

Dr Robert Smith, Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) lecturer in leadership and management, looks at the emerging concept of 'entrepreneurial policing' and what it means in practical policing terms.



# Entrepreneurial policing

## What is entrepreneurial policing?

In his review of policing in England and Wales, published in 2008, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary's Sir Ronnie Flannagan, commented upon the prevailing culture of risk aversion within the British police service and made a call for the introduction of a more entrepreneurial culture into policing.

In this article Dr Robert Smith, a former police officer, examines what the emerging concept of 'entrepreneurial policing' actually means in practical policing terms and explores how entrepreneurship theories can help the police move towards the entrepreneurial future as envisaged by Sir Ronnie.

The term 'entrepreneurial policing' is one which has only recently entered the lexicon of policing. At present it is one which is used sparingly among academics, politicians, journalists, civil servants and a few police officers, usually of senior rank.

The earliest example of the use of the label was by an American journalist Kay Bohner in 1996, who used it in relation to the activities of a sheriff in St Clair County, Illinois, who being short of money to pay for reflective stripes on his police cars, raised the cash in an entrepreneurial manner by selling advertising space above the wheel wells on their cruisers.

Such contentious practices are now common in policing circles but at the time were examples of entrepreneurship in practice. This is but one limited example of entrepreneurial policing. The term as envisaged by the author relates to loose structures, management systems and amounts to a change in leadership philosophy.

In Britain, the term is becoming more common as a loose descriptor for describing innovative police practices and practitioners. Thus, for example, Ronnie Flannagan in his report used the term to describe the activities of a genre of enlightened chief constables, such as Richard Brunstrom of North Wales and Mike Fuller of Essex. Mr Brunstrom is considered entrepreneurial because of his innovative practice of selling police services such as the police driving school to other agencies to raise money to finance policing operations. Likewise, Mr Fuller has made

innovative organisational changes and introduced new policing practices to the force.

Dr Tim Brain, chief constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary, is also an advocate of entrepreneurial policing.

## Entrepreneurship and the police

Entrepreneurship is an activity which is primarily associated with the business sector but in recent years has expanded to cover many everyday activities.

Entrepreneurship, innovation and change are integral facets of everyday life with all the chaos it entails. This is particularly so in a business environment where change drives and is driven by planned innovations and by creativity. Traditionally, the police service was sheltered from the effects of societal change and as a consequence organisationally the police were able to concentrate on core issues of policing instead of worrying about change.

It is not the purpose of this article to try and define entrepreneurship because entrepreneurship scholars struggle to do so succinctly. In any case, it is not necessary to have an understanding of entrepreneurship theories to behave entrepreneurially and also most people have a basic understanding of what it entails.

For the purpose of this article it will suffice to say that it involves taking risks to achieve results and to creating added value in an organisational setting. It is related to innovation and creativity both of which, paradoxically, are valued traits within the police service.

Despite this, from a historical perspective the very concept of entrepreneurship does not appear to have influenced policing per se. Indeed, as highlighted above it does not naturally form part of the vocabulary of policing. This is surprising given that the core activities of the British police are to guard, watch and patrol and as a consequence the police service has developed a client-patron relationship with the business community and in particular business owners.

Indeed, ex-chief constable and policing scholar John Alderson suggests that in a capitalist society the role of the police is to protect the bourgeoisie against the criminal classes. Consequentially, many police officers developed a respectful *modus Vivendi* towards the entrepreneurs in their communities.

This close contact led to a reciprocal relationship whereby some senior officers joined local business networks such as the Round Table, or other clubs. However, this close contact with the business community did not influence the bureaucratic management style adopted by the service and the concept of entrepreneurship remained separate from the world of policing.

Nevertheless, many police officers come from 'entrepreneurial families' with connections to the business community and the entrepreneurial middle classes. As such they are attuned to the nuances of entrepreneurial activity.

Also, an increasing number of officers are now running their own businesses and entrepreneurial ventures. This is hardly surprising given that entrepreneurship can be viewed as a life theme as suggested by entrepreneurship scholars Bolton and Thompson. It is thus a cognitive behaviour embedded in everyday life practices. The point of this narrative so far is to argue that it is not possible to separate entrepreneurial traits and characteristics from everyday work practices.

Perhaps one of the first of this new generation of police entrepreneurs was the visionary Mr Alderson, who initiated community policing in Devon and Cornwall and took risks in

**“In the militaristic model of policing, those with an entrepreneurial orientation generally found it difficult to survive and advance within the service because their traits and characteristics saw them characterised as rebels and mavericks.”**

reorganising how he policed his area despite considerable internal resistance. Another classic example is the former Commissioner Robert Mark who also took reputational risks to push through innovative work practices and an institutional reorganisation within the Metropolitan Police Service.

One of the consequences of working in a bureaucracy (such as the police) is that over time, one is socialised into bureaucratic attitudes and frames of mind. Thus the entrepreneurial element of our human psyche is stifled by rules and regulations and traditional ways of behaving and acting.

The traditional militaristic model of policing also conspired against the emergence of openly entrepreneurial attitudes within the service. In that era, the aspiring police leader consciously modeled himself upon the heroic role model of the 'commander'.

In the militaristic model of policing, those with an entrepreneurial orientation generally found it difficult to survive

and advance within the service because their traits and characteristics saw them characterised as rebels and mavericks.

In a British context the concept of 'entrepreneurial policing' emerged into academic consciousness with the seminal work of the sociologist Dick Hobbs in 1987, whose work reported on the entrepreneurial nature of detectives working in the East End of London. Mr Hobbs considered the detectives he studied to be entrepreneurs because they traded upon information for results. A later study by the sociologist Gerald Mars confirmed this thesis – although neither Mr Hobbs nor Mr Mars used the term 'entrepreneurial policing' per se.

The emergence of the terminology owes more to the changing nature of society and in particular to operational practices across the public services. The seminal work of Osborne and Gaebler in the 1990s in relation to the emergence of entrepreneurial governance and management struck a chord and positively encouraged an entrepreneurial attitude amongst public servants and politicians. This coincided with the emergence of new public management and to the police adopting corporate culture and a corporate approach per se.

Over time a new breed of aspiring police leaders have emerged who have sought to reinvent themselves as 'executives' complete with a business school education and qualification.

Simultaneously, the rhetoric of enterprise has spread across society and has permeated the consciousness of the service. An awareness of social enterprise is a must for everyone who seeks to do good work in the third sector. During this time of change the service has continued to guard, watch and patrol against a new breed of criminal entrepreneurs. Thus the face of crime has changed and new methods of operating are clearly required as both the police and the criminals innovate.

### **How can entrepreneurship theory assist the police with their enquiries?**

The past decade has seen considerable changes in terms of policing innovation and policing practice brought about by demographic and socio-political changes and by the inexorable desire to professionalise.

In recent times the police service has been inundated with new policing methodologies, such as community policing, zero tolerance policing, problem solving policing, and hot spot policing, all of which compete for time and resources with the doctrines and practices associated with the National Intelligence Model (NIM). The police service has coped admirably with the influx of new duties and responsibilities but at a cost. The need to staff and prioritise new models of policing has arguably led to a reduction in the number of officers on patrol. Clearly there is a need for new and better ways of thinking and organising the everyday practices of policing.

The revolutionary concept of 'entrepreneurial policing' as envisaged by the author cannot be studied in isolation from the social forces of innovation and change and more importantly the subject of police leadership. Indeed 'entrepreneurial policing' has the potential to evolve into a new philosophy of police leadership in which officers will willingly support calculated risk taking to introduce new methods and models of policing. In these times of change the argument that policing cannot be run as a business is no longer viable. At a managerial and organisational level it can

operate as if it were a business, like other corporate entities, providing it adopts new structures and organisational models.

Elsewhere, Mr Hobbs has argued that philosophically, and from an organisational perspective, policing can be regarded as a business because it is a people business. The 'directive purpose' of a business, whatever its domain, is to add value to a product or service and the creation of a more robust service delivery model must surely be seen as adding value.

Nevertheless, despite this quiet revolution in terms of how the police organise themselves, the subject matter and theories of entrepreneurship are still alien to many in the service. The preceding paragraphs have provided a cursory explanation as to why the police service has traditionally been a non-entrepreneurial organisation which breeds risk adverse officers. In the final few paragraphs we now turn to explore how encouraging the concept of 'entrepreneurial policing' will benefit the police and help them with their enquiries.

Criminologists such as Dr Robin Fletcher from Britain and Darren Palmer in Australia, building upon the appreciation of Mr Hobbs and Mr Mars, are beginning to appreciate the policing – entrepreneurship nexus and how entrepreneurship as a life theme actually pervades policing.

Dr Fletcher appreciates how the detective, collator and thief-taker all acted entrepreneurially. His work is concerned with the de-skilling of the service and in particular the detective branch. This is important in that a better understanding of the entrepreneurial nature of the police investigation process would perhaps lead to a rejuvenation of the detective branch and to advances in detective ability.

Mr Palmer considers a particular genre of police officers within the Australian police service to be entrepreneurial officers. Following the Australian model of introducing policing change is worthy of serious consideration.

Elsewhere, the author has explored how knowledge of corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial teams, intrapreneurship and entrepreneurial leadership can help reinvigorate ongoing police reforms and introduce organisational change. There is also a growing trend for police leaders to instigate community initiatives

in conjunction with academics who act as entrepreneurial change agents. There is scope for funded joint research projects between the police and academia whereby greater use is made of qualitative research methodologies to:

- Explore the policing – entrepreneurship nexus in greater detail to develop new models of policing.
- Develop the philosophy of 'entrepreneurial policing'; a new policing doctrine of individuality.
- Examine the concept of 'criminal entrepreneurship' and how the service can better interdict such individuals.
- Explore the links between the business community and organised crime.
- Enhance the analytic capability of the police by using qualitative methodologies to interpret crime patterns from intelligence in real-time.

Obviously, there is considerable scope for developing an accredited module in relation to 'entrepreneurial policing' which could be taught to future police leaders to develop their appreciation of the subject. This would help speed up the process of change and see the introduction of a more entrepreneurial culture in policing as argued for by Sir Ronnie Flannagan.

The direction given by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary usually finds its way into policing as best practice. Nevertheless, innovation and change do not occur spontaneously, therefore there is a pressing need for the police service to appreciate their entrepreneurial potential. For this to happen a new generation of police leaders will have to take a risk and adopt entrepreneurial leadership as their everyday operational policing philosophy.

We are now entering an exiting new era of policing in which 'old school' view points and ways of operating are changing. It is therefore incumbent upon us as professionals to enter into this debate with the intention of planning and initiating proactive change. Change is inevitable but one has a choice in which direction change leads one – 'entrepreneurial policing' is one possible direction it can pursue.

\*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not of SIPR.

Dr Robert Smith is the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) lecturer in leadership and management at Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University.

SIPR ([www.sipr.ac.uk](http://www.sipr.ac.uk)) is a strategic collaboration between 12 of Scotland's universities and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS), offering a range of opportunities for conducting relevant, applicable research to help the police meet the challenges of the 21st century and for achieving international excellence for policing research in Scotland.

Dr Smith is a former police constable. If you wish to contribute to the emerging debate on entrepreneurial policing or

entrepreneurial leadership then contact him on 01224 263922 or email [r.smith-a@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:r.smith-a@rgu.ac.uk). He is also keen to learn about other examples of entrepreneurial policing.

To progress the debate Dr Smith is arranging a seminar on 'New Directions in Policing' on Thursday May 7, 2009 at Aberdeen Business School in conjunction with SIPR. The event is intended to bring together academics and anyone from the police community interested in learning more about innovation, entrepreneurial policing and leadership. The event will combine presentations by academics and practitioners as well as workshops and discussion forums.

To book a place at this free event contact

Mr Tim Heilbronn on 01382 384205 or email [t.d.heilbronn@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:t.d.heilbronn@dundee.ac.uk).

Dr Smith is also collaborating with Dr Robin Fletcher, senior lecturer in policing studies and criminology at Middlesex University, on a special edition in the *Police Journal* entitled 'New Directions in Policing: A debate on Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Leadership and Change'.

It is anticipated that the special edition will be published in July/August 2009. Contributions to the emerging debate from police officers and staff would be welcomed. Contributions could include a full article, case study or worked examples of entrepreneurial policing in practice. Dr Fletcher can be contacted by email at [r.fletcher@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:r.fletcher@mdx.ac.uk)