Knowledge Wars: Professionalisation, Organisational Justice and Competing Knowledge Paradigms in British Policing

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The professionalisation agenda in British policing is being driven by the College of Policing. Whilst there are a number of definitions of professionalism (Sklansky, 2014), the basic tenets of a professional organisation are that the employees follow a code of ethics, there is a commitment to use expert knowledge and that there is an element of self-regulation. Within the professionalisation agenda for the British police there are a number of strands. These include the implementation of a police code of ethics, the development of a police education qualification framework (PEQF) and wide support of police and academic collaborations to ensure police practice becomes increasingly evidence based. This chapter focuses on the latter strand of work, evidence based policing (EBP), particularly as there has been extensive debate in both the academic and policing fields about the extent to which police officers are both supportive and understanding of this concept and the extent to which they feel involved in EBP at all stages of the process (Fleming and Wingrove, 2017). In doing so, the chapter will seek to explore some of the potential issues which arise in respect of EBP by using the theory and principles of organisational justice. This will be used to explore the changing conceptualisation of knowledge within police organisations and the link this has with the professionalisation of policing. We will attempt to do this firstly, by exploring the concept and principles of organisational justice and applying this to the context of policing, EBP and knowledge work. Secondly, we will explore what we mean by knowledge in a police context and, thirdly, we will examine the potential to apply the concept of organisational justice to current views on the constitution of knowledge and knowledge outputs in the modern policing milieu.

The application of ideas of procedural knowledge have become increasingly common to policing not least in respect of our understanding of how the public perceive and respond to interactions with police officers (see, for example, Bradford, 2014) which are grounded in procedural elements of the police role. These have been especially helpful in developing our understanding of how police organisations can seek to enhance their legitimacy in respect of external public audiences. Allied to the concept of procedural justice, which highlights the

perceived fairness of procedures, is that of distributive justice which instead focusses on the fairness of outputs (Moorman, 1991). Taken together, these allied concepts constitute the concept of 'organisational justice' a subject which has been applied to numerous occupational contexts by organisational scientists. Drawing from Adams' Equity Theory (1963) organisational justice focuses, at its basic level, on the idea that perceptions of justice are a fundamental expectation within an organisation that expects to both function effectively and ensure an appropriate level of expectation amongst those employed by that organisation (Greenberg, 1990). Myhill and Bradford (2013) have applied ideas of organisational justice to the policing environment and argue that identification with the police organization is stronger when officers feel a sense of procedural fairness from both their direct supervisors and the organization as a whole. Procedural justice, therefore, is attributed to a sense of involvement and of being listened to by organisations and their leaders. Such perceptions of organisational and procedural justice tend to promote a sense of empowerment, a willingness to put in discretionary effort and a commitment to new organisational goals and priorities.

This broad concept provides a means of understanding the dynamics of a wide range of organisational contexts. However there is scope, we believe, to expand on the work of Myhill and Bradford (2013) and to relate these ideas to current applications of evidence based practice within the policing environment and particularly the concept of police knowledge. A primary justification for this can be the idea that the advent of late modernity has fundamentally changed the role of the police, not least in how they approach their fundamental role of enforcing order. The result has been to increasingly embed actuarialism and rationality within the role of the police and this is evidenced by the 'paper burden' of police officers (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997, p. 296) working in roles which are increasingly characterised by large administrative workloads. This is but one of the recent substantive developments that led Ericson and Haggerty to characterise modern police work as 'knowledge work' where officers, "...generate, analyse and present various forms of knowledge within ever-changing formats" (Cockcroft, 2009, p. 23). The work of Thompson and Heron (2005) is of interest here as it explores the ways in which organisational justice relates to workers whose roles might be termed 'knowledge work'. In doing so, they provide a fitting lens through which to understand police officer experiences by focussing not so much on the context of their work (public sector) and by focussing on the *type* of work they did. The central tenet of their argument is that:

"In knowledge-intensive firms that rely primarily on the problem-solving capabilities of their employees for long-term success, the quality of internal relationships becomes central to organisational strategies to achieve knowledge creation and appropriation" (2005, p. 383).

To Thompson and Heron, therefore, high levels of commitment to the organisation led to more effective knowledge sharing as did heightened perceptions of a supportive and safe working environment. At one level, therefore, we can show how organisational environments, and relationships within them, can shape workers' feelings of institutional fairness both in terms of the procedures by which they are treated and by the resultant outcomes that they experience. For those engaged in knowledge work, perceived levels of organisational justice will impact on the extent to which those working environments will be characterised by effective knowledge sharing. This is pertinent in the concept of what counts as knowledge in the current police debates about evidence based policing. We will return to this later in this chapter.

The preceding brief discussion has, hopefully, encouraged us to consider the nature of knowledge in a policing context. In particular, it has focussed on the relationship between the police and knowledge in respect of the police role and how that role is increasingly characterised by what has become known as knowledge work. Recent years have also seen practitioners, academics and policy-makers address the ways in which understanding of knowledge is embedded into policing in ways other than those pertaining to the roles and processes of police *work*. In particular, some debate and discussion has fallen upon the issue of '*what constitutes knowledge in policing*?'. At one level, it is helpful to present this argument in terms of a binary between cultural and what Eraut (2000) would term 'codified' knowledge. Cultural knowledge represents those forms of knowledge which arise informally. In respect of policing, it is easy to see how the pragmatic nature of the role, the propensity for an infinite array of potential scenarios, the legal basis of much police work and the inherently discretionary nature of policing mean that much day-to-day knowledge of police work is generated experientially and outside of any prescribed formal academic knowledge framework. The organisational sociologist John Van Maanen, in a classic piece entitled *Observations on the Making of Policemen*, quotes a recruit talking about what his expectations for learning were whilst enrolled at the police academy:

"I want them to tell me what police work is all about. I could care less about the outside speakers or the guys they bring out here from upstairs who haven't been on the street for the last twenty years. What I want is for somebody who's gonna level with us and really give the lowdown on how we're supposed to survive out there" (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 297)

Indeed, more recent work by Chan (1997) in Australia found that much taught knowledge imparted to new officers in a classroom environment was considered as secondary to the narratives provided by their more established and experienced colleagues. Such accounts, which very much recall traditional depictions of the police occupational culture, highlight the historic assertion that police knowledge is largely viewed, by its practitioners at least, in experiential terms. Over the years, however, academics such as Tong, Horvath & Bryant (2009) have noted that police knowledge is portrayed in many arenas, rather ambiguously, as an amalgam of science, craft and art. Increasingly, this view has begun to lose traction as policing has sought to re-shape itself in terms of a profession. This move towards professionalization, especially in respect of 'new' professions, can serve a number of functions. As Evetts (2013) notes, it can operate positively as a means of enforcing regulation on key societal functions or it can operate negatively by creating market closure through occupational monopolies. Similarly, Fournier (1999) notes that these moves towards professionalization (amongst previously non-professionalized occupations) often results not in the empowerment of members but on power being exercised *upon* members. Notwithstanding such discussions about the positives or negatives associated with professionalization, there are undoubted benefits. As Sklansky (2014) notes, professionalisation allows for audiences to assume greater efficiency, push reformist agendas and to enhance their status through association with specialised forms of knowledge.

The latter in particular raises some interesting dynamics. Whilst we have noted above that one can detect a changing trajectory of what constitutes police knowledge over the years, it is probably the case that we are currently witnessing the most defined era yet in respect of a formalised knowledge agenda in policing. The Evidence Based Policing (EBP) agenda, as Wood et al (2017) acknowledge, represents a largely welcome development in policing as it draws us away from the overly experiential knowledge base as described by Van Maanen

(1978). We would argue that such a concept is not new in terms of the use of research and analysis being utilised in police work. Indeed, the intelligence led policing focus of the early 2000s was based on the collection, and rational analysis, of police data. However, Cope (2004) found that officers were reluctant to follow the deployment options specified in the analytical outputs and a preference for the use of experiential and learnt policing knowledge remained.

Eraut (2000) helpfully distinguished between 'personal' and 'codified' knowledge where the former refers to 'tacit' or informal knowledge and the latter refers to that knowledge which has been derived by formal means and which, "...includes propositions about skilled behaviour, but not skills or 'knowing how' " (p.114). The EBP agenda very strongly resembles 'codified' or formal knowledge in that it seeks to develop a corpus of accepted knowledge that those accepted into the profession will draw upon. In respect of every strategy regarding an evidence base, the question of course emerges of what forms of evidence are acceptable and which are not. The EBP agenda, suggest Wood et al (2017), is, "...shaped by epistemological assumptions and a police science discourse favouring scientifically tested informed policy directives" (p. 9). They go on to conclude that the EBP agenda actually appears to promote a view of police work which negates the importance of police officer discretion. Lest we forget, discretionary decision-making (facilitated by informal knowledge) has, according to many of the classic works in police culture, been instrumental in delivering policing on the streets of our communities. Would such a knowledge base as proposed under EBP reduce the need for officers to utilise discretion or would it merely mean that discretionary decision-making was informed by a different form of knowledge? These are moot points. However, one important consideration, drawing back to the work of Fournier (1999), is the potential for this professionalising form of knowledge to control rather than empower those in the office of constable. In the context of officers having that sense of organisational justice this is worthy of further exploration. At the same time, what status would remain for those elements of police knowledge that held value amongst practitioners at the cultural level for such a long period of time? There is very real concern that tried and tested cultural knowledge or 'common sense' policing would be rendered inappropriate under a paradigm that favours the RCT over human experience.

The College of Policing in the UK recently published a definition of evidence based policing. Partly this was a response to the criticism that certain supporters of this concept place increased value on certain types of knowledge as the 'gold standard' and negate the importance of human

voice within the research agenda (Punch, 2015). This has resulted in a common perception that quantifiable data and a positivist, scientific approach is superior in police research and that qualitative methodology is unreliable and anecdotal (Hesketh and Williams, 2017). Those that are more sceptical of pure, quantitative research methods suggest that the constant focus on 'what works' and crime prevention are motivated by political agendas and ignore the voice of the practitioner. Moreover, particularly during a time when demand for police services is becoming so complex, such research can ignore 'what matters' (Punch, 2015).

The recent publication of the College of Policing's definition of EBP recognises the importance of a range of methodologies and sources of knowledge, including the experience of the practitioner. However, the current perception amongst some police officers is that evidence based policing ignores critical context and views the world as static (Greene, 2014). Furthermore, there is a sense that practical outputs from research can undermine officers' professionalism and serve the needs of management rather than the front line (Thacher, 2008). Relating this back to the concept of organisational justice, we feel that there is worth in thinking about both the hierarchy of knowledge within the EBP arena and the purpose of the outputs created in the context of organisational justice. Officer knowledge can only be accessed for the purposes of research if police researchers listen and involve practitioners at every stage of the process. Fleming and Wingrove (2017) describe how reform and change is often considered to be driven by and imposed by outside influences without explanation of any of the aims or reasoning for the reform. They suggest that this, "may have led to a sense of obligation to protect their (officers) practices where they perceive their experience/ craft knowledge justifies it" (p. 210). Therefore, we argue there is scope to consider this in the context of officers' involvement in EBP as one of the most recent reforms in policing (Willis and Mastrofski, 2016).

Firstly, we would like to consider the issue of police knowledge. As previously stated, listening to and engaging with practitioners can drive an increased commitment to change and a sense of empowerment (Myhill and Bradford, 2011). During a period of public sector austerity, and one within which EBP has been so strongly supported, there is a precedence for research to be focused on crime prevention and 'what works'. This has inevitably resulted in the use of primarily, scientific methods to objectively measure whether something is having the correct impact. As Sparrow (2016) claims this form of research can appeal to senior leaders as it relates to cost effectiveness and management decisions. Indeed, it can be the favoured method in terms

of what research is funded which is also problematic for the academic community. However, many officers believe that this minimises their experience of implementing such initiatives and impairs their understanding of the problems that might have arisen or, conversely, the facilitating factors that might have driven a successful outcome. As Pease and Roach (2017) argue, evaluations are not seen to derive from the experience of police officers and they do not capture the choices that officers have to routinely make as part of their daily business.

There is an additional exclusionary factor in the current EBP discourse that relates to language and accessibility. The application of scientific language drawn from medical and criminological terminology is not translated for the wider population of police officers. Indeed, resistance to the implementation of research recommendations can be exacerbated by the language currently used by some academics involved in the application of science to police work. The application of a 'treatment' and ensuring the correct 'dosage' assumes a level of understanding that, firstly, is not generic across all officers and, secondly, which ignores the fact that policing is always dependent on the context and circumstances within which it is being delivered (Pease and Roach, 2017). It is this knowledge, experience and judgement that officers hold in their heads and such 'evidence' that can provide a far deeper level of understanding to any quantifiable evaluation. Moreover, as Van de Ven and Schomaker (2002) argue the absence of this can devalue this critical part of police knowledge. By exploring this in the context of organisational justice the links are evident. Engagement, inclusion and participation are critical when attempting to encourage staff commitment to a reform programme. However, reviewing this evidence of officers' perceptions of involvement it is clear what might be driving some of the negativity concerning the implementation and drive of EBP in policing. Sklansky (2008) argues that, given concerns about the subsequent negative effect on officers who perceive reform to be top down and irrelevant to their lived experiences, the impact these perceptions have on their willingness to support research outputs should not be of surprise. Currently they feel they have made limited, if any contribution to outputs. This moves us on to the second issue we would like to discuss here.

Gundhus (2012) explores the notion of professionalisation in the context of policing and suggests that it can condone certain forms of legitimate knowledge which arguably results in the creation of new professional guidance about methods of operational practice. What results is the reliance on a more systematic and measurable type of knowledge which can simplify methods of management and performance. However, this can undermine the craft or

occupational professional knowledge that officers hold (Willis and Mastrofski, 2016). Understanding officers' reluctance to buy into the concept of EBP and its' outputs needs to be considered in the context of personal professional identities. Professionalism at the individual and organisational levels needs to be congruent and balanced. Occupational professional experience gives officers a knowledge set that guides their working day. However, the new notion of organisational professionalism (Gundhus, 2012) can be experienced by officers as a method of controlling practitioner behaviour through prescriptive outputs based on objective, and abstracted, knowledge. Hence when applying the notion of organisational justice, we would argue that officers sense of professionalism is impacted on in two ways. Firstly, their own working professionalism is largely absent from many purist forms of EBP and therefore believed by officers to not be considered as legitimate. Secondly, this results in the creation of operational directives that aim to produce a corporate form of behaviour to control its staff. Moreover, it ultimately creates a more simplistic frame for police managers to monitor behaviour and operate a command and control structure within the organisation. This makes the use of discretion and officers' independent decision making more regulated (Petersson. Cited in Fleming et al, 2017: 188) and can result in what Sklansky (2008) has termed the turning of artisans into robots. Understanding this in more detail is critical in the current climate of police professionalism developments and against the wider context of increased support for knowledge driven activity within the policing world. It seems that any process which results in particular types of knowledge not being considered legitimate leads to a de-legitimisation of the process being implemented – in this case EBP.

Fleming and Wingrove (2017) argue that if we want the police to incorporate knowledge from research into their daily business there has to be a climate that is ready for this change. They suggest that the police need to be, "enabled and empowered to push back, bottom up, for the organisational structures and resources which they need to implement an EBP approach" (p.186). Applying the principles of organisational justice to officers' active involvement in and support for EBP provides a framework in which to understand the current resistance amongst some officers.

Given that good communication and participatory styles of leadership can result in support for change we would argue that similar issues need to be addressed in the process of research. Gundhus (2012) describes the distinction between 'thin' and 'thick' professionalism. The former relies more on a standardised approach to create standards, a scientific approach and an

objective truth. Conversely, thick professionalism captures the gut feeling and intuition held by officers when decision making in the field. The merger of these two would incorporate the voice of the practitioner at the start of the process, produce contextual knowledge that could be more responsive to the diverse environment within which the police operate and would, according to organisational justice theory, influence officers' buying into the outputs. The perception of the highly skilled officer as articulated by Bittner (1983) would be recognised through this methodology and it would also secure the capture of the "rarely codified" (Flanigin.cited in Willis and Mastrofski, 2016:p, 4) tacit knowledge that generally only is experienced via police narratives. It is this knowledge that provides situational and local understanding and recognises such craft as professional knowledge. As Thacher (2008) argues, we cannot underestimate the ability of officers to identify, categorise and apply previous experience to their working encounters and we argue that it is this that needs further exploration if we want officers to support this reform.

Returning to the definition of professionalism, the notion of organisation justice can explain some of the wider problems around the fundamental characteristics of a profession. Particularly in this chapter those relating to a reliance on expert knowledge and self-regulation. Officers describe the need to understand the context of their force area and yet the application of this local knowledge and expertise is rarely systematically analysed or considered next to other community or academic sources (Braga, 2016). This professional knowledge must count in this conversation. It seems to us that there needs to be more understanding of how to reduce this gap between what is considered expert knowledge in a generic, external sense and the expertise of the individual officer. Indeed, it is only with this further link that a culture of learning will be established within, and through, EBP. Additionally, in order for officers to effectively self-regulate, a trust-based environment is vital to ensuring that police officers both act professionally and identify as 'professionals'. However, research suggests that the perception of many practitioners is that they are over regulated by EBP outputs, unable to make professional operational decisions without making reference to a tool kit, and at risk of reprimand if they do not refer to the abstract expertise that negates their craft knowledge (Willis and Mastrofki, 2016). Paradoxically, it would appear that academic ignorance of the residual tacit professional knowledge inside the organisation serves to destabilise the very agenda of professionalisation that the academy is advocating.

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