have a built in bias towards obtaining negative self-reports by respondents. Anonymous surveys possibly offer a rare opportunity for officers to 'sound off' against superiors and release the tensions that are inevitable in a hierarchical command organisation.

John Stevens, former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, described the Chief Constable's role as 'lonely'. Does organisational hierarchy in a command organisation inevitably mean that senior officers have difficulty gauging the true feelings of officers and staff about the leadership and management of their organisation?

Inspector Steve Ritchie, Grampian Police, studying for a PhD with a Bramshill Fellowship at RGU, argued that police officers operate in a culture which appreciates visibility and decisiveness in senior officers and that moves towards standardisation. For example, during investigations, procedures could be disempowering in that officers lose valuable scope for initiative and discretion.

David Dalziel, Chief Fire Officer, Grampian Fire and Rescue, and Secretary, Chief Fire Officers Association (Scotland), noted the challenges facing Fire and Rescue Service top leadership. The service inevitably undertook risky measures in operational emergencies but was generally unwilling to depart from accustomed procedures and take risks with regard to its own organisation. There was also considerable resistance to change from the Fire Brigade Union and staff generally but more effective performance may require innovations such as bringing external managers to senior roles in the service.

Partnership and Multi-Agency Working

The morning's discussion of leadership flagged skills in partnership working as a key demand on leaders in the current policing environment.

David Dalziel, noted that Grampian Fire and Rescue was involved in 137 partnerships and that there was growing cooperation at the Grampian regional level between the chief executives of the regional health, police and fire and rescue services. The service was also working with schools on traffic safety and with the ambulance service on integrating their respective services in Aberdeenshire. There were signs, too, of an emerging agenda for the integration of emergency services at the Scottish or at a higher level than the current regions that were established in 1975.

The challenges of multi-agency working were taken up further by Professor Norman Bonney of the Department of Public Policy at The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. He noted the difficulties that organisations had in ensuring that even their own departments worked together effectively before they engaged in cooperative partnerships with external agencies and he asked seminar members to reflect on whether their own organisation was as effective in this respect as it might be. Much was often to be gained by getting existing departments and divisions within an organisation to work together more effectively as was evident for instance at the present time with the reorganisation of the central Scottish police services and the increasing cooperation between Scottish police forces through ACPOS. Top organisational leaders, especially in their early period in office, were often focused on the need to adjust the structure of the organisation to suit changing circumstances and their particular management style.

Securing effective working with external partner organisations was an even greater challenge than securing effective internal coordination. London Resilience required 50 organisations to work together and indeed emergency planning was a fine example of how inter-agency working could be effective. Sure there were problems but effective pre-planning can mean that the multiple agencies involved in emergency response can deploy themselves effectively by understanding each partners' respective contributions in extremely challenging situations.

In contrast much other partnership working was slow and ponderous and struggled to demonstrate results. Community planning, the ambition in Scotland, to get the numerous public, voluntary and private sector agencies concerned with the well-being of a local authority area (including the Police and Fire and Rescue Services) to work together effectively under local authority leadership had demonstrated slow and variable rates of success. More focused partnerships in areas such as community safety had probably been more successful but all these non-emergency partnerships in which the police service were typically one of the most prominent leading agencies had experienced slow progress as other partners were generally reluctant to commit resources or diverge from their own organisational agendas and priorities. The police service leadership role in partnership working was notable and it probably reflected the command culture of policing and the responsiveness of senior police officers to Scottish Executive priorities.

Resources for further exploration of these ideas;

www.amazon.co.uk search under 'leadership', 'police leadership', 'police partnership'

'Community Planning: An Initial Review', Audit Scotland 2006

<http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/index/06pf03ag.asp>

HMIC 2004 *Report on Local Connections: Policing with the Community*. A Thematic on Community Engagement. Ch 2 Community Planning and Community Safety.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19105/34624>

John Stevens, *Not for the Faint-Hearted, My Life Fighting Crime*. London: Phoenix 2005. Autobiographical account of a former Metropolitan Police Commissioner and Chief Constable.

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