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Abstract

Recent work into policing has increasingly acknowledged the influence of a broad array of changes upon both the structure and culture of police organisations. Generally, however, literature and research have tended to focus attention onto those elements of the broader police environment that effect such developments whilst little commentary, to date, has been directed towards those features which impact across the broader public sector. Through drawing on the concepts of 'hybrid professionalism' (Noordergraaf, 2015) and 'institutional isomorphism' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) this conceptual paper will argue that the impact of neo-liberal ideology on the contemporary public sector has created a police organisation for which professionalism increasingly denotes generic management skills which are common across different occupations and across different police roles. In particular, it will be suggested that such institutional isomorphism may drive ideational responses commensurate with cultural change within police organisations. In short, therefore, the paper will make the case that, in parallel with changes already identified by other academics, broader structural changes may lead to a narrower and more generic set of cultural responses within contemporary police organisations.

Introduction

One of the key features of recent academic work in the area of police culture has been that of social change and its associated cultural impact (Cockcroft, 2017). These forms of change, the social and the cultural, are notoriously difficult to substantiate or measure, but remain central to our understanding of the relationship between police culture and its wider social context. The work of writers such as Chan (1997), for example, has been instrumental in articulating our understanding of the ways in which a variety of external factors (although specific to policing) help to determine the cultural world of the police officer. Likewise, the work of Terpstra, Fyfe & Salet (2019) identifies the growing abstraction of policing (between both police organisations and communities and police officers and their colleagues) as a result of developments in the discourses of policing, changes to organisational structures and the wider police reform agenda. This conceptual paper will seek to identify and develop the impact of broader external factors, complementary to the work of both Chan (1997) and Terpstra et al (2019), which have created fundamental changes to the ways in which public sector practitioners experience the idea of 'professionalism'. Furthermore, it will tentatively suggest that these shifts may indicate a resulting cultural change amongst police officers.

Late Modernity, Post Modernity and Policing

In his paper, *Policing a Postmodern Society*, Reiner (1992) provided, arguably, the first academic attempt to explore the relationship between late modernity and policing or, to be more accurate, the impact of the former on the latter. In doing so, he identifies and charts a period of transformation in British policing since the late 1950s, positioning the cause firmly in wider structural and cultural change (see also McLaughlin, 2007, Kaplan-Lyman, 2012). Of note here is that, to Reiner, the changes occasioned by late modernity are essentially negative. In one of the key sections of the paper, Reiner seeks to understand the reasons for the demise of what has previously been viewed as the Golden Age of Policing (see Weinberger, 1995, Loader, 1997). Helpfully, Reiner identifies eight substantive elements that comprise the broader changes experienced during this period. They are Recruitment, Training and Discipline; The Rule of Law; The Strategy of Minimal Force; Non-partisanship; The Service Role; Preventive Policing; Policing Effectiveness; and Accountability. As one would expect, these themes cover a broad spectrum of issues pertinent to the police arena, ranging from abuse of police

powers, under- (and over-) policing of young people, perceived political bias, the reconfiguration of policing from that of the omni-competent officer to an organisation based on a division of labour and the increasing use of discourses that question police effectiveness in fighting crime.

In doing so, Reiner (1992) points very much towards the substantial impact of “complex and social changes” (p.773) created by the advent of postmodern society. Central to his analysis is that this particular era constituted a, “qualitative break in the development of contemporary society” (p.773) signaled, in part, by the death of grand narratives which previously imbued both our understanding of the contemporary, and our history, with a sense of coherence, direction and optimism. As a result, he suggests that postmodernity is largely therefore defined by a growing consciousness (and, it should be noted, criticality) of the implicit features of the previous era of modern society. In this way, the term postmodern has become a lens through which to understand, “the political economy, culture and social order of contemporary societies” (1992, p.775), features which inescapably draw us to the subject of policing. Furthermore, the impact of late modernity is felt, not just at the level of state institutions, but also at a fundamental and existential level. Jock Young, the sociologist, describing this process, noted that,

“Vertigo is the malaise of late modernity: a sense of insecurity of insubstantiality, and of uncertainty, a whiff of chaos and a fear of falling. The signs of giddiness, of unsteadiness, are everywhere, some serious, some minor; yet once acknowledged, a series of separate seemingly disparate facts begin to fall into place. The obsession with rules, an insistence on clear uncompromising lines of demarcation between correct and incorrect behaviour, a narrowing of borders, the decreased tolerance of deviance, a disproportionate response to rule-breaking, an easy resort to punitiveness and a point at which simple punishment begins to verge on the vindictive” (2007, p.12)

Late modernity has, therefore, an incontrovertible impact on individuals in ways that direct them to modify (and usually to intensify) their expectations of policing and security. Simultaneously, however, Reiner (1992) notes that police reforms which have been introduced in response to the changing conditions of late modern society have largely failed to meet public expectations. A key element of these reforms has been to re-orient the culture of the police to engage with values of quality of service. In other words, to change the structure and values of policing to those oriented towards the expressed needs of the public rather than the more abstracted application of police powers to society. In the postmodern era, however, it is possible to identify a growing contradiction in the relationship between the police and the society it serves, with Reiner suggesting that policing represents a, “paradigm of the modern” (1992, p.779). What becomes apparent therefore is a stark contrast between the modernist concept of the police institution (for example, in respect of its monopoly on responses to crime, disorder and security [see Blackstone & Hakim, 2013]) and the more fluid security arrangements identified in post modern or late modern society (for example, with reference to the increased plurality of police arrangements [see Stenning and Shearing, 2018]).

A paper by Waters (2007) develops further some of Reiner’s ideas of the impact of late modernity on policing, notably by exploring the relationship between modernity, postmodernity and police reform. In particular, he draws attention to the question of whether or not a modernist agenda for reform can

affect meaningful change in the postmodern police. Furthermore, he questions the fundamental concept of continuous police reform given that it is possible that the scope of police reform may indeed be finite. He notes that,

“Ongoing police reforms are invariably mooted in a modernist light, with a firm belief that changes to procedures will yield improvement in services and efficiency. Discourse is overwhelmingly modernist...” (2007, p.263).

Waters’ work acknowledges that whilst the police reform agenda is unfailingly modernist in outlook, the postmodern era is increasingly distrusting of reason and subject to perpetual change, a perception of incompleteness and an overall pessimism about future success. Against this backdrop, he draws attention to a number of weaknesses in the modernist police agenda, not least in respect of the validity of ongoing police reform, the embedded assumption that progress will be achieved and, ultimately, the orthodoxy that a singular model of policing can either exist or work under current conditions. Whilst such critique is helpful, we need to be cautious in applying the dichotomy of modernity/postmodernity to complex public sector organisations as to do so is to invite a number of difficult to resolve challenges (see, for example, the work of Howe, 1994, and Parton, 1998, in respect of applying this distinction to the profession of social work).

The Abstract Police

The Abstract Police (Terpstra et al, 2019) is a helpful reference point in any discussion of contemporary policing, police culture and change and provides a degree of continuity and development to the work of Reiner (1992) and Waters (2007) though without explicitly articulating themes such as modernity, postmodernity or late modernity. It refers, at its simplest level, to the ways in which policing has become abstracted, dis-connected and increasingly removed from key contexts which hitherto provided both the focus of police work and the relationships which inform the occupational culture of the police. In doing so, it highlights contemporary developments which, intentionally or otherwise, have led to new ways of ‘doing policing’ that offer less scope for the utilisation of professional knowledge. At the same time, it refers to the growing communicative dislocation between the police and the communities which they serve. For Terpstra et al’s concept, or ideal type, one of the key drivers of these changes are police reforms aimed at improving the effectiveness of the police. Such agendas of change are increasingly cloaked in a discourse of abstracted and global security threats not least in respect of responding to the growing threat posed by cybercrime and terrorism, against an organizational context that continues to embrace the tenets of New Public Management (NPM).

The significance of this explanatory model, the authors claim, is that it has an impact on what is to be conceived of as ‘good’ policing, on how we position and undertake professionalization within police organisations and, ultimately, on the shape and form of police leadership. This notion of a growing abstraction of policing largely situates the origin of these changes in reform processes. To explain the concept of the Abstract Police, the authors use two case studies of police failings that have occurred within police organizations which have seen relatively recent structural reform. In both cases there appears some evidence to suggest that these structural changes have been partial explanations for mistakes made in delivering effective policing. Similarly, much is made of the growing disconnect, or

abstraction, which has occurred internally with the horizontal and vertical fragmentation of policing being seen as central to this re-casting of relations between police officers. Informal relations, for example in the ways they seek assistance from colleagues, have been disrupted through the recent formalisation, and proceduralisation, of their engagement with each other. The result has been a growing set of barriers to informal means of engaging the help of fellow practitioners caused by the restructuring of police organisations. Furthermore, this growing disconnect for the police in respect of how they relate, engage and interact with both their organization and the public has distinct cultural implications for police officers. This particularly emerges in issue in respect of the camaraderie that has traditionally characterised the group norms of police officers (see Skolnick, 1994). Increasingly, this has diminished within an emerging system where communication between officers is formalised (by, and through, electronic platforms) and the traditional routes and forms of inter-officer communication have begun to disappear. Similarly, the context of officer/line manager relations have equally been transformed as traditional forms of supervision have been replaced by target driven systems (see also FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph and Qureshi, 2002).

As a result, the abstraction of officers' relationships within the organisation is mirrored in their growing detachment from the public. The moral impetus of policing, in parallel with the police's obligations to the public, has become reduced as police interaction with them is increasingly mediated through the impersonal filter of electronic communication. Likewise, the low-level functions of the police, which previously provided the most opportunities for positive and constructive engagement with the public, have increasingly been pushed up the hierarchy creating a largely de-skilled police frontline (Terpstra et al, 2019). Terpstra et al (2019) identify two substantive issues as accounting for these changes; a) organizational changes, and b) the impact of different views on policing. In terms of the former, this seems to have been realised, predominantly, through the amalgamation of smaller police organisations into larger national policing bodies. As a result, we have witnessed more standardised work processes and a greater uniformity across all areas of police work. Central to this has been the introduction of electronic systems to simultaneously streamline communication but also to facilitate the recording of information in respect of performance management. In this way we can show how thinking about policing has evolved over recent decades to centralise discourse of cost effectiveness, the role of information in relation to police operations and the notion of 'core' police business.

The move towards the abstraction and technologisation of police processes, according to Terpstra et al (2019), was partially, as noted above, in response to the prevalence of 'new' threats of cybercrime, organised crime and terrorism. And whilst this may resonate with some of the concepts of 'high policing' (see Brodeur, 1983, 2007), the concept of the Abstract Police is helpful in that it allows us to explore, particularly, the impact of these processes on the lower level operational practices of policing and those who undertake them. In particular, Terpstra et al (2019) direct our attention to the negative effects of such developments, namely a reduction in scope for police officers to assume responsibility and ownership of the issues for which the public seek support. Furthermore, these processes can be seen as impacting on staff development through narrowing the scope of leadership, inhibiting the use of discretion and simultaneously undermining both the culture of the police and the notion of community policing. Similarly, this, the authors argue, leads to, "isolation, fatalism and powerlessness" (2019, p.15), issues which parallel the broader concept of risk aversion in policing (see Flanagan, 2008, and Heaton, 2010).

The concept of the Abstract Police therefore provides a helpful concept for both exploring and understanding many of the changes that we can identify occurring in contemporary police organisations. By focusing on the two broad elements of organisational change and changing views on policing, the concept allows a focused analysis that allows us to see policing, and its transformation, in isolation. That is, the concept works well as a case study on the example of policing and policework, where the drivers of the changes can be distinguished as being firmly positioned in the field of policing. By taking such a stance, the authors position the concept as one that can apply in a number of different jurisdictions where similar change and reforms are identified.

However, it is possible that the concept of the 'Abstract Police' can be complemented and contextualised further, by exploring it through a lens informed by the concept of the 'Hybrid Organisation' (Noordegraaf, 2006, 2011, 2015) and the 'Managerial State' (Clarke & Newman, 1997). In doing so, and with reference to the concept of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1997), this paper will argue that many of the forms of change associated with the Abstract Police are also, in part, driven by broader developments within public sector organisations. Furthermore, it will be argued that the broader processes of institutional isomorphism may also be driving more generic cultural changes (i.e. applicable to a wider range of public sector organisations) within the police.

Hybrid Organisations and The Managerial State

The work of Mirko Noordegraaf (2006, 2011, 2015) allows us to understand more fully the relationship between the increasingly neo-liberal nature of western states (itself, a result of the drift into late modernity) and changes to the ways in which we view and configure public sector agencies. Whilst Noordegraaf (2006) focuses on the context of such changes in the care and welfare sectors, the parallels to policing are readily apparent. Accordingly, this section will draw on his work but contextualise it in terms of the policing sector of public services.

To Noordegraaf, public sector institutions occupy incredibly complex positions in contemporary society where members of professions work with vulnerable service users against a backdrop of converging (and not necessarily compatible) group and individual interests. The complexity of their position is based on the rise of post-industrial societies which have led to evolving demands on such agencies. Fundamentally, notes Noordegraaf (2006), whilst we are incredibly aware that we exist within a substantially shifting society, the nature and cause of these changed circumstances remains unclear. On this subject, he notes, "The ultimate truth about societal conditions cannot be found, although time and again experts present fresh, absolute truths. The fact that there is no absolute truth may actually be the only truth to be found in contemporary societies" (Noordegraaf, 2006, p.183).

Central to the new realities of organisational life is the central disconnect, or contradiction, that takes place against a fragmented narrative created by separate and competing voices of authority. Similarly, the range and form of networked relationships, public expectation and the nature and extent of risks have all changed to help create an increasingly complex operating environment for already elaborate operations undertaken within the public sector. Simultaneously, the late modern mood encourages a

viewpoint that disparages expertise and complexity. As a result, the police, and other public sector organisations, tend to revert to simplistic and uniform measures of quality rather than those informed by professional judgment. Work by Goode and Lumsden (2018), for example, suggests that, in policing, this is already the case with organisational concern failing to extend beyond the simple and reductive binary of judging an operational outcome to be 'successful' or 'unsuccessful'. To Noordegraaf (2006), these responses are common in the post-NPM landscape and effectively convey that organisations have a full understanding of the new social conditions which they find themselves within. Whilst, the old tripartite system (see Millen and Stephens, 2011) under which the police of England and Wales used to operate recognised (in terms of its structure) the responsibility to both the state and to the public, it can be argued that scrutiny brought to bear from both sides has increased and intensified as the processes of late modernity have taken hold. Neo-liberalism is intrinsically linked to late modernity (see, for example, Ayers, 2005, Dawson, 2013) and has led to a reduction in police budgets in England and Wales via austerity programmes (see Lumsden and Black, 2017). As a result, we have witnessed practitioner opposition, for example the Police Federation's '#cutshaveconsequences' campaign (Metropolitan Police Federation, 2015), which seeks to highlight the impact of austerity on police budgets. Arguably, this suggests a growing awareness of the centralised fiscal control brought to bear by the state as it reconfigured the public sector. Simultaneous to these processes, it can be claimed that the relationship between the police and the public has intensified. The advent of the risk society (see Beck, 1992) has led to growing insecurity amongst the public and increased demands made upon the police in respect of their work (Cockcroft, 2013). This, Loader (2006) reminds us, has led, in some cases, to the police engaging with 'citizen focus', a philosophy derived from NPM whereby public opinion is sought and responded to without deeper analysis. The argument is not so much that these constitute new or novel arrangements but that these represent an intensification of the expectations that are held of the police by both the state and the public during recent history.

As a result, public sector organisations position themselves in the most effective manner to maximise their credibility in the eyes of the state, but also, likewise, to maximise the degree of legitimacy with which the public view them. Here, Noordegraaf (2006) identifies another contradiction. The managerial control offered by NPM, for example in respect of the '3 E's' of effectiveness, efficiency and economy (see Morgan and Newburn, 1997) that were brought to bear on British policing, is essentially incompatible with the parallel focus upon citizen focus and service user satisfaction. Quite simply, suggests Noordegraaf, "managers and markets pull service organisations in different directions" (Noordegraaf, 2006, p.183). An example of the impact of contemporary arrangements is shown through the work of Herrington and Millie (2006) who noted how the introduction of reassurance policing (see Tuffin et al, 2006) as a result of growing public expectations drew police attention towards quality of life issues, and away from the more centralised core priorities identified by the state.

To make professions subject to two essentially external controlling powers, the generic and prescriptive management offered by NPM on the one hand and the weight of public expectation on the other, offers substantial benefits to the new orthodoxy of the post-industrial neo-liberal state. Traditionally, professions are characterized by substantial autonomy. However, this sits uncomfortably with two of the key ideological tenets applied to public services under neo-liberalism – 'cost control' and 'transparency and accountability' (Noordegraaf, 2006, p.184). The inferential and experiential aspects of traditional models of professionalism, according to Noordegraaf (2006), are unlikely to see professional decision-making constrained by the apparent arbitrariness of

organisational budget forecasts. Likewise, a traditional model of professionalism would see professionals coming to their own conclusions (derived from the application of professional knowledge to their operational context) about what constitutes effectiveness in their field, rather than this being determined by public perception. As a result, concludes Noordegraaf (2006), “new types of control attempt to de-professionalise, ‘proletarianise’, bureaucratised, or ‘corporatise’ professionals” (p. 184) to allow organisations to protect the ‘service ethics’ that are central to the new measures of organizational effectiveness. Importantly, the direction of the managerial professionalisation identified here was determined very much by the requirements of neo-liberalism. This is relevant as this neo-liberal impetus helps to explain the prioritised focus on the customer and the need to re-orient ‘professions’ to the service ethics of organisations and, in contrast, away from the disciplinary context of their professions. As a result, we can see how the importance of (or, at least, scope for application of) professional knowledge in a traditional sense has been diminished, as more generic neo-liberal conceptions of effectiveness become embedded within organisations.

Noordegraaf (2011) develops these ideas further by noting that, progressively, organisations are trying to mitigate against the professional socialisation with which professionals enter the workplace. Instead, organisations have to socialise their employees so that they develop sympathies to the processes of that organisation (rather than, solely, an identity rooted in a profession). Applying such a process to the medical context, Noordegraaf (2011), shows how, “Maintaining good medical practice, for example, is about ‘being able to explain how to contribute to an audit’, and working with colleagues is about ‘working as a member of a team’, ‘sharing information’ and listening to and taking into account the views of other health professionals and agencies” (p.475). Professionalisation is therefore becoming ever more concerned with the meeting of organisational needs rather than those of the profession, not least in promoting perceptions of credibility and legitimacy amongst their key audiences. And whilst such processes are increasingly evidenced in the world around us, it would be unwise to suggest that there was not a degree of interplay between the traditional and contemporary models. Indeed, Noordegraaf (2006, 2011) is quick to point out that we are currently witnessing a model of organisation that straddles both of the forms alluded to above. In this way, the traditional and contemporary models are probably best viewed as ideal types which help us understand the various ideological devices at work, rather than to present an accurate map of the organisational terrain.

Hybrid Organisations: Generic Roles, Generic Pressures

One of the consequences of such discussions about the changing context, form and nature of professions and their impact on practice is an acknowledgement of the growing importance of new pressures upon both professionals and professions. To Frostenson (2015), we might illustrate this with respect to the growing challenges for professionals to, “maintain the boundaries of their professional domains vis-à-vis other professionals, the authorities, market forces, or others” (p.20). This, in turn, might lead to perceptions of a loss of power at the individual level in respect to the organization of work roles, procedural issues, training (and professional knowledge) and ‘ideologies of control’ (2015, p.22). Ideology therefore becomes inextricably connected to the reform process and leads to new ways of organising professional work. Referring to the perceived de-professionalisation amongst teachers in Sweden, for example, Frostenson saw increasingly controlling discourses being applied to the profession.

Putting to one side, for a moment, the extent of the impact upon practice of such processes, it is important to try and frame some form of rationale for the emergence of this phenomenon. Central to any explanation, according to Noordergraaf (2015), is an acknowledgement of two ideal types – professionalism and managerialism. These two types are differentiated by characteristics that reflect very different forms of values. Managerialism is predicated upon the application of control, results driven authority and the underlying value is of ‘efficiency’. Professionalism, conversely, is driven by the organization of self-directed workers, trust-driven authority and the underlying value is of ‘quality’. This differentiation between the two forms explains the widespread belief that such models are essentially incompatible with each other.

The advent of NPM has largely put an end to this polarised distinction (in real terms, if not as ideological types). Instead, what we are increasingly witnessing is ‘hybrid professionalism’ (Noordergraaf, 2015) which refers to ‘professionalism’ being driven down from above to encourage ‘new’ professionals to take responsibility for organisational efficiency. Such ideas resonate closely with the work of Evetts (2013) which differentiates between the ‘ideology’ (p. 788) and the reality of professionalism. And whilst, “ ‘professional’ workers are very keen to grasp and lay claim to the normative values of professionalism” (Evetts, 2013, p. 790) professionalism has essentially become the tool with which practitioners’ behaviours are moulded to mirror the requirements of the organisation. Of note here, is the idea that even for traditional professions organisational (rather than occupational) requirements are increasingly shaping the experience of work. For example, Noordergraaf notes that,

“We show how professionals like medical doctors no longer merely treat patients within health care organizations. Instead, they are forced to organize sound patient treatment—to arrange inter-professional and cross-disciplinary collaboration, to set-up and implement innovation projects, to deal with (scarce) capacity, to align decision processes against the background of financial constraints, and to work with multiple stakeholders” (2015, p.2).

Whilst it might be tempting to attribute the origins of this development solely to NPM, the more accurate explanation likely runs deeper than the mere evolution of new management models and relates to changing societal configurations. The work of Clarke & Newman (1997, cited in Noordergraaf, 2015, p.10) argues that under what they term the ‘managerial state’ the new social arrangements of late modern society create demand for ‘bureaucratic/professional regimes’. In short, “fiscal stress and austerity, as well as changing social relations, work, households, and citizen preferences” (Noordergraaf, 2015, p.10) lead to growing expectations of organizational effectiveness. The convergence of these issues, due to the new settlements which emerged following the decline of the post-war welfare state, has led to widescale change in the relationship between the social, organisational and political-economic spheres. The net result has been an embedding of broadly neo-liberal values, rather than the post war social democratic ideals, as the de facto ideological position of the last 20 years.

To Clarke and Newman (1997) one of the results of this decline in the post war consensus has been a resultant change in the perception of how the public view the institutions which make up the public sector. Previously, there had existed “presumptions of trust” (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p.123) which meant that the professions were generally believed to operate both effectively and in the interest of the public and, as a result, were left largely unscrutinised. Since the re-writing of the social settlement, however, relationships between individuals, identity groups and the community at large have become increasingly formalised as the old presumptions tended to lose traction. Furthermore, issues of trust had become even more acute during the process of the re-configuration of our relationships as the notion of the benevolent and interventionist state had become largely maligned. As the state become rebranded as an ‘enabler’ rather than a ‘provider’ (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p.133), so a vacuum emerged in respect of the previous arrangements’ role in ameliorating the effects of inequality in society. Issues such as race and gender discrimination, whilst unresolved at the structural level, drove distrust (and, therefore, challenges to organisational legitimacy) at the level of interaction with the public sector. This, arguably, is a key reason for the increasing merger of managerial sensibilities into the world view of the public sector professional. As structural inequalities persist, the state removes itself from the role of provider of solutions and the results of those inequalities fall to the institutional level to manage, if not resolve. In this way, contemporary professional identities have expanded to encompass a range of further roles, including constructive engagement with stakeholder groups and external communities, the recording of operational data and a range of further measures seeking to maintain legitimacy amongst external audiences. As we can see, such developments resonate strongly with the concept of the Abstract Police (Terpstra et al, 2019).

As identified previously, managerial attributes tend towards the generic in that the processes associated with them can be viably transposed between public sector organisations. As a result, existing literature has identified a tendency towards isomorphism, the increasing homogeneity of organisations (DiMaggio & Powell). What is important here is to note that such drives towards isomorphism represent, “normative processes” (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p.146), motivated not just by the application of external pressures but, also, of the active pursuit, by organisations, for legitimacy amongst their key audiences. To DiMaggio & Powell (1983) three different explanations emerge to explain isomorphism - ‘coercive’, ‘mimetic’ and ‘normative’ (p. 150). The first is driven by the politicised context within which the organisation is positioned and associated issues of legitimacy. The second occurs as a natural response to the uncertainties which are common to most, if not all, complex organisations. The third, and final, one refers to the narrowing of scope afforded by elements of professionalisation networks such as the influence of Higher Education institutions and professional networks. Importantly, the authors suggest, these three forms are quite difficult to separate or isolate in practice and this appears to be very much the case in terms of contemporary policing.

The police, like other public sector institutions actively engage with professionalisation agendas, for a range of symbolic benefits including those of redefinition, re-legitimisation and the ability to shape discourse around the areas they operate within (Hallenberg and Cockcroft, 2017). Importantly, Clarke & Newman (1997) further highlight the importance of ‘normative’ isomorphism (see DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), showing how the growing homogeneity of organisations is enabled by new management models which influence professionals through a variety of opportunities occasioned by professional bodies, and external and educational networks. Significantly, these models are sufficiently generic to apply to a range of institutional arrangements across the public sector.

Inter-Institutional and Intra-Institutional Isomorphism

The very nature of the concepts that have been addressed in this paper thus far demands some commentary on the different ways in which these processes can be understood in terms of how they impact *between* institutions and *within* institutions. In terms of the former, little commentary exists in respect of understanding the similarities that exist between different criminal justice system agencies. This is not to say that similarities do not exist for clearly they do. By way of example, one can take the work of Cockcroft (2016) which explored the synergies between the cultural worlds of police officers and prison officers. In the article, he suggests cultural commonalities exist between the two roles and that, superficially, it might be possible to identify occupational similarities between the two roles. In particular, he draws attention to the use of discretion by both groups of officers and the presumed commonalities associated with working in the same organisational sphere – the criminal justice system. However, on closer inspection such an approach might be problematic given that both the organisational context (the structure and values of the organisation) and the occupational context (the operational role) are very different. In Cockcroft's commentary, it was the impact of NPM, and the reconfiguration of the public sector, on the working conditions of police officers and prison officers that provided the similarity in outlook, rather than shared experience of working in the criminal justice system.

However, a more acute challenge lies in charting the extent to which cultural isomorphism operates at an intra as opposed to inter organisational level. This paper adopts the position that isomorphism does occur within organisations. However, it is also important to acknowledge a counter argument to this point that suggests that increasing specialisation of police organisations might mitigate against cultural isomorphism by supporting nuanced role-based dispositions which might counteract the generic processes detailed earlier in the paper.

To Terpstra et al (2019), the experience of Scottish police reform has been an increase in the growth of specialisms within the police organisation, especially at the national level and in areas such as "intelligence and crime analysis" (2019, p. 13). Moves toward specialisation have also been identified in other national jurisdictions by, for example, Tong and O'Neill (2019) who show how partnerships between academic and police institutions can open the way for the professionalisation and subsequent specialisation of key police roles such as investigation. The potential for such specialisation to lead to cultural variation amongst officers has been well-documented over time particularly in some of the early work addressing elements of police occupational culture (e.g. Hobbs, 1988, Young, 1991). However, we should exercise caution in assuming that the presence of specialised roles correlates unequivocally with distinct cultural responses. Indeed, research by Balenovich et al (2008) identifies cultural variation between officers within the same role, especially where such roles cut across the traditional symbolic divides of welfare and law enforcement. Whilst specialism may once have created pockets of cultural uniformity, as this research shows it is by no means guaranteed.

This paper suggests that, whilst specialist knowledge and roles continue to proliferate within public sector organisations, there is scope to question their continued influence on cultural manifestations. To do so requires us to return to the tension between organizational and occupational cultures, a

distinction made by Gregory (1983). To Gregory, organizational cultures are driven from above, whereas occupational cultures are driven from below. It follows, therefore, that occupational cultures derive in part from the autonomy and discretion accorded to members of an occupation. The ability to create cultural knowledge relies therefore on freedom to negotiate the interface between one's professional identity and the working environments that one encounters. Conversely, organisational cultures are driven by the leadership and management strata and are projected onto those working at the lower levels. The work of scholars such as Noordegraaf (2006, 2011, and 2015) and Evetts (2013) suggests that recent changes to the configuration of the public sector have reduced discretion, changed the extent to which professional knowledge is largely practice-based and led to generic organisational skills being adopted by practitioners. All these have allowed organisational rather than occupational factors to have an increased impact on the cultural orientation of public sector professionals. Whilst the organisational rationalities associated with NPM may not always transfer wholesale to the culture, according to Doolin et al (2001) their influence can certainly be felt.

Therefore, whilst specialisation is a feature of contemporary police organizations, it can be argued that the drivers of organisational hybridity tend to work against these institutional specialisms creating a unique cultural footprint. In part, this may be due to the fact that some of the emergent specialisms are themselves driven by the centralised controls advocated under NPM. For example, the work of Chan (2001) shows how information technology has served to reinforce the demands for accountability and transparency demanded by the new modes of management. As a result, the development of such innovative ways of working has embedded the new values of the hybrid organisation, particularly those aligned to the 'service ethics' identified by Noordegraaf (2006). As Chan notes, "information technology has allowed police procedures to be more transparent at the level of 'customer interface', and this transparency has become accepted as an indicator of a good police service" (2001, p.156). Such changes, which closely align the operational roles of policing to the institutional values, would, the work of Chan (1997) might suggest, signify a shifting of the 'habitus' to accommodate these significant changes to the policing 'field'.

Cultural Responses to the Hybrid Organisation

If, as Noordegraaf (2015) notes, professional life is becoming increasingly imbued with an awareness of organisational (rather than just occupational) contexts driven by the external environment, we would expect to see related changes at the cultural level of organisational life. Research and commentary has, over recent years, begun to reject assumptions of 'monolithic' assumptions surrounding organisational culture (see, for example, Chan, 1997, Reiner, 2010). Instead, such cultures are increasingly positioned as developing in response to their external environment (Schein, 2004). The work of Martin (2002) expands on this by distinguishing between the 'materialist' base and 'ideational' responses, when she notes that,

'the materialist base consists of attributes such as job descriptions, reporting relationships, pay practices, and formally mandated policies and procedures, which are not part of the cultural superstructure. Culture, then, consists of the ideational elements, such as beliefs and values, that emerge to explain and reinforce a materialist base' (Martin, 2002, p.59).

Changes to how organisations conduct their business, therefore, generate parallel cultural responses. Such processes have for some time been recognised within the context of policing and recent research has substantially altered the way in which we perceive the relationship between work in criminal justice contexts and organisational cultures. However, such insights tend to focus upon external forces relating solely to the police sphere, with Chan's work, for example, drawing attention to the effect of new legislation and responses to scandals in changing organisational dynamics within police organisations. What is largely absent, in comparison, is an acknowledgement of the role played by broader changes, impacting across the wider public sector and driven by broadly neo-liberal ideologies. These changes, note Clarke and Newman (1997), represent not just the pursuit of fiscal stringency, but a re-articulation of the broader concept of 'welfarism' and a re-structuring of those organisations which embed those values.

Furthermore, taking onboard the above argument we might expect to see a greater degree of cultural homogeneity between different organisational groups within the public sector and therefore hypothesise that organisational isomorphism may encourage cultural isomorphism. Evidence already points towards the likelihood of this process. Cockcroft (2016), as noted above, suggests that occupational culture within the broader criminal justice system has largely been impacted by the generic management models which have been applied it and that we should expect to witness some cultural convergence between different institutions. If we direct our attention towards the intra-organisational context, the growing cultural isomorphism between management and non-management roles of the police (see Cockcroft, 2019) provides a lens through which to identify a gradually more generic organisational culture within policing.

The demarcation between management and non-management roles within police organisations in the Anglo-American context can be seen as falling between the police constable or street cop role and that of the police sergeant (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983, Van Maanen, 1984). Whilst tension has traditionally arisen between these roles with, for example, Niederhoffer (1969) identifying the cause as originating in social class differences, Butterfield et al (2005) present a different explanation. To them, the cultural distinction between sergeant and constable is a relatively recent phenomenon, emerging as a direct result of the adoption of NPM and, specifically, the introduction of sergeant's assuming responsibility for individual performance management. With performance management came a necessary distance and one which re-wrote the cultural script of the sergeant to position them firmly on the side of management. In doing so, note Butterfield et al (2005), the distinction between the role of professionals and managers became largely blurred to the extent that modern police sergeants, they suggest, have become recast as 'practitioner managers' (2005, p. 333).

The Impact of Managerial Skills on the Culture of Police Officers

Such changes to the structural position and role of the police sergeant, symptomatic of the impact of NPM values and initiatives, can also be perceived as leading to particular cultural impacts. The more orthodox expectation in this regard is that the advent of new public management has been to remove the sergeant from their previous position as a hub of the traditional canteen culture. One of the significant developments identified by Butterfield et al (2004) was the influence of officer age upon cultural response to managerial initiatives. One sergeant cited in their study, for example, noted how discord had arisen as a consequence of the camaraderie between younger officers and their refusal

to act in accordance with the expectations of older officers. Likewise, In Cockcroft and Beattie's (2009) article exploring the impact of a new performance management initiative, they show how it was the younger officers who most fully embraced the NPM-driven regime and those with longer periods of service who opposed it. This appears to support the view of O'Malley and Hutchinson (2007) that, for those officers joining the police, the pervading managerial ethos will be increasingly less likely to be viewed as incongruous. In this way, managerial principles may well prove less incompatible, culturally, for future generations of police officers.

Traditionally, academic discourse has promoted a discourse of cultural bifurcation within policing (between management and non-management officers) based on the assumption that police officers can be classed as 'management' on the basis of seniority of role or rank. This, increasingly, appears somewhat problematic. First, traditional forms of progression, in the British context at least, have meant that all officers have experienced and worked within the roles that constitute the cultural locus of policing – patrol work. Second, there is an increasingly held presumption that leadership is integral to all elements of policework regardless of role or rank (see Grint & Thornton, 2015, Kilgallon, Wright & Lee, 2015). Indeed, the introduction of new strategic initiatives over recent years certainly provide an explicit ambition of change. For example, the Police Code of Ethics (College of Policing, 2014), outlined new expectations in respect of 'policing principles' and 'standards of professional behaviour' that very much drive ideas of transparency, openness and leading by example at all levels. The net result of this is that the perceived divide between managers and non-managers might be increasingly difficult to maintain in police organisations that are increasingly expected to abide by principles of inclusivity and fairness. In short, the foundations of a changing relationship are, arguably, in place.

Research undertaken by Caless (2011), based on interviews with police leaders, helps us to develop the idea that a presumption of a substantively different orientation between managerial and non managerial police roles is a potentially problematic way of depicting contemporary police organisations. Above, we have seen evidence to suggest that the transactional nature of police management is less likely to be as prevalent within contemporary organisations as was the case in previous eras. One of the key strengths of Caless' work is that forces us to reassess the role and nature that leadership takes within policing contexts. In particular, one striking element is the seeming ambivalence of many of his sample to the concept of leadership in any structured or prescribed sense.

To Caless, two key points emerge however. First, is that the first group of attributes, expected of leaders, represent remarkably generic competencies that would apply to a leader in any organization. Second, is that the competencies expected of constables mirror over half of those expected of leaders. These themselves are of interest to us as they suggest that there is a growing leadership shift towards values that seek to reassure external audiences and communities and to act in ways that are synonymous with the concept of accountability. Furthermore, there is a suggestion that at a strategic level, such values are increasingly expected amongst all ranks.

Where these ideas tend to resonate the most strongly is when we juxtapose them to the context of the post-NPM environment. The first point suggested by Caless' work, that police leadership is to be increasingly seen as a set of generic rather than specialized set of skills support Noordegraaf's (2005,

2015) concept of the 'hybrid' organisation. In particular, one can readily identify the ways in which the key skills expected of police officers correlate strongly with generic skills required throughout the public sector. As the work of Cales suggests, we are witnessing a contraction of the traditional schism dividing lower and upper levels of operation within the police organisation. Whereas Niederhoffer (1966) described the antagonism between management and non-management officers as tantamount to, "internecine class conflict" (1969, p.18), it is now possible to identify a potentially different set of dynamics.

As the Managerial State (Clarke & Newman, 1997) becomes further embedded and we witness a growing normalisation of the processes of organisational hybridity and isomorphism, it becomes apparent that we might expect such changes to act as a catalyst for cultural change. Recent decades have seen a growing assumptions surrounding the processes that define organisational culture which posits that the external environment in which an organisation is situated will influence the cultural orientation of that body (Chan, 1997, Schein, 2004). As seen previously, this occurs as a result of the 'materialist base' (Martin, 2002, p.59) of the occupation, which impacts on the experiences of individuals who work in it, and in turn changes to reflect the new expectations and rationalities of the 'hybrid' organisation.

Policing, Hybridity and Cultural Change

Organisational cultures are notoriously difficult to measure or quantify. Even for less ambitious endeavours such as charting broad and qualitative shifts in cultural emphasis, substantial caveats need to be applied. That said, and notwithstanding these issues, there is some evidence to suggest that police culture might be changing to reflect the new configuration of the public sector.

The work of Cockcroft (2019) draws on the work of Sarah Charman (2017) which explored the processes whereby probationer officers become socialised into a UK police constabulary. Her work supports the idea that the values we have come to associate with police culture over recent decades are being gradually replaced by new cultural orientations. In particular, she identifies the rise of '#newbreed' officers (p. 272) who see the police role, and the skillsets required to be a police officer, as changing. One of the key cultural differences identified relates to attitudes towards the often conflicting police roles of law enforcement and welfare. In particular, the welfare elements of policework, often derided by officers in the past, were increasingly viewed as, "generic, rather than gendered" (Cockcroft, 2019, p.35) features of policework. Increasingly, Charman (2017) notes, such officers tend to view their occupational focus in terms of responding to vulnerability, rather than the imposing the law. Other research also highlights the broader existence of such trends. For example, research conducted by Cochran and Bromley (2003) identified similar trends by showing that new cultural orientations (which reinforce the more generic skills of the hybrid organisation) were emerging which prioritised community policing over traditional law enforcement roles. It is interesting to note the apparent rewriting of the cultural script of policing, according to studies such as those cited above. While there is often a reluctance for academics to acknowledge cultural change in police organisations (see Sklansky, 2007), it appears that cultural change is identifiable and that, in part, this may be due to the hybrid structure of the public sector driving isomorphic cultural responses amongst those professional identities.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore contemporary accounts of organisational and cultural change within police organisations. Whilst acknowledging the contribution made by earlier writers, particularly in respect of the impact of broader changes at the level of policing (see Terpstra et al, 2019), the paper sought to situate such changes, in part, within the wider context of those changes to public sector organisations caused by the development of 'hybrid' organisations (Noordegraaf, 2006, 2011, 2015) under the conditions of the 'Managerial State' (Clarke & Newman, 1997). In doing so, the paper suggests that the increasingly isomorphic nature of public sector organisations has driven the increased prevalence of generic skill sets in associated professions and that these may have contributed, in part, to some of the cultural changes which have been identified in some pieces of research. The paper also represents an extension of the concept of the Abstract Police by suggesting that many of the changes and reforms that have been initiated within policing over recent years, cannot be completely understood without situating these within the context of public sector change, rather than seeking to solely understand such changes in respect of police reform processes. Simultaneously, it has sought to propose that, as a result, police culture is increasingly being shaped by organisational rather than occupational demands.

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