The Scottish Institute for Policing Research

ADOPTING 'AGILE LEADERSHIP' IN THE POLICE SERVICE

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ADOPTING LEADERSHIP STYLES APPRORIATE TO TIMES OF CHANGE

The police service in Britain is undergoing a period of rapid and significant change both organisationally and environmentally a fact appreciated Sir Ronnie Flannigan (Flannigan, 2008: 1) in his review of policing in England and Wales. Flannigan (2008: 7) made a call for a fundamental redesign of structures which support policing and indeed made a plea for more "entrepreneurial and innovative solutions from the leaders of the police service at all levels". Interestingly, he repeated this plea for chief constables to take a more entrepreneurial approach to leadership later on in the report (Flannigan, 2008: 36).

For the purpose of clarity, Entrepreneurial Policing is a term used for "The repeated implementation of a combination of creative and innovative management and leadership practices in an operational policing context which involve a degree of risk to the instigator not sanctioned by virtue of traditional bureaucratic authority. The risk may be financial or reputational".

Consequentially, this briefing paper makes a proposal for the adoption of an enhanced level of team working within the service facilitated via a form of visionary leadership known as 'Agile Leadership'. This practice necessitates the deliberate instigation of 'Agile Teams' formed from different disciplines for a specific purpose or project. Agile leadership *per se* thus spans the boundaries of the practices of management and leadership. This can be problematic because management and leadership particularly in the police service are frequently conflated making it necessary to define both terms in relation to this paper.

Leadership relates to the ability to affect human behavior so as to accomplish a mission and to acts in relation to this activity. It involves influencing a group of people towards goal setting and achievement (Stogdill 1950: 3). Indeed, Birch (1999) describes the distinction between leadership and management in general terms as being that managers concern themselves with tasks while leaders concern themselves with people. Whilst this is a generalisation - leadership occurs at a strategic (macro) level, whilst management occurs at an operational (micro) level. Tourish & Jackson (2008) argue that leadership is process dependent and depends upon the exercise of reciprocal influence between leader and followers in which communication is at the heart of the process. In terms of police management it can be the same individual who is called upon to exercise both functions. Nevertheless, management and leadership are both styles which can be personalised and enacted by individual officers irrespective of rank. It is of significance that leadership can be constructed and enacted as a discursive process (Fairhurst, 2007). There is a degree of circularity to leadership and management in a policing context because structure (which includes rank, tradition and culture) is fixed and often inflexible. Indeed in bureaucracies structure tends to be rigid whereas management and leadership styles are less so. It is helpful to consider leadership styles commonly associated with the police:-

Bureaucratic: The traditional hierarchal type of leadership exercised by the police service follows that of the bureaucratic leader model espoused by Weber (1905). This model relies on structures and following established procedures. It stifles innovation and creativity preventing one from exploring new ways to solve problems. It is characterised by slowness of pace and adherence to tried and trusted methods. In such a system Leaders follow set out steps and pass it down the hierarchal chain. In the police service it usually ensures that standards and qualities are met whilst providing increased security and decreased levels of corruption. This of course dictates that as an organisation the police can be slow to change direction in the face of a crisis. Also, leaders who try to speed up processes face frustration and the risk of being branded a maverick.

Autocratic: In a similar vein, the leadership style most closely associated with bureaucratic leadership is that of the 'Autocratic leader' (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939). Autocratic leaders have the authority to make decisions without consultation. This style of leadership works well where subordinates need to be closely supervised in relation to their tasks but it stifles employees who are creative team players because they are denied the autonomy to enhance processes, take risks or make decisions.

Charismatic: Another type of Leader frequently encountered in the police service is the 'Charismatic Leader' (Weber, 1905) who infuses energy into the work place, energising their team. Such leaders are generally committed to their police careers. On the down side, if they are successful and the success is attributed to the leader alone they can become a liability to the organisation because this style of leadership can be situationally disruptive in that employees relate to the leader and not the organisation per se making succession a problematic issue.

Moreover, Densten (2003) appreciates that each rank of senior officer has unique sets of leadership behaviors that influence the perception of their effectiveness to motivate others to exert extra effort. Therefore it is essential to consider rank in relation to leadership at the senior levels in police organizations whilst appreciating that leadership can be exerted and enacted discursively at any rank. Consequentially, no one generic approach to leadership can provide the answer making it incumbent upon academics to work with individual police leaders to enhance their understanding of how to select leadership styles appropriate to them in the circumstances. One such leadership style is agile leadership which emerged from project management techniques in the computer and soft ware industries from the late 1990's onwards. In rapidly changing environments existing structures were found to be wanting and this often necessitated the setting up of specific project teams. This is of significance in relation to policing per se because increasingly police of all ranks are being seconded to engage in and often managing multi agency projects where different sets of leadership styles have to be adopted when working outside existing hierarchical structures. For example, police are now routinely called upon to work in partnership with officers from local authorities and outside agencies in community based projects and anti-social behaviour teams composed of individuals with a multi disciplinary focus. This changing organisational landscape makes agile leadership an exciting and promising paradigm worthy of further consideration in a policing context.

AGILE LEADERSHIP EXPLAINED

Agile leadership (Lange, 1995; Wadsworth, 1997; Crucitto & Youssef, 2003; Joiner & Josephs, 2007) is a subset of 'Non Linear Management' techniques and of the literature on 'Transformative Leadership' (Bass & Riggio, 2006) currently in vogue within police management circles (See Dobbie *et al.*; 2004; Menzies, 2007; and Ritchie, ongoing). In 2001, protagonists of 'Agile Methods' met to create a people-centric methodology. They compiled what became known as the 'Agile Manifesto' enshrining the principles of agility based upon embracing change. The agile process encourages rapid delivery of products and services thus enhancing customer satisfaction. Agile methodology is not a single approach but all agile methodologies are practical allowing project teams to adapt working practices to suit the needs of individual projects. Being a practitioner based methodology, when implemented it creates an initial buzz in an organisation (Augustine, 2007). In industry, agile leadership is supported by software products. However, it is possible to a strip it back to basics and identify management practices that can be adopted independently of software and used in any work based setting. Although agile management techniques were developed in relation to project management the practice is becoming more widespread as a team based philosophy. The principle behind such 'Agile Philosophy' is to create cross-functional and self-organising teams free of existing hierarchies and roles

(Augustine, 2007). For the purpose of achieving clarity, it is helpful to discuss 'Agile Teams' and 'Agile Leadership' separately albeit that in practice they are interrelated. This is also necessary because leading and managing agile teams throws up its own set of challenges.

Agile Teams

Agile philosophy is operationalised via the agile team thus team work is a crucial part of agility (Crucitto & Youssef, 2003: 396). Agile teams differ from traditional project management teams in that agile teams are in reality self-organizing teams arranged in flat hierarchies, delivering fast response-times in environments prone to frequent change (Lange, 1999). Obviously this process requires a different style of working with people as well as necessitating the implementation of new techniques (Lange, 1999). Augustine (2007) explains that from practice, it has been found that it is best to 'colocate' the team in one office thereby fostering a climate in which face-to-face conversation becomes the privileged form of communication. This has the effect of engendering close, daily cooperation between team members and as a result agile teams gel quickly. It is customary to locate agile teams in an open plan office to facilitate such open communication. For Augustine (2005) a number of practices are essential to the success of agile teams and these include daily scrum meetings or huddles where all team members meet to discuss and review problems and issues in order to deliver priorities. This formal scrum methodology encourages routine informal communication between team members enabling the team to regularly adapt to changing circumstances. Being both iterative and incremental it encourages intensive and collaborative working practices. The ideal team size is between five and nine members and it is recommended that teams larger than nine persons should be divided into smaller concentric teams to facilitate team communication and collaboration (Augustine, 2007). Such active communication negates the need for time consuming paperwork providing that honest communication prevails. Ideologically it is patently an anti bureaucratic methodology.

Members of agile teams must be motivated individuals trusted by senior management to progress the project by identifying simple solutions. The team must be encouraged to fulfil a shared project vision and embark upon a cycle of continuous improvement in which team members must be encouraged to reflect, learn and adapt to change (Augustine, 2007). From a team perspective, the overriding ethos of agile methodology is to deliver upon promises early thus satisfying customers and stakeholders. This engenders a team spirit in which teams are energised, empowered and enabled to produce work in a rapid yet reliable manner. Agile teams engage in a process of continuous learning during which they adapt to changing needs and environments. The focus is upon project throughput, teamwork and leadership. Importantly, work informs the plan and not vice versa. A benefit of agile process is that it limits work done to the capacity of the existing team. This is important in organisations such as the police who are currently suffering from staff shortages. However, it is essential that all team members are integrated into the team and feel able to contribute as equals (Augustine, 2007). This can be difficult if they come from different organisational and management cultures providing a challenge to the person leading the project. From a policing perspective, in normal partnership approaches the focus is upon collaboration but in agile teams this is taken as read. Ultimately, a project will not be judged on how well a team worked together but on what it delivered in terms of outputs and outcomes.

At team meetings members must reflect and retrospectively examine work carried out to analyze, adapt and improve processes and practices. It is beneficial to have a neutral facilitator and to conduct the meeting in a large room with all members seated in a circle (Augustine, 2005). Each team member is expected to contribute to the discussion by providing feedback to the questions - what's working well, what can we improve, and what are the obstacles or issues facing the team. During the ensuing brainstorming session the facilitator captures items to be actioned (Augustine, 2005). The team leader plays a vital role in coordinating execution via commitment. This is a vastly different management paradigm from command and control obedience is the key idiom. In an agile environment it is the leader's role to ensure that team members make, keep and individual commitments to deliver on work promised. Thus coordination is the key and in any case in the contemporary policing environment tasking and coordinating is ingrained in police culture. The role of the leader is to craft and engage in conversations that create and coordinate team members' commitments. This entrepreneurial process is known as "Conversation for Action" (Augustine, 2005). In agile process a team organises its work into "stories" or short descriptions of one thing

that needs to be done on a project. The Team is asked to discuss and prioritise the stories, a number of which are selected and worked upon during the ensuing week. Each story (iteration) is assigned to a team member who estimates the time it will take. A feedback cycle is initiated whereby new stories may be developed and existing stories reprioritised. It is however necessary to track, analyse and integrate work and discussion forums are ideal for this (Augustine, 2005). As a result of experience some best practices have been identified and these include - daily kickoffs and reviews of goals set. Integrated teams work best when formed from people working with generic skill sets common to the team and as a consequence are not reliant on individual members with a specific skill. The ethos of agility enables a team to change direction quickly. However, in a multi agency policing context it would be necessary to develop working codes of practice for evaluating progress. It is a function driven process in which all disciplines involved combine to deliver an ability to change direction quickly. It is the antithesis of the bureaucratic, slow, micro-management style we associate with police leaders of the Weberian mould discussed above.

Agile Leadership

There are various practical benefits to be gained by adopting agile leadership and agile methodologies. For example, it is possible to promote a working climate conducive to development; open collaboration; and process adaptability throughout the life-cycle of individual projects. The process is based around planning, implementation and analysis. Augustine (2007) lists some of the challenges facing leaders who choose to implement agile methods. The first challenge is to form an integrated team comprising of members with diverse skills and roles. Secondly, one must learn to manage a value flow and not micro manage activities. Thirdly, one must move away from the corporate culture of 'Lessons Learned' to a new mindset of 'Project Reflections'. This allows one to focus upon project context and not content. The main challenge, however is to learn to coordinate the execution of the project through commitments, not commands. This latter facet is of importance in relation to leadership in a policing context and it can be a difficult paradigm to achieve in a system in which the notion of 'Command and Control' is enshrined. Augustine (2007) also identified that agile leadership employs a business-driven approach in which iterative and incremental results are delivered. The fact that police managers at all levels are sceptical of business like policing (Hobbs, 1991) is also a challenge for the service to overcome.

From a leadership perspective, it is a challenge to ensure that the project team delivers an end product which satisfies customers and stakeholders. Augustine (2007) suggests that to do so it is necessary to look upward and outward toward stakeholders or sponsors by considering the project's goals and outcomes; its objectives; its scope; and how it relates to other projects being undertaken. Augustine (2007) also suggests that it is necessary to take cognisance of what other factors does the success of the project depend upon; what value it adds to the organization; how it contributes towards achieving the organization's strategic goals; and finally what is the strategy to deal with external changes? These are strategic questions which must constantly be addressed by the principle project leader. This can be difficult because the project leader must allow the actual agile team to self-manage their activities on a day to day basis.

Whilst recognising the role of management in moving to an 'Agile Culture' (Macaulay, 1996), we have limited awareness of the managerial processes that build and maintain agility (Crucitto & Youssef, 2003: 391). According to Crucitto & Youssef, leadership lies at the foundation of agility and they suggest a model of agility built around quality, speed and cost in which responsiveness and flexibility play their part. From a policing perspective quality and cost may be more important than speed of delivery. However, Crucitto & Youssef (2003: 395) warn that "Leaders at every level – not just top managers - need to buy into agility as an organisational value". This could prove to be problematic within police circles because as Crucitto & Youssef (2003: 396) rightly highlight it is difficult for managers steeped in hierarchy to abandon [ingrained] status and position they may have taken years to attain.

Moreover, it is important to remember that agile leadership transcends agile management and practices. Indeed, Joiner & Josephs (2007: 36) recognise that agility is a leadership capacity and that leadership agility is the ability to lead effectively under conditions of rapid change and high complexity. They argue that it is necessary due to the increasing pace of change within the organisational environment. Incisively, Joiner & Josephs (2006) identified five levels of leadership agility on a sliding scale namely expert; achiever; catalyst; co-creator and synergist. The first

two basic levels are classified by Joiner & Josephs as being qualities of traditional 'Heroic Leadership' whilst the last three are 'Post Heroic' leadership qualities (Bradford & Cohen, 1998). Heroic leaders can be over controlling and stifle the initiative of subordinates. This brings us to consider how best to adopt and implement such practices in the police service.

IMPLEMENTING AGILE METHODOLOGIES IN A POLICING CONTEXT

As a concept, in a policing context, agile leadership entails more than the implementation of set procedures and processes. It is perhaps an example of "Intelligent Leadership" (Hooper & Potter, 2000). This is so because it is not just the selection of the 'Team Leader' with the appropriate skills that ensures the success of the project, but the commitment of a strong visionary Chief Constable with the confidence to take risks to initiate the methodology in the first place. Indeed, Flannigan (2008: introduction) stresses that there is a need to move away from the endemic culture of risk aversion which drives unnecessary bureaucracy in the service. In this respect it obviously entails displaying risk-taking and is a form of "Entrepreneurial Leadership" (Darling & Beebe, 2007). Agility, in a leadership context involves the ability to switch between management and leadership styles as the occasion and circumstances demand. However, the beauty of agile methodologies is that they accommodate other existing management methodologies and practices. In particular, it is an ideal methodology through which community based problem solving projects can be facilitated. The 'Problem Solving Policing' methodology has evolved into a more open 'Problem Solving Partnerships' approach which encourages a genuine spirit of collaboration between different agencies involved in the criminal justice and social systems. This affords an excellent opportunity to set up agile teams. The benefits of implementing agile leadership as an 'add on' to existing management structures are that it provides additional operational flexibility or agility in achieving the stated objectives of the organisation. In effect one can alter the culture, organisational structure and leadership styles of employees without changing the overall hierarchical nature of the police service as an organisation. See diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1 – Agile leadership as an add on to existing management structures
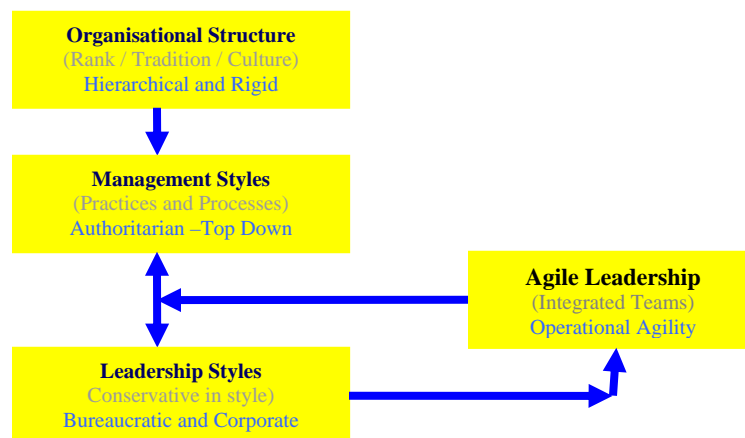
However, in a policing context it could prove to be extremely difficult to measure agility and its effects upon performance. One method is by measuring project velocity or how quickly results are delivered. According to Augustine (2007) criticisms of agile methodologies include:

- Lack of structure and necessary documentation which can frustrate attempts to analyse failure;
- Success is reliant upon senior-level developers;
- It may require too much cultural change to adopt and can be destructive;
- The process can be inefficient and accepted stories may change several times during a project;
- It is extremely difficult to cost an agile project at the beginning of its life cycle.
- Because agile methodologies are story driven some elements are difficult to accommodate.

These issues can be overcome by inspired leadership and careful planning. Another difficulty in implementing agile methodologies and practices in the police service is that they are the exact opposite of disciplined, plan driven approaches favoured by bureaucratic institutions like the police. The normal disciplined approach to project management is known as the 'Waterfall Approach' (Laplante and Neill, 2004) in which an action plan is developed and initiated in a step by step approach embodied in a formalised plan. However, agile methods are not unplanned or undisciplined. Such methods whether in the context of management or leadership are adaptive methods which focus on adapting quickly to changing environments and realities. Consequentially an adaptive team can change quickly by concentrating on the task in hand instead of having to predict the future. However, it is necessary to remember that despite the loose nature of agile methodologies they are still a methodology and not a licence to adopt a laissez faire approach. As a general rule, agile philosophy works because experts do whatever feels right based upon their experience. This leads to a constant re-evaluation of plans, face-to-face communication, and a sparse paper trail but paradoxically, disciplined and rigorous processes. However it is also necessary to stipulate that trying to force agile processes into 'Command and Control' cultures makes agile leadership difficult.

It is significant that Boehm and Turner (2004) argue that it is necessary to implement a risk analysis process in order to decide whether a particular project should be managed by adaptive (agile) and predictive (plan driven). Agile methods work best in projects where there is a low level of criticality in fluid environments where change is rapid. It is necessary to have senior (experienced) project workers organised into small teams that can thrive on chaos. However, agile methods are not a panacea to all the ills of contemporary policing. Beck (1999) argues that no one process fits every project and that practices should be tailored to the needs of the project. If a project is critical (very large, complex and has high financial implications); or is staffed by inexperienced team members; the team is too large; the environment is static or the culture of the organisation or leader demands order then it is best to adopt a predictive, plan driven order. Often the decision as to which method should be adopted is made for one by nature of the project brief inherited. Static methods are favoured when the project context will remain stable for the duration of the project and in such an environment route maps can help direct the project.

However, in more emergent dynamic contexts in which processes are not predictable prescriptive route maps are not appropriate. In such cases project managers often have to modify structures and may even have to innovate new processes (Aydin, *et al.* 2005). Ultimately, it is the responsibility of any police leader to decide if they have members of staff capable of coping with agile structures and methodologies. It may well be that they have first to foster a management culture in which such practices can flourish. Incisively, Joiner & Josephs (2007: 41) advocate a leadership development programme combining coaching with action learning and workshops to encourage reflective learning within a 'Learning Team' environment. There is obviously a danger that agile methodologies could become a new dogma, however, the basic notion of agile leadership is potentially useful and could be implemented in a policing context. It certainly falls within the remit of the call made by Adlam and Villiers (2003) in relation to the need for police leaders in the twenty first century to adopt new philosophies and doctrines of policing. Norris (1992) echoing the words of Warren Bennis noted that successful leaders of the future will be very different from those who have succeeded in the past.

This short briefing paper has demonstrated an alternative method of deploying police staff in relation to specific 'project related' areas of work which the police now have to undertake on a regular basis. Police leaders can adopt "post heroic" agile methodologies when appropriate whilst simultaneously enacting "heroic" styles of leadership identified by Bradford and Cohen (1998) which correlate to the bureaucratic, autocratic and charismatic leadership style associated with police leadership.

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