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The Scottish Institute for **Policing Research**

Mapping police organisational culture:
Evidence from a study of Scottish policing

Submission to Chief Constable and Executive Team, Police Scotland

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Superintendent Andrew Tatnell (SIPR Practitioner Fellow)
Mr Garry Elliott (SIPR Fellow)

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1.   **Introduction: organisational culture and police reform**

Following the Office of Government Commerce's (OGC) Gateway Review of the National Police Reform Programme in early 2012 and it's recommendation 5(2) that work be undertaken to consider what aspects of existing Scottish Police Service organisational culture might help or hinder the Reform process, SIPR[1] was commissioned to undertake a small-scale study with the aim of beginning to address this recommendation through the provision of robust evidence which might assist the Chief Constable and his team in the lead up to, through and beyond Day 1 of the Police Service of Scotland.

The importance of this work is reinforced by a recent analysis of police reform in several northern and western European countries (see Fyfe, Terpstra and Tops, 2013). A review of recent reforms in Finland, for example, highlighted how insufficient attention was given to differences in organisational culture between police districts that were being merged to create larger police areas:

The PORA [police] reform was so focused on streamlining the administration and enhancing the unity of the Finnish police that it did not pay enough attention to local organizational culture. People tend to bring along to work their deep rooted ideas, values, and practices regardless of whether centralizing or decentralizing is in fashion in administrative reorganization. This means that established ideas, values, and practice are difficult to change in the same direction, and as quickly as organizational and administrative structures. Moreover, organizational change puts a great deal of pressure on the employees, which may affect their job satisfaction, commitment, and well-being (Haraholma and Houtsonen, 2013).

This paper is a follow up to the earlier paper submitted in October 2012 which outlined the emerging findings from this study and which helped inform DCC Allen's Vision & Values discussion paper submitted that same month.

2.   **Research Design and Methodology**

A combination of quantitative methods (a questionnaire survey of police officers and staff) and qualitative methods (focus groups with police officers and staff) were used in order to examine the organisational culture of the Scottish police service. This approach has allowed the triangulation of research findings using different data sets. It is also important to recognise that both the quantitative and qualitative approaches have focused on 'street-level'/'frontline' perceptions given existing evidence regarding the importance of how police occupational culture is created, given meaning, shaped and transformed from below "through the agency, actions and activities of police unions, associations and individual officers" (Marks, 2004).

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[1] The research was carried out by Superintendent Andy Tatnell (Central Scotland Police) as a SIPR Practitioner Fellow and Mr Garry Elliott (SIPR Fellow) under the supervision of Professor Nick Fyfe. Research assistance was provided by Andrew Woof (University of Dundee) and Wendy Alletson (Scottish Police College).

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2.1 Scottish Police Organisational Culture Survey

Between September and November 2012, a survey was conducted to establish a picture of the similarities and differences between the existing organisational cultures within the ten policing organisations in Scotland and the 'ideal' or 'preferred' organisational culture that staff would like to see.

2.1.1 Background

The survey uses the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) which is based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF). This is chosen because it has been widely used, clearly validated, and allows the culture to be represented in a diagrammatic form.

The CVF is an empirically based model of organisational culture developed from analysis of thirty nine criteria identified as determining effectiveness of organisations. From these criteria, two sets of competing values are identified which are shown in Figure 1.
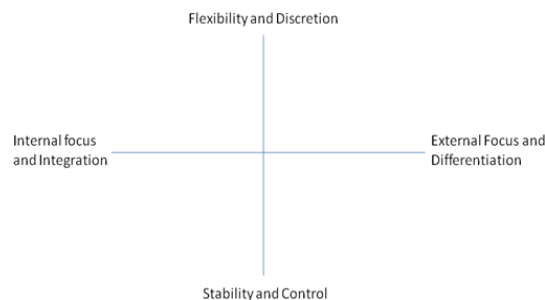
Figure 1: The Competing Values Framework

The vertical axis sets out the contrast between flexibility and stability. At one end is the idea that effectiveness comes from allowing flexibility of working, discretion and dynamism. At the other is the requirement for control, order and stability. The horizontal axis considers the focus of the organisation. At the extremes, this ranges from an internal orientation which values integration and unity, to an external focus which values differentiation and rivalry. The axes represent opposing or competing assumptions about the way in which organisations operate.

The intersection of these axes gives four contrasting dimensions of organisational culture (Figure 2). These are:

Figure 2: The four cultural dimensions

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2.1.2 Clan

Ideas of the importance of flexibility combined with an internal orientation gives a 'Clan' culture which values cohesion, teamwork and a sense of 'we-ness'. Shared vision and goals are strong in organisations with this culture and hierarchies are less apparent.

2.1.3 Adhocracy

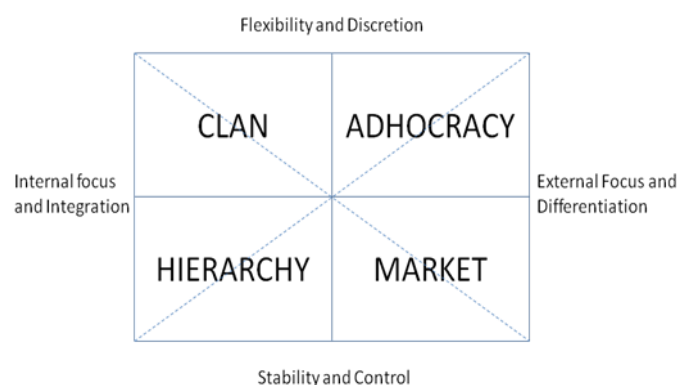This is found where the importance of flexibility is combined with a focus on the differing and changing demands of the external environment. In this culture which has become more apparent in the information age, creativity and innovation are valued. Effective organisations are the ones where individuals are able to develop new ways of working to deal with the particular problems they are facing. There is an acceptance of risk taking.

2.1.4 Hierarchy

This culture combines ideas of the need for stability with an internal focus. It is a culture which values rules and policies. Formal hierarchies are clear and output is predictable. At the extreme it is a classic Weberian bureaucracy.

2.1.5 Market

Where views about the value of stability are combined with an external focus, there is a culture which focuses on results. This is a tough and demanding culture where competitiveness is apparent and productivity is the only measure of effectiveness.

2.1.6 The OCAI

The OCAI comprises six questions each looking at perceptions of a different characteristics of the organisation. These are:

- the dominant characteristics of the organisation;
- the predominant style of organisational leadership;
- the way that employees are managed;
- the 'glue' that holds the organisation together;
- the strategic emphases, and;
- the way that success is measured.

These six characteristics have been found to be predictive of organisational culture. For each question, respondents are asked to divide 100 points between four statements in proportion to how they think they describe their organisation. This is done twice. First describing the current culture of the organisation and second, describing the 'ideal' cultural profile for the organisation to be most effective.

Where the culture is clear, it is likely that there will be congruence between the six characteristics of the organisation with each emphasising the same culture. Cameron and Quinn give an example of this in describing how a Hierarchy culture can be shown through all of the different characteristics.

"[It is] a very formalized and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. The leaders pride themselves on being good coordinators and organisers who are efficiency minded. Maintaining a smooth running organisation is most critical. Formal rules and policies hold the organisation together. The long-term concern is on stability and

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performance with efficient smooth operations. Success is defined in terms of dependable delivery. Smooth scheduling and low cost. The management of employees is concerned with secure employment and predictability." (Cameron and Quinn 2006)

Conversely, where the different aspects of the organisation lack congruence and pull towards different cultures, it is likely that the dominant culture will be unclear or even conflicting, affecting the overall performance of the organisation.

2.1.7 The survey

Data was gathered online after the survey was advertised through the Police Reform website and on organisation intranets. 1,360 respondents provided data on their perceptions of the current culture of their organisations but a significant number did not give some details of their organisation or position. Responses which provided no personal data were removed. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the remaining respondents.

Central	97	Constable or equiv.	482	Police officers	696
Dumfries and Galloway	86	Sergeant or equiv.	250	Police staff	386
Fife	91	Inspector or equiv.	188	**Total**	**1082**
Grampian	94	C/Inspector or equiv.	55		
Lothian and Borders	70	Supt. or equiv.	28		
Northern	69	Ch. Supt. or equiv.	6		
Strathclyde	378	Executive	7		
SCDEA	49	**Total**	**1016**		
SPSA	62				
Tayside	76				
Total	**1072**				

Table 1: Breakdown of respondents to the survey

An analysis comparing the responses of those who did not provide personal data with groups that did, showed no significant difference. There is no reason to think that the sample achieved is not representative of the population of police officers and police staff in Scottish policing organisations.

2.2 Qualitative Research: focus groups with roads policing units and specialist crime teams

The qualitative approach comprised a series of nine facilitated focus groups with Roads Policing and Specialist Crime teams from across Scotland. Each focus group comprised between six and twelve police constables, police sergeants and equivalent police staff members and was facilitated by trained and experienced facilitators using an adaptation of Schein's (2010) rapid organisational assessment methodology.

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2.3   **Triangulation**

Despite the focus groups and the on-line survey examining different aspects of organisational culture, the similarity between the findings from both qualitative and quantitative methods is striking. They are also consistent with findings from many other similar pieces of research and the Engagement Sessions held by DCC Allen and ACC Gwynne with staff from across Scotland. It is therefore reasonable to extrapolate these themes more broadly across the rest of the Scottish Police Service

3.   <u>**Recognising organisational cultural diversity: a cultural 'map' of Scottish policing**</u>

Much of the early academic research into police culture presented a largely monolithic view of the police occupational culture as an homogeneous and homogenising phenomenon, assumed to apply generally to all police groups. More recent research (see Chan, 1997 and Loftus, 2009) identified that a variety of sub-cultures may exist within a single force or agency which take account of the differing relationships between the police and the social and political environments they operate within. Chan also argues that police culture cannot be fully appreciated without consideration of the wider social context in which it is located.

The survey carried out for this study has confirmed that within the Scottish Police Service (i.e. the existing eight forces and two agencies) there are differences between the perceptions of staff as to the organisational cultures which currently exist.

3.1   **Differences between the organisational cultural profiles within existing forces and agencies**

Drawing on the findings from the survey of police organisational culture, Fig.3 shows how the eight forces, SCDEA and SPSA vary along the four cultural dimensions (Clan, Market, Adhocracy and Hierarchy). Three of the existing forces and agencies show a significant variation in cultural profile from the mean of all ten organisations. These organisations are:

• Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary which shows a stronger Clan dimension than the mean for Scottish policing suggesting that this smaller force places particular emphasis on developing a sense of shared identity;

• Strathclyde Police which shows a significantly stronger Market dimension than the mean for Scottish policing suggesting that this force places particular emphasis on results, productivity and competitiveness;

• the SCDEA which shows a strong Adhocracy dimension which may be a result of the specialist skills of the officers and staff working there who need to be able to use their discretion and engage in creative problem solving.

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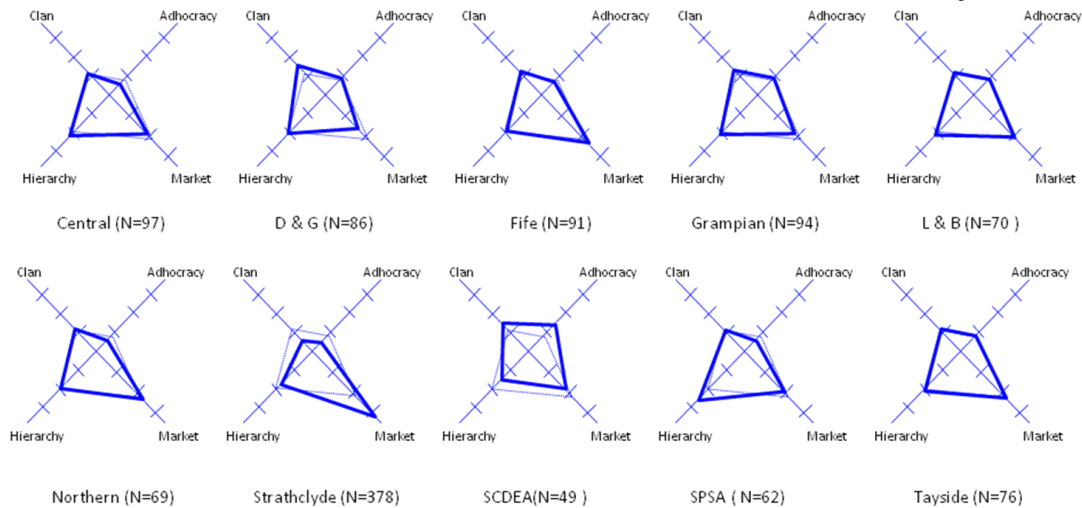**Fig 3: Current cultural profiles of Scottish policing organisations**
(The dotted profile shows the mean current profile of all 10 organisations)

Qualitative data from the focus groups was used to provide further insight into the significance of the four dimensions in the context of two different functional areas of policing (Roads Policing Units and Specialist Investigation Teams).

3.2   The meaning of 'clan' in a Scottish policing context: purpose, pride, professionalism and identity

Clan culture values cohesion, teamwork and a sense of 'we-ness', placing importance on flexibility and internal orientation. Shared vision, purpose and goals are strong in organisations with this culture and hierarchies are less apparent.

The focus groups revealed that there is a strong sense of clan, with a clear sense of pride, professionalism and 'purpose' amongst officers and staff who feel strongly that they are making a real and positive difference to improving the safety and wellbeing of people in Scotland through making roads safer and disrupting/dismantling serious and organised crime groups. Becoming a Roads Policing officer, for example, is widely viewed as "*becoming part of an elite club*" as defined by such rights of passage as passing the advanced driving course, completing challenging exams all of which entitle 'members' to wear the white hat, drive high powered cars at high speeds etc. Being professional and maintaining high standards is also viewed as being crucial to the Roads Policing clan.

However, there was also a consistent and strongly held view across all of the Roads Policing Units taking part in the focus groups that their sense of clan is 'under attack'. The examples which participants most often cited included:

• *A drop in the standard of officers being accepted into Roads Policing*: There were widely held perceptions across all of the Roads Policing teams who took part in the focus groups that instead of potential Roads Policing officers having to demonstrate a genuine desire to be a Roads Policing officer, principally through the completion of a six month period of apprenticeship (known as an 'aideship') to the department before being considered for a permanent posting and a place on the coveted national driver training course, they go straight to the driving course (at considerable expense), have several

chances to pass and are motivated principally by a desire to avoid more mundane general policing duties.

- *Perceptions of poor management*: The placement of managers in Roads Policing Units who have no previous experience in the specialism and an under utilisation of specialist training and skills of officers by their managers who frequently task them with general policing duties to supplement local policing resources, leading to a lack of return on the value of investment made in developing specialist skills.

These views are supported by findings in the survey which find that there is a tension between where junior staff feel the ideal level of a sense of 'clan' should be and the focus by leaders on market/performance. In most forces leadership, management and measures of performance are viewed as pulling the culture away from the sense of Clan.

3.3   The importance of hierarchy

A hierarchical culture combines ideas of the need for stability with an internal focus. It is a culture which values rules and policies.   Formal hierarchies are clear and output is predictable. The on-line survey shows that staff are comfortable with the importance of hierarchy and roles (e.g. ranks, elites and specialisms).   There is a close 'match' between the ideal culture and the existing culture in respect of this aspect of organisational culture.

3.4   Concerns about Market approaches to policing

A Market organisational culture is one where views about the value of stability are combined with an external focus on results. This is a culture where competitiveness is apparent and productivity is the key measure of effectiveness.

From the survey, all of the existing forces and agencies show a cultural profile which is more strongly orientated towards the Market dimension than the typical profile of a public administration organisation found by Cameron and Quinn (2006). The general dominance of the Market dimension in this study may be the result of recent changes in Scottish policing, for example, the introduction of the Scottish Policing Performance Framework (SPPF). However, Strathclyde Police also appears to differ significantly from the rest of the forces/agencies in respect of its focus on the Market culture dimension and performance management, especially through numerical targets.

The focus groups show that the requirement to meet performance targets associated with a Market culture is a contentious issue. There tended to be negative attitudes towards not only the targets themselves but also the manner in which they were enforced by managers. Set targets were negatively perceived as a top down way of directing what is policed, undermining officers' sense of purpose. For example, in Roads Policing the perceived disproportionate focus on enforcement was seen as being detrimental to the improvement of road safety through a balanced use of the 4 'E's – Engineering, Enforcement, Education and Encouragement. Specialist Crime teams also see managers' focus on comparatively low seizures of drugs in order to achieve numerical targets set for political reasons, as preventing officers from the larger tasks of dismantling serious and organised crime groups.

Officers also perceived that this *"tick box culture"* was preventing them from maximizing their skills, experience and creativity. They felt that they needed to be given greater freedom/discretion to use their initiative to make decisions about what can have the greatest

impact on achieving broader strategic aims. Here, for example, are some observations by officers from Roads Policing Units:

"What would be really interesting is to pick up on what X and X have said, and at the risk of inducing probably more than a few heart attacks at senior level is to say, for a month, 'no KPIs'. None; let's no' have any, and let's see how the shifts cope with that. Because I guarantee you – and I'd put my house on it – I guarantee you would get back to doing exactly what everybody in this room joined the police to do – and that's doing police work using their experience, their knowledge, their ability to educate people and encourage them to drive properly". (RPU constable)

"When you're talking about losing skills, I think six years ago when that's where it happened. That first year I done what I thought a traffic cop would do – we'd stop lorries going down to the ferries at [town], next day we'd go to [village]… we'd go here, we'd go there servicing different parts of the area, listening to people's concerns, doing road checks. And then the big change came and we never went to those [smaller outlying] places, it was just to major towns where you knew you'd get a volume of tickets". (RPU constable)

"In our division these figures are published on a Monday morning and we are showing red for some of the KPIs, so the pressure's on us now to… If you put in a Hachem case, 'what are you doing that for?' We're actually being told not to do that because they're not interested in it". (RPU constable)

Participants also perceive the current management approach as constraining problem solving, contributing to a sense of 'deskilling' officers, and fostering a lack of trust between officers and their managers.

These feelings were not uniform across all focus groups however. Roads policing units where officers believed there was a more balanced '4 E's strategy' (i.e. less focused on enforcement), report feeling empowered to undertake their duties with minimal direction from managers. Morale is high and staff feel that they are valued for the role that they are performing.

3.5   The importance of adhocracy: creativity and local knowledge

The survey shows that there are significant differences between existing forces and agencies in respect of adhocracy (see Figure 3 above). Adhocracy is found where the importance of flexibility is combined with a focus on the differing and changing demands of the external environment. Creativity and innovation are valued. Effective organisations are the ones where individuals are able to develop new ways of working to deal with the particular problems they are facing. There is an acceptance of risk taking.

Within policing, there will always be a tension between on the one hand the need for a disciplined organisation which must ensure that its staff comply with a plethora of statutory and non-statutory requirements, and on the other hand empowering its staff with a sufficient degree of discretion to allow for *"individual judgment, localised responses and discretionary decisions"* resulting in *"situationally justified actions"* which are *"taken as the situations demand"* (Manning 1977 cited in Chan 1997: 90) which has been shown to be key to effective operational policing.

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Bourdieu (cited in Chan (1997; 71) argues that whilst an organisation generates strategies which are necessarily coherent and systematic, these strategies also need to be *"ad hoc because they are "triggered" by the encounter with the particular external environment in which the organisation operates"*. Given the plethora of differing external environments in which the police operate (social, economic, political, geographic etc), staff require a degree of creativity and innovation in order to police communities effectively and thereby to maintain the current high levels of support. In other words, they need to *"develop a 'feel for the game' (based on the cultural knowledge of police officers which integrates past experiences accumulated individually and collectively over many years) enabling them to make a infinite number of 'moves' in an infinite number of situations - what police officers refer to as 'commonsense'* (see Manning 1977) *and 'policing skills'"* (see Brogden *et al*, 1988).

The development of local policing plans, which will reflect the needs of local communities in over three hundred electoral wards, will require local officers at a junior, operational level, to provide a policing service which reflects the plethora of local policing issues which such a diverse country as Scotland presents.

3.6   Differences in perceptions of organisational characteristics

In addition to providing insights into four key cultural variables (clan, market, hierarchy and adhocracy), the survey data also reveals differences in perceptions of organisation characteristics across the eight forces and two police organisations (See Fig 4 below). These organizational characteristics include:

- Dominant characteristics;
- Organisational leadership
- Management of employees
- Organisational glue;
- Strategic emphases;
- Criteria for success.

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Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Central (N=97)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Dumfries & Galloway (N=86)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Fife (N=91)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Grampian (N=94)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Lothian and Borders (N=70)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Northern (N=69)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Strathclyde (N=378)

Dominant Characteristics   Organisational Leadership   Management of Employees   Organisational Glue   Strategic Emphases   Criteria for success

Tayside (N=76)

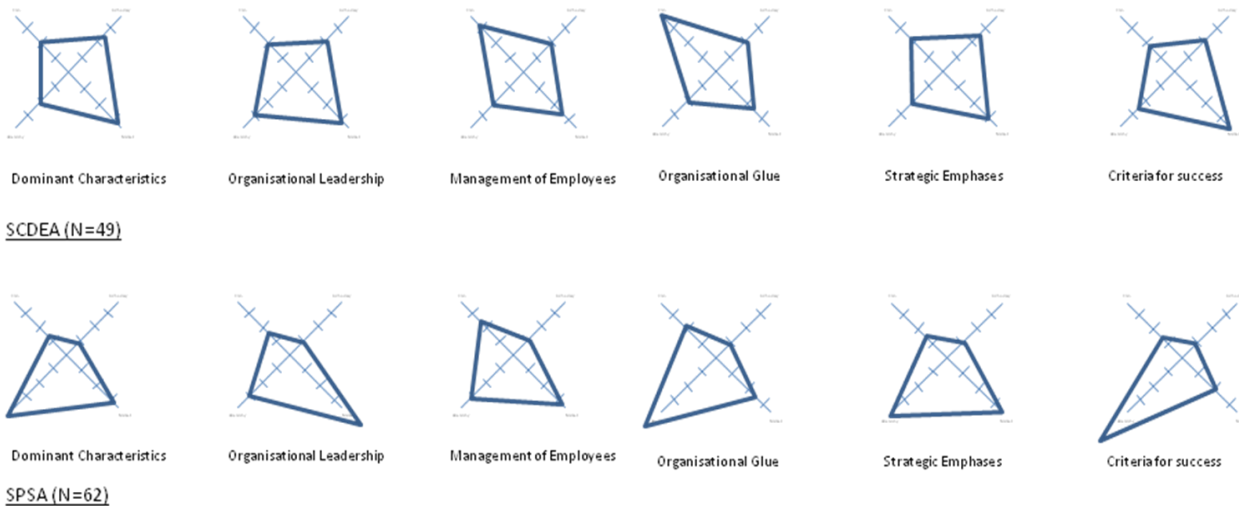**Final Version**   **22nd January 2012**

Fig 4 Organisational characteristics of Scottish policing organisations

While there isn't sufficient space to explore all these different organisational characteristics, it is important to highlight that the focus groups indicated that organisational leadership was a concern among many officers. Two areas in particular emerged as important:

- A lack of understanding by managers of the roles that more junior staff perform, especially within specialist areas. Although there was an awareness within the specialist units that managers have difficult decisions to make (sometimes in life or death situations), most participants are critical of managers for lacking the understanding required for these specialisms. For example, officers with the Roads Policing Units were critical of managers who were not class 1 driver trained and/or who have never worked within the specialism, making high pressure operational decisions such as when to call off pursuits. This was perceived as undermining the expertise of the specialist constables and sergeants.

- A lack of positive feedback from managers when things go well and a 'quick to criticize' mentality when they don't, which served to reinforce the feeling that officers in some units have of being undervalued.

4.   "Mind the gap": Differences between the current and preferred cultural characteristics of police organisational culture

4.1   Figure 5 compares the perceptions of the current cultural profile (solid line) and the 'ideal' profile (dashed line) for the ten different policing organisations. While the current profiles show differences between the organisations, as discussed already, the 'ideal' profile shows similarity across all the organisations. This can be seen particularly by comparing the profiles of Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway. The current profiles show significant differences in all dimensions. The Market dimension of Strathclyde is twice as strong as Dumfries and Galloway while the Clan dimension is half that of the neighbouring force. However, despite these significant differences in perceptions of the current culture of the force, the 'ideal' profiles are almost identical. This suggests that there may be deeply held views about organisational culture in policing which are shared between officers and staff which could assist the cohesion between officers and staff from the different organisations.
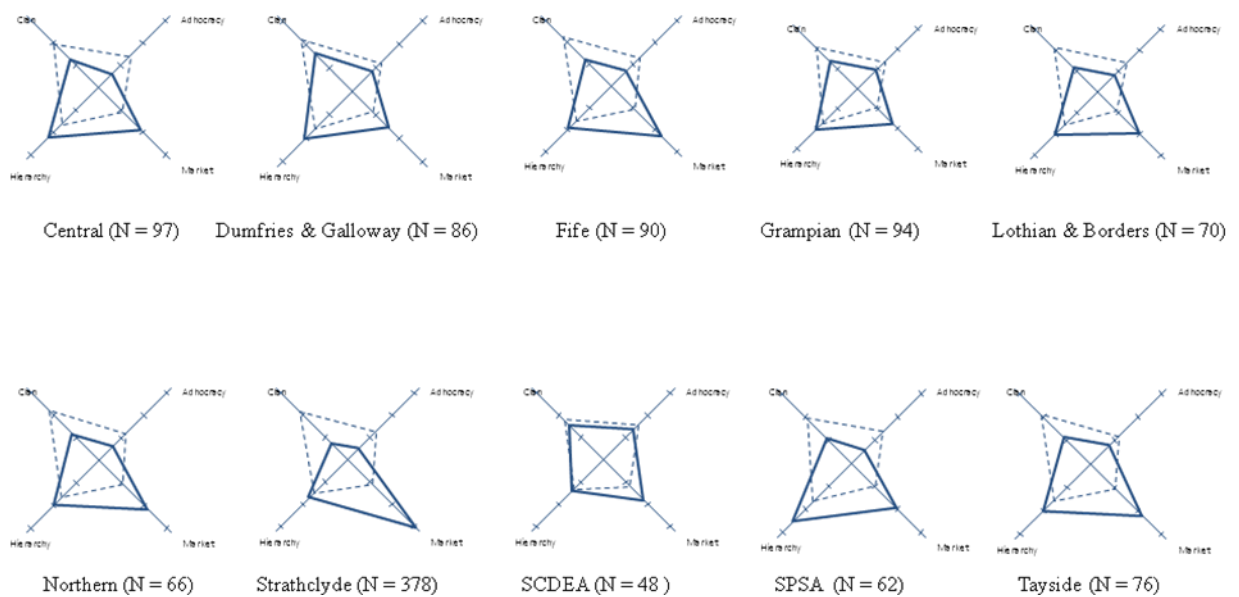
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Figure 5: Current & Ideal cultural characteristics broken down by force/agency
(The solid line is the current profile, the dotted line is the ideal profile)

However, the diagrams also show a difference between this shared 'ideal' view and the current perception. In all police forces, the ideal profile shows stronger Clan and Adhocracy dimensions and weaker Market and Hierarchy dimensions. The study shows a desire for more discretion and autonomy within an organisation with strong shared values and sense of mission. The view discussed in the focus groups about how the way of working is perceived to be damaging identity and expertise is not only held by participants involved in specialist work but more generally by officers and police staff.

4.2   Gap between operational level staff and managers

Figure 6 shows that ideas about the ideal cultural profile of policing are also shared across all ranks and grades. The difference between the perception of the current organisational culture and the 'ideal' culture discussed above is most pronounced in federated ranks.

Although the numbers in the sample are small, the results suggest that executive level managers share the views about the 'ideal' culture but perceive much less difference between the 'ideal' and the current profile.

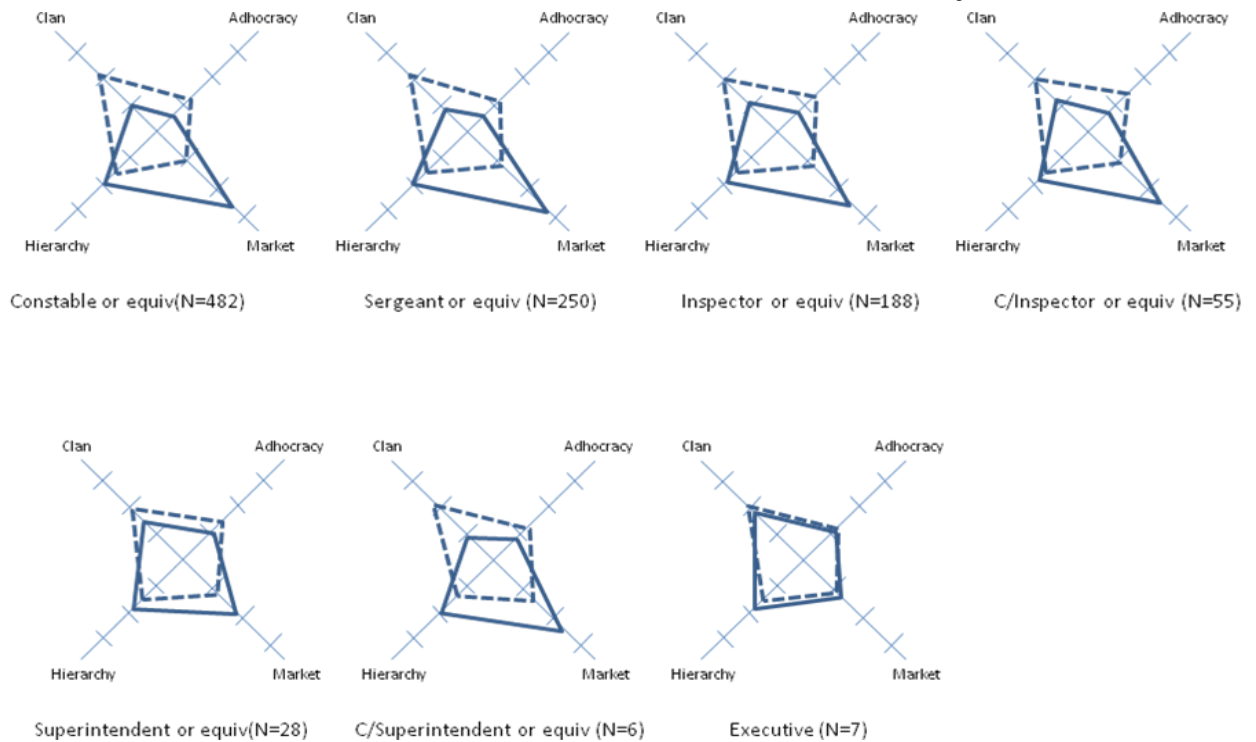**Final Version**   **22nd January 2012**

Figure 6: Current & Ideal cultural profiles broken down by rank or grade
(The solid line is the current profile, the dotted line is the ideal profile)

5.   Conclusions: potential implications for the Reform Programme

The data gathered for this report, provides some important insights into the nature of the organisational culture of Scottish policing. The analysis presented here has only been able to scratch the surface of the issues raised by those completing the on-line survey and participating in the focus groups, but it does highlight some important questions and challenges for the continuing process of police reform in Scotland:

5.1   Recognising and working with organisational cultural diversity

The data indicates an important degree of cultural diversity across the ten Scottish police organisations and this was clearly reinforced by the findings from the focus groups with officers from two functional areas of policing (Roads Policing Units and Specialist Crime Teams)

5.2   Supporting valuable cultural traits: a sense of belonging to the Police 'Clan' or Family

The data suggests that a sense of clan/family/we-ness is important to staff and that they would like the organisation they work in to have a greater sense of it. Failure to achieve this greater sense of clan may impact on morale which may in turn impact on performance.

5.3   Tackling negative perceptions of a target driven performance culture

The perception amongst staff in those areas where there are robustly enforced, numerical targets is that there is a tension between this type of performance culture and officers' own

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sense of professionalism particularly through limitations it can place on their use of discretion.

5.4 Supporting a desire for greater flexibility, creativity and innovation by strong leadership

A clear message from this study is that staff would like to work in an organisation which has a greater degree of adhocracy than that which currently exists in order to ensure that decision making at a local is sufficiently flexible and creative to meet the needs of local communities; and that Police leaders and managers encourage operational level staff to use their discretion and to be flexible and creative as they attempt to find solutions to local policing issues..

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