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Abstract

For a number of years there has been a sustained acknowledgement of the worth of
'transformational' leadership as a catalyst for change within police organisations.
Academics, policy makers and senior officers alike have pronounced the benefits to
be enjoyed from the implementation of such leadership models, not least in respect of
promoting cultural change. However, this paper will present a counter argument to
suggest that the application of transformational leadership models to policing contexts
is, if not flawed, then at least worthy of more robust critique that that which, to date, it
has been subjected to. In doing so, this paper explores the concept of
'transformational' leadership and its relevance to policing contexts. Additionally, the
paper will suggest that claims of success in effecting cultural change within police
organisations are likely to rest on simplistic conceptions of police culture and its
relationship to police behaviour.

Recent years have seen a growing application of the language and ideas of transformational leadership to the context of policing (Porter and Warrender, 2009, Aremu, Pakes and Johnston, 2011, Dean and Gottschalk, 2013 and Mazerolle, Darroch and White, 2013). In particular, this popularity appears linked to the expectation that transformational leadership styles might, in some way, allow us to deal with the perennial challenge of police culture (Foster, 2003, Mastrofski, 2004). This paper will argue that the assumed symmetry between the 'problem' of police culture and the reformative powers of transformational leadership is a more complex relationship than has been commonly acknowledged. In particular, it will be argued that insufficient attention has been paid to the unique organizational setting of policework (and its associated organizational culture), the concept of transformational leadership or to the challenges of measuring the ways in which leadership can affect cultural change.

During the summer of 2011, at a time of widespread speculation as to who would be appointed the next Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and in the wake of widespread rioting in the British capital, journalists from *the Guardian* newspaper conducted an interview with Bill Bratton. Bratton had been largely credited for his leadership successes in a number of large American police departments (although see Bowling, 1999, for a critical overview of Bratton's successes as NYPD Commissioner) and had, according to reports, been approached by the British Prime Minister David Cameron as a potential applicant for the role. During the course of the interview, Bratton stated that; 'Bureaucrats change processes, leaders change culture. I think of myself as a transformational leader who changes cultures' (Dodd and Stratton, 2011, no page). At one level, this statement is relatively unremarkable in that

it can be seen merely as a senior police officer pronouncing their leadership strengths. At another level, however, it is interesting in its positioning of transformational leadership as an approach that can be used to achieve cultural change within police organizations where, according to some literature, there is a perceived cultural divide between the world of the street officer and that of his or her manager (Marks, 2007). That those who do the 'dirty work' of policing and those who provide leadership might have conflicting agendas and aims and be subjected to different organizational pressures is not a particularly new idea. Whilst Reuss-Ianni and Ianni (1983) did much to expose this issue, as far back as 1969 Niederhoffer described the ways in which the recruitment policies of the New York City Police Department led to an intake of applicants from both working class backgrounds and the college educated classes resulting in cultural tensions between 'common sense' street policing and the newly professionalized ranks of police managers. With the increasing application of neoliberal narratives to police work over recent decades (see Bevir and Krupicka, 2007, and Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009) this cultural tension, which had previously been presented as essentially a sociological issue, became recast as a leadership one. This paper will therefore seek to explore the relevance of transformational leadership in the context of police management particularly in respect of initiating cultural change. The paper will then assess the challenges of accurate measurement of cultural change.

What is Transformational Leadership?

The popularity of transformational leadership symbolizes a fundamental shift in stance from more traditional transactional models of leadership that have become

increasingly disparaged over recent years. These conventional leadership styles began to be viewed by many as ineffective due to their reliance on what was viewed as little more than the imposition of 'contractual relationships' (Bass and Avolio, 1993, p. 116). Through these relationships, workers are motivated by reward and punishment structures that encourage an orientation to organizational engagement predicated upon self-interest rather than through any real emotional association with the values of the organization. Under such models, workers are motivated through rewards for displays of appropriate behaviour and punished for that which is considered inappropriate. Under transactional leadership, according to Engel and Worden (2003, p. 136),

> The subordinate performs what is expected of him or her, while the leader specifies the conditions under which these expectations must be met and the rewards that the subordinate will receive when the requirements are fulfilled.

Transformational approaches, on the other hand, are based upon values of 'participation, consultation and inclusion' (Silvestri, 2007, p. 39) and seek to erode the cultural barriers that may exist within an organization's hierarchy. In this respect, they aim to transform the orientation of the worker to the desired behaviour, from one where they conform due to the expectation of reward or punishment to one where they conform because they share, and buy into, the organization's 'vision'. To Mastrofski, the advent of the transformational agenda has meant that,

> Police managers are encouraged to persuade officers to embrace certain goals and values not because doing so will produce desirable personal consequences, or failing to do so will produce negative ones, but because doing so is simply right and proper or the best way (2004, p. 104)

Whilst some might be tempted to suggest that the above quotation reveals perhaps the

major innovatory aspect of transformational leadership as a straightforward appeal to the virtues of the individual and, in the case of police officers, as essentially a plea for compliance on moral grounds, a number of writers make a more compelling case for its benefits. For example, whilst transactional leadership has generally been the norm within police organizations (Densten, 1999), transformational leadership is seen as enabling legitimate organisational change (Mastrofski, 2004), facilitating improved communication (Densten, 1999) and encouraging a more motivated workforce (Pillai and Williams, 2004). Scepticism has, however, been voiced from some quarters (see, for example, Currie and Lockett 2007, and Neyroud, 2011) regarding the extent to which transformational leadership should be viewed as a cure-all for the organizational issues facing public sector institutions. Furthermore, as Pawar (2003) illustrates, our understanding of transformational leadership (and its application to a broad range of organisational contexts) is somewhat hindered by a number of conceptual issues that demand clarification and which centre upon the relationship between leadership styles, organisational contexts and organisational change. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these matters in depth, it is of use to be aware that transformational leadership remains a sometimes vaguely defined and divisive concept, that one of its founders himself described as 'both an art and a science' (Bass, 1990, p. 30). For the purpose of this paper, a definition will be adopted which draws on Densten's (1999) view of transformational leadership as leadership behaviours that draw on idealized influence (for example, encouraging a 'sense of mission'), inspirational motivation (for example, more fully engaging the employee with the organizational vision), individualized consideration (for example, having individualized relationships with subordinates) and intellectual stimulation (for example, encouraging employees to think innovatively about problem-solving).

Similarly, Densten's view of transactional leadership will be adopted. This suggests that transactional leadership focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers, with the former seeking to influence performance through either 'contingent reward' (application of positive sanctions as a response to desired behaviour) or 'management-by-exception' (application of negative sanctions as a response to undesired behaviour).

Mapping Transformational Leadership to the Police Organisation

Bratton's statement regarding the ability of transformational leaders to effect cultural change is interesting as it portrays a very stylized and uncomplicated sense of the role of culture in the police world. Whilst it would be unwise to lose track of the fact that we are referring to a media-directed sound bite, it would similarly be unwise to ignore the fact that the sentiment conveyed within it represents an increasingly orthodox position within the arena of police management. Numerous academic commentators have drawn attention to the prevalence of transformational management strategies and rhetoric within law enforcement circles (for example, Foster, 2003, Silvestri, 2003, Dobby, Anscombe and Tuffin, 2004, Neyroud, 2011 and Mazerolle, Darroch and White, 2013), with one, Janet Foster, noting succinctly that, 'Transformational leadership is a vital component in changing police cultures' (Foster, 2003, p.220).

However, when contextualized in the light of what we actually know (or, perhaps more accurately, in the light of what we think we actually know) about organizational culture and, more specifically, police organizational and occupational culture it soon

becomes apparent that such sentiments might make more sense as rhetorical aspiration rather than an empirical example of cause and effect. Indeed, a number of issues immediately present themselves and make clear the complexities to be addressed when seeking to understand or to address the cultural issues impacting on police organizations. First, literature over the last two decades has given rise to continued debate regarding the existence of a universal police culture (see, for example Chan, 1997). Increasingly, writers are acknowledging that some elements of police cultural life are essentially embedded whilst others are more fleeting (see, for example, Loftus, 2009) and that this necessitates an acknowledgment of the existence of multiple (and fluid) cultures within the police world. However, what remains uncertain is the extent to which academic debate over the existence of multiple cultures will, or should, impact on strategies for dealing with culturally-driven behaviour at an organizational level. Second, the existence of both organizational and occupational cultures provide another layer of complexity to the challenge of delivering change within organizations. Whilst organizations may seek to impose culturally driven values upon their staff, these values often conflict with occupational values associated with practitioner cultures (see Gregory, 1983, Paoline, 2003). This tension is of interest in that it focuses attention on the key issue of whether it is organizations or occupations which provide the key cultural influence on worker behaviours and values. Taken together, these issues make clear not only the intricacies of the cultural world of the police officer but also serve as a warning for police leaders against assuming that police culture is a relatively straightforward issue requiring an undemanding solution.

Whilst there is a need, as described above, to acknowledge the complexities of the cultural terrain of police organizations, there is perhaps an even more fundamental challenge to be addressed when considering the adoption of transformational leadership as a means of dealing with police culture. It concerns the extent to which it is appropriate to apply transformational leadership (developed as a response to the perceived needs of private sector organizations) to the policing context. In particular, it can be argued that both the core business of police organizations, and the environments which they operate within, fail to reflect the type of 'business' envisaged by writers like Bass and Avolio. And whilst commentators like Bevir and Krupicka (2007) note that narratives of reform based upon neoliberal models are unlikely to overcome practitioner resistance, it is possible to make a strong case to suggest that such resistance is rooted in a fundamental mis-match between the perceived problems facing policing and the solutions offered by transformational leadership. Here it is interesting to note that key proponents of transformational leadership methods did display an awareness of the limits of their conceptual framework. For example, Bernard Bass, in 1990, admitted that transformational leadership is not an appropriate solution for every organization. He went on to suggest that the intellectual stimulation of staff demanded by transformational leadership has scant opportunity for realization in roles where opportunities to foster new opportunities, to reflect on organizational weakness and to develop new ways of working are limited. The extent to which police officers can exert such power over their working environment is arguable, and whilst writers like Skolnick (1994) and LaFave (1962) have discussed the existence of police discretion at length, others have sought to show the ways in which lower level police work is controlled, be it through the application of disciplinary codes (Brogden, 1991) or through rule-tightening

(Chan, 1997). Within the UK context, Home Office Circular 114/83 (Home Office, 1983) had a significant impact by providing the foundations for greater scrutiny of police performance through the introduction of private sector leadership models to police organizations (Long, 2003). Over time the importance of this development has become realized as the prescriptive nature of performance targets associated with these models has led to a decrease in discretion (see Flanagan, 2008) and a subsequent growing disempowerment amongst staff (see FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph and Qureshi, 2002). There may be some evidence therefore to suggest that the spread of New Public Management to police organizations has effectively limited the degree of discretion available to make the blanket adoption of transformational models appropriate.

In order to highlight the conceptual weaknesses associated with transformational leadership, it is necessary to invoke, as is the case here, a simplistic distinction between transactional and transformational leadership. This, in truth, reflects the way in which transformational leadership has been presented by its proponents. However, there are some academic accounts which have been largely critical of two-factor, or binary, models of organizational leadership. For example, Yukl (1999a) notes that such binary arguments are insufficiently sophisticated to fully explain how styles of leadership are applied in real-life situations. For example, in a telling quotation, Yukl (1999a, p. 38) states, 'Some managers use some of the behaviors some of the time, but few managers use most of the behaviors whenever they are relevant'. This, inevitably, leads us not only to question the relevance of the binary argument that is often drawn upon but to go further and seek clarification, as Pawar (2003) does, of the

exact relationship between the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership. Whilst the complex methodological challenges of exploring this relationship are set out by Yukl (1999b) we must not lose track of the fact that other issues remain. Not least, the challenge of understanding the relationship between transactional/transformational leadership and the police relies not only on understanding conceptual difficulties associated with leadership models but also on acknowledging the problems of transposing private sector management models to the public sector. As noted by commentators like Wisniewski and Olaffson (2004), public sector organizations tend to deliver a broader range of more elaborate services than those in the private sector. Similarly, Williams (1985) draws attention to the fundamental differences in role and values between the two sectors. In short, substantial challenges remain in respect of understanding how transformational leadership operates within the private sector (within which it was originally developed). It remains to be seen whether or not the model will prove relevant to the complexities of public sector policing. Furthermore, if Wisniewski and Olaffson are correct in their assumption that public sector organizations like the police carry out a wider range of roles than those in the private sector, it may well be the case that we should expect to see both transformational and transactional leadership styles used depending on the requirements of a given situation. If this proves to be the case, we may be in a position to further question the relevance of the binary model.

Assessing Cultural Change

It might also be prudent to articulate, at this juncture, the benefits to police managers

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of evidencing cultural change within their organizations. Within a British context, the tension between 'traditional' police arrangements and practices and those broadly associated with private sector management strategies (such as New Public Management) can be traced back, according to Southgate (1985), to the Planning, Programing and Budgeting System of the early 1970s. Whilst the cultural aspects of such paradigm shifts are more fully documented elsewhere (see, for example, Cockcroft, 2013), it has become increasingly apparent over recent years that the implementation of change (or perhaps, more accurately, the *appearance* of change) is now perhaps the most persuasive evidence of success for police leaders (FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph and Qureshi, 2002, Smith 2009). And in a world where 'the shift from hierarchical bureaucracy to markets and networks [has become] the new governing framework for the police' (Marks, 2007, p. 235) there is a marked will to be seen to overcome the perceived obstacles placed by an intransigent culture so steeped in 'discourses of morality [and] tradition' (Loader and Mulcahy, 2003, p.134).

However, the work of one of the defining writers in this area, Edgar Schein, emphasizes the nuanced nature of workplace culture in a way that has been generally ignored by many of those with an interest in police work, be they practitioners or academics. To gain a fuller comprehension of Schein's model, it is perhaps apposite to start with his definition of culture;

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2004, p.17).

From this relatively straightforward foundation, Schein went on to differentiate between different levels of culture and it is in respect of these, arguably, that many of

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our misconceptions regarding culture arise (Cockcroft, 2013). Schein conceived of culture as working at three distinct levels; 'artifacts', 'espoused beliefs and values'; and 'underlying assumption`', where 'artifacts' represented the explicit and outwardly visible manifestations of cultures including language, modes of self-presentation, opinions, custom and ritual. 'Espoused beliefs and values' include those expressed attitudes that lead to observable behaviour or language at the 'artifact' level. If these beliefs and values prove successful as a means of explaining the social worlds of group members they may become entrenched at the deepest cultural level of 'underlying assumption'.

Thus, arguments that maintain that police culture can effectively be modified by transformational leadership styles need to consider at which of these three levels they believe their effectiveness is felt. Perhaps ironically, it appears perfectly plausible that it is at the most superficial level, that of 'artifacts', that the impact of leadership might be felt. That is to say, that the impact of leadership on 'police culture' might be merely to restrict the extent to which officers feel comfortable in exhibiting the more explicit manifestations of underlying cultural values, for example, in respect of inappropriate or discriminatory language. If this is the case, wider questions remain regarding the extent to which leadership can or does impact at the deeper levels of 'espoused beliefs and values' and 'underlying assumption'.

This idea that leadership-driven initiatives may impact at more superficial levels (such as those associated with Schein's 'artifacts') rather than at more entrenched levels (as in the case of 'underlying assumption') is amply illustrated by the work of Bethan Loftus in her police ethnography *Police Culture in a Changing World* (2009). Within it she describes a police world where the politicisation of identity has effectively

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impacted on police interactions with particular social groups. For example, she notes how police interactions with ethnic minority groups have changed as a result of the rise of identity politics. One result of this development was that some police behaviours were motivated not so much by occupational culture or, for that matter, the wishes of police leaders but by the fear of becoming the target of complaints from those groups whose encounters with the police were open to substantial public scrutiny. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the challenges regarding the implementation of change within policing contexts revolve around two main issues. The first issue is whether 'change' has been effected at the level of behaviour/performance, explicitly articulated attitude or personally held assumption. That is, does the change represent a modification to displayed behaviour or to cultural outlook. The second, and related issue, concerns whether or not this can realistically be represented as cultural change. In terms of the first, Loftus' work provides a glaringly obvious example of the challenges of identifying cultural change being effected through leadership. To those officers studied by Loftus, a reduction in explicitly articulated views, far from signifying cultural change, merely represented the importance of *transactional* relationships between rank and file and senior officers. Modifications to behaviours through a fear of being disciplined (as a result of, for example, a complaint investigation) obviously suggest that it is individual officers' self-interest at work rather than any deep-rooted engagement with organisational values. As Loftus herself notes, traditional police stereotypes regarding the race-crime nexus remain intact yet co-exist with a new dynamic in the social world of police work, that of 'anxiety' towards these particular groups. What we appear to be witnessing are the traditional, rather than new, cultural markers of the occupation being played out against the backdrop of a changing landscape.

In terms of the second issue, it remains clear that not all apparent 'cultural change' is anything more than a change to behaviours and that such modifications may be of scant use in establishing evidence of cultural change. In particular, it may be the case that officers, rather than undergoing any pronounced transformation of attitudes or values, may be becoming more guarded about how and to whom they express the artifacts of their culture. To Loftus, officers were weary of attracting the epithet of 'racist' but, simultaneously, held working personalities very much attuned to the notion of race. This not only suggests that race has an increasingly complex relationship to police culture but also reminds us of the challenges of quantifying culture, and perceived changes to it, especially in an organisational environment where managers are keen to evidence cultural change amongst practitioners.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to subject the relationship between transformational leadership, the police and police culture to a degree of critical scrutiny. Whilst, as Bratton's quotation shows, there is room for no-nonsense leadership rhetoric about this relationship, there is also room for a critical appraisal of the challenges facing those who do so. In particular, the paper identifies three key areas where greater clarity about our terms of reference would further this debate. First, there is a real need for greater clarity regarding what constitutes 'police culture' in the eyes of police leaders. Whilst police scholars may be accused of over-intellectualizing the issue of police culture, the counter argument is that police leaders have been guilty of over-simplifying it, or at least not being explicit in why and how it constitutes an

issue of leadership. Furthermore, our attempts to evidence cultural change should acknowledge the inherent complexities of culture.

Second, as with culture, there is a need to avoid oversimplification of the ways in which we conceptualize transactional leadership, transformational leadership and the relationship between the two. The simplistic binary argument which has been used to extol the virtues of transformational leadership over transactional leadership fails to fully recognize the nuances of organizational life. Models that synthesize the two might be a way of overcoming criticisms founded upon both the simplicity of two-fold classifications and the need for clarification of the relationship between the two models.

Third, and finally, there is a need to acknowledge that 'policing' covers a wide range of roles within increasingly complex organizational environments. As such, it is unlikely that one form of leadership will be appropriate for every set of organizational relationships. Whilst Neyroud (2011) may be correct to note that transformational leadership is essentially incompatible with what he termed the 'transactional demands of command' (p. 39), on some occasions, police organizations will undoubtedly require, and benefit greatly from, leadership styles that are not predicated upon hierarchy, reward and punishment.

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