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# THE ABSTRACT POLICE AND POLICE CULTURE

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# THEMES

- Social Change and New Policing Context
- Late Modernity, Post Modernity and Policing
- The Abstract Police
- Hybrid Organisations and the Managerial State
- Hybrid Organisations: Generic Roles & Generic Pressures
- Cultural Responses to the Hybrid Organisation
- Policing, Hybridity and Cultural Change
- Conclusion
- References



## INTRODUCTION - SOCIAL CHANGE AND NEW POLICING CONTEXT

- The relationship between social change, policing and police culture is well established (Chan, 1997)
- The concept of the Abstract Police allows us to understand more fully the impact of changes to the discourses of policing, changes to organizational structures and changes to the wider police reform agenda.
- The aim of this presentation is to tentatively contextualise the idea of the Abstract Police in relation to wider changes around public sector professionalism.



## LATE MODERNITY, POST MODERNITY AND POLICING

- Reiner (1992) 'Policing a Postmodern Society' represented one of the first academic attempts to explore the relationship between late modernity and policing.
- The transformation of British policing since 1950s due to structural and cultural change (see Kaplan-Lyman, 2012)
- Recruitment, Training and Discipline
- The Rule of Law
- The Strategy of Minimal Force
- Non-partisanship
- The Service Role
- Preventive Policing
- Policing Effectiveness
- Accountability



## CONT.

- These 'complex and social changes' (p.773) constituted a, “qualitative break in the development of contemporary society” (p.773)
- Processes associated with late modernity impact on individuals in ways that direct them to modify (and usually to intensify) their expectations of policing and security.
- A key element of related reforms has been to re-orient the culture of the police to become engaged with values of quality of service.
- “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...” (Waters, 2007, p.263).



## 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
- 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
- Shows the reform agenda impacts upon 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.



## CONT.

- 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.
- This growing disconnect for officers in respect of how they relate, engage and interact with both their organization and their public has distinct cultural implications for police officers.
- Abstraction leads to growing detachment from the public
- The moral impetus of policing, in parallel with the police's obligations to the public, have become reduced as police interaction with the public is increasingly mediated through the impersonal filter of electronic communication.
- Likewise, the low-level functions of the police, which provide the most opportunities for positive and constructive engagement with the public, have increasingly been pushed up the hierarchy creating an increasingly de-skilled police frontline (Terpstra et al, 2019).





## CONT.

- 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.
- The move towards the abstraction and technologization of police processes, partially is a response to the prevalence of 'new' threats of cybercrime, organised crime and terrorism.
- The concept of the 'Abstract' police is helpful in that it allows us to explore, particularly, the impact of these processes on the operational practices of policing and those who undertake them.

## IMPACTS

- A reduction in scope for police officers to assume responsibility and ownership of the issues for which the public seek support.
- These processes, the authors argue, lead to, “isolation, fatalism and powerlessness” (2019, p.15), issues which parallel the broader concept of risk aversion (see Flanagan, 2008, and Heaton, 2010).



## EVALUATION

- A helpful model for both exploring and understanding many of the changes which we can identify occurring in contemporary police organisations.
- The model allows a focused analysis that allows us to see policing, and its transformation, in isolation.
- The model works well as a case study on the example of policing and policework, where the drivers of the changes identified remain firmly in the field of policing. By taking such a stance, the authors position the model as one that can apply in a number of different jurisdictions where similar change and reforms can be identified.

## BROADENING THE CONCEPT...

- The concept of the Abstract Police can be complemented and contextualised further, through exploring it through a lens informed by the concept of the 'Hybrid Organisation' (Noordegraaf, 2006, 2011, 2015) and the 'Managerial State' (Clarke & Newman, 1997).
- The related concept of Organisational Isomorphism (Clarke & Newman, 1997), allows us to link changes associated with the Abstract Police to broader developments in public sector organisations.
- Furthermore, it can be argued that the broader processes of organisational isomorphism may also be driving more generic (i.e. applicable to a wider range of public sector organisations) cultural changes 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.
- Public sector institutions have become incredibly complex
  - Professionals work with vulnerable service users
  - The work context is made up of of converging (and not necessarily compatible) group and individual interests
- New pressures coalesce around changes to
  - public expectation,
  - the nature and extent of risks



## CONTINUED

- The late modern mood encourages a viewpoint that disparages expertise and complexity
- 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.
- However, “managers and markets pull service organisations in different directions” (Noordegraaf, 2006, p.183).



# AUTONOMY AND THE PROFESSIONS

- Autonomy 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).
- 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.



## HYBRID ORGANISATIONS: GENERIC ROLES, GENERIC PRESSURES

- “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).
- Decline in “presumptions of trust” (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p.123) leads to the increasing absorption of managerial sensibilities into the world view of the public sector professional.
- Isomorphic nature of public sector agencies.





# CULTURAL RESPONSES TO THE HYBRID ORGANISATION

- Cultures are increasingly positioned as developing in response to their external environment (Schein, 2004).
- Changes to how organisations conduct their business, therefore, generate parallel cultural responses - (i.e. Ideational responses to the materialist base) (Martin, 2002)



## FROM ORGANISATIONAL ISOMORPHISM TO CULTURAL ISOMORPHISM?

- Change
  - Traditional cultural bifurcation between management/leadership and lower ranks (Niederhoffer, 1967, Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983)
  - Leadership increasingly viewed as integral to all elements of policework regardless of role or rank (see Grint & Thornton, 2015, Kilgallon, Wright & Lee, 2015)
  - Ambivalence of many police leaders to the concept of 'leadership' (Caless, 2011)
  - Police competencies between leadership and non leadership roles often overlap (Caless, 2011)

## CONTINUED

- Normalisation of managerialism (O'Malley and Hutchinson, 2007)
- 'nouveau police sub-culture' (p. 108) which highly valued community service (Cochran and Bromley, 2003)
- '#newbreed officers' (Charman, 2017)
- Differentiation of cultural resistance to role narrowing (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2007)
- a distortion of the traditional, 'boundaries between professional and managerial work' – rise of the 'practitioner manager' (Butterfield et al 2005, p. 331)



## CONCLUSION

- At the same time, 'Abstraction' is not just an issue pertaining to the interests of policing
- The work of Noordegraaf and others shows how occupational identities are becoming abstracted from traditional reference points (autonomy, discretion, etc) and more formerly recast to support organizational needs.
- Does this lead us to revisit the traditional distinction between organizational and occupational culture?

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