Maintaining democratic policing: the challenge for police leaders

Professor Colin Rogers

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The democratic policing model is the corner stone of the policing profession in many Western democracies, including Australia and New Zealand. A democratic approach guides the work that police do, and the way that they do it. Policing has seen many changes, but we have - arguably - seen the pace of that change speed up in recent years. We have seen, too, a shift in the drivers of change as the age of austerity in the public sector develops momentum. In this paper Professor Colin Rogers reflects on recent changes in the policing landscape in the UK, and considers whether some of these changes give rise to unintended consequences for the democratic policing approach. I urge you to think critically about the contents of this paper, and consider whether some of the issues raised by Professor Rogers are apparent and important in the Australasian context. If they are, what might we do about it?

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INTRODUCTION

The policing function in most democratic countries is currently undergoing a series of radical changes, not only economically through different austerity measures, but organisationally and structurally through the introduction of various reviews into police pay, working conditions etc. For example, in the UK the Audit Commission (2010) and Winsor (2011) have suggested such changes as direct entry schemes to the rank of inspector and superintendent as well as setting different levels of advancement for payment of constables.

These changes may appear to some as superficial tinkering with the way the police perform their practical function, and indeed appear to be aimed at the delivery of street level policing. However, the effects of such changes may manifest themselves in a far more subtle manner surrounding the very philosophy of policing as understood since its modern inception. The unforeseen implications of such changes have the potential to store up challenges and problems for police leaders if not recognised and understood.

Contemporary democratic policing normally claims its roots and legitimacy in the fact that it is supported by communities in the carrying out of their du-ties. Hence respect for and continued interaction with communities is vital support to allow the police to carry out their function. This is particularly so when discussing the democratic policing model.

DEFINING DEMOCRATIC POLICING

As Dunleavy and O'Leary (1987) point out, the concept of democracy is best understood through its Greek roots, with demos meaning 'the citizen body' and cracy meaning 'the rule of'. Therefore the great advantage of public policing in democratic countries is that it is accountable to every citizen through the mechanisms of representative government (Bayley and Shearing 2005). This in turn means that the police have a legitimacy within communities, which makes the application of their duties much easier. Defining the idea of a democratic policing model can, however, be difficult. Whilst the antithesis of democratic policing is the police state, democracy itself has many meanings and definitions. That said, there are certain important underlying themes and elements to the idea of democracy. These are consensus, freedom and equality, within which the concept of democratic policing needs to be situated. In the following paragraphs we

consider these underlying themes in greater detail.

Consensus

All politically civilised societies owe their continuing existence to a consensus concerning the foundations of society (Berkley 1969). Citizens agree upon a common purpose, the procedures by which these purposes are to be affected and the institutions which are intended to preserve them. Without consensus, therefore, no democratic system would survive for very long. Aligned to the concept of consensus is the idea that society allows policing by consent, which is a crucial concept for how we think about public policing in most Western Societies. Countries such as USA and the UK and Canada have historically been source countries for police expertise and training for developing countries, based upon the premise that policing is supported by consensus and the consent of the public. By comparing police systems based on consent and consensus with alternative, state-centred, social ordered systems consent based policing generally appears in a favourable light (Sklansky2008). That's not to say that everything in the democratic policing model is rosy, of course, and the consent of some groups to being policed has sometimes been lacking or unsatisfactory (Goldsmith 2001). One example is the policing of some minority ethnic groups in different countries. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of needing the consent of people to being policed still appears to retain a certain value.

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However, the idea of a model of policing based upon near full consent of the governed is now open to question. Broad social changes, as well as changes to police management mean that there needs to be a reappraisal of the idea of consent-based policing. As Fukuyama (1999, 2005) suggests there has been a rise in scepticism and distrust among citizens in western societies towards institutions representing political authority and public service. This scepticism can also erode the confidence required to support the idea of legitimacy from the public that the police require. But not many would argue that this should lead to the end of the police.

Freedom and equality

Another vital element of democracy is 'Freedom', and in particular that individuals in society need freedom to participate in politically motivated discussion and are able to hold government officials to account. Police do not meet citizens on an equal footing. Police are equipped with additional legal powers, both formal and informal, and they also carry weapons as the tools of their trade (Skansky 2008).No matter how efficient the police may be and no matter how careful they are to observe civil liberties of long standing, they will always have to fight their way against an undercurrent of opposition and criticism from some citizens, who are also the very people they are paid to serve and protect and to which, in the last analysis, they are responsible. This is the enduring paradox of the police in a democracy (Manning,2008).

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Further complicating issues is that policing is no longer monopolised by the public police, that is, the police entrusted by government with a monopoly on the use of state sanctioned force (Klockars 1985). Policing is now widely offered by institutions other than the state, most importantly by private companies on a commercial basis and by communities on a volunteer basis. What we have witnessed increasingly over the past decade the rise of pluralised policing provision (Crawford et al. 2005, McLaughlin 2007). The great advantage of public policing in democratic countries is that it is accountable to every citizen through the mechanisms of representative government. This is not the case for commercial private policing organisations, who are accountable - ultimately - to their shareholders.

LINE OF POLICE OFFICERS IN THE MALL, LONDON

Several major works have historically described and analysed democratic accountability of policing and its importance . Heavy weight scholars such as Bittner (1980), Sklansky (2008), and Punch (2011) have all contributed to the notion that democratic policing cannot survive without accountability. In support of these seminal writers, one of the most important documents regarding democratic accountable policing in Europe is the recent 2008 publication by the Organisation for Security

and Cooperation Europe (OSCE, 2008). This publication reinforces the key principles of democratic policing, in particular police accountability and transparency. Here, democratic policing is considered to require that the police be and consider themselves to be accountable to;

- The citizens
- Their representatives
- The State and
- The law.

Therefore public police activities ranging from behaviour and attitude, strategies for police operations, appointment procedures and even budget management must be open to scrutiny by a variety of oversight institutions. Furthermore, if a central feature of democratic policing is the consent of the people, prerequisites for gaining public support should be 'providing transparency in police operations and mutual understanding with the public the police serve and protect' (OSCE 2008:13). The recent introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales is considered partly to be a bridge between communities and police as a mechanism to strengthen police accountability to the public (Rogers and Gravelle 2012).

THE THREAT OF RATIONALISATION TO DEMOCRATIC POLICING

It is clear that due to external pressures, mainly viewed as economic necessity, police services across many countries have embarked upon an unprecedented rationalisation of their work. One of the godfathers of modern social thinking - Max Weber (1957) - claimed that it is natural for all bureaucratic organisations to rationalise their operations from time to time. But there has been increasing demand from social, political and economic forces for the police to become more efficient, economic and effective in recent years. This is understandable given the recent and likely continued reduction of police budgets, but its implications lead us somewhere new. Building upon Weber's belief that rationalisation is natural in bureaucratic organsiations, Ritzer (2013) introduces us to the idea of Macdonaldisation, or the process by which the business principles of the fast food restaurant come to dominate more and more sectors of society. In practice, according to Ritzer, there are four main criteria that can be examined to gauge the extent to which an organisation is undergoing this process. These are:

- Efficiency
- Calculability
- Predictability, and
- Control.

Of course these areas are not stand-alone, and indeed overlap in many instances. In addition to Ritzer's analysis we can also add a fifth element, that of franchise, which is also relevant when discussing the current policing process in many countries. A cursory examination of the criteria highlighted by Ritzer allows us to recognise just how much of this process is already embedded within our police organisations.

Efficiency

This aspect relies upon searching for the optimum approach to achieve a desired outcome (Ritzer, 2013). Placing more resources in certain areas that appear to be more involved in crime and anti-social behaviour rather than others is believed to be a way of ensuring efficient use of resources (Ross and Pease, 2008).

POLICE AT THE G20 LONDON PROTESTS

Of course this type of approach is dependent upon the greater use of intelligence systems and a greater use of technology. This has meant the introduction of such activities as crime analysis, crime mapping and intelligence led policing (Harfield et al, 2008). In addition police are now equipped with a plethora of new technology that enables them to take fingerprints of suspects on the street, automatic registration recognition software for identifying suspect vehicles that are linked to databases that provide information regarding the owners, as well as a number of other technological innovations which are designed to make the provision of policing services more efficient.

However, rationalisation as described by Ritzer relies upon a number of different types of efficiency. For example, simplifying the product on offer is more efficient than providing a complex choice. This means for the police the streamlining of major processes (Gravelle, 2012). In most police forces, for example, the use of call centres to handle calls from the customers (public) is utilised, who then employ a triage approach to the nature of the enquiry and rationalise whether or not the matter is one for the police to deal with or whether someone else should handle the matter (Rogers and Gravelle, 2012). Additionally, the introduction of

nationally designed forms provides for a standardisation across different police force areas, so that wherever a person is arrested, a standard service is applied.

Calculability

Here, the emphasis is on things that can be 'counted' as it makes it easier to determine quantitative efficiency. In the past decade or so there has been an enormous increase in the dependence of the police upon the use of statistics. This is so, not just in the counting of recorded crimes, which has always been the case, but an increase in statistics to fuel the drive for so-called 'intelligence-led policing'. This in turn can produce crime hotspots, ultimately leading to predictive strategies, whereby the police can, it is alleged, become more efficient at catching those who commit crime (Ratcliffe, 2008). Further, once it is quantified, a process becomes more predictable, which we return to below.

MANCHESTER POLICE OFFICERS IN PICCADILLY GARDENS

Calculability also allows for the illusion of quality. Whilst detractors of the police may point to poor quality of service for victims (Walklate, 2007), the police will point to the excellent numbers of detections they have in order to support the view that they are providing a quality service. This leads us onto the next criteria, that of predictability.

Predictability

Perhaps this area is one that appeals to the police organisation the most. Rationalisation emphasises such things as discipline, order, formalisation, routine, and methodical operation. This is of course linked directly to calculability, but it emphasises predictability from one time or place to another with no surprises. The current vogue for Evidence Based Practice (EBP) (Williamson, 2008) encapsulates the idea that whatever an organisation does should be underpinned by evidence of 'what works'. Basing decisions on such evidence allows the predictability of given (desirable) outcomes from a set of practice decisions. Predictability also allows for replication of service. The use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by police call centres for example, mean that individuals who call the

police with a problem have that problem categorised and are dealt with in a particular way once the problem has been identified within the criteria framework.

Therefore, predictability, utilising the so called 'scientific' approach and comprising of such factors as intelligence-led policing, the use of analysts, profiling techniques, (individual and community), common use of forms and the same type of response to particular types of problems, allows for a scripting between customer and provider. It also – arguably – sets the scene for customers to identify problems and provide solutions. In many senses, then, predictability allows for the next stage of the process seen in the rationalisation of policing; that of control.

Control

Policing is, by its very nature, an activity that involves control; whether of people in certain circumstances or of events and incidents (Klockars, 1985). It is an activity which involves the use of power and it follows that control is a vital aspect of policing. However, this aspect of control has been exaggerated by the adaption of the rationalisation process. The police record calls for help as incidents which are allocated a reference number in much the same way as crimes are allocated a crime number. These calls are subject to control by the police, using the triage style system described earlier. So depending on what the police define as your problem, determines the type of result. It also, arguably, determines the level of quality and service you receive, and the level you perceive you should receive from them. For example, if a person calls the police because someone has caused damage to their car overnight, this call will be subject to a decision regarding whether or not it is worth sending a police officer to visit the victim and they may even be asked to call at the police station at a time and date convenient for the police. Controlling the incident and the victim is important for the police if they are to maintain control of their resources and achieve the rationalisation that they need.

Franchise

The final element of Macdonaldisation is franchising. Franchising is a system in which one large firm grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade name and processes to a number of smaller firms. Franchise holders, although legally independent, must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company (Dicke, 1992). For franchise of production to be maximised central control needs to be maximised. In many senses we now see the franchising of policing services, particularly in England

and Wales but in many other countries also, which is part of the rationalisation process. There has been a slow but steady increase in 'selling off' parts and functions of the public police to private companies. Currently, the idea of 'outsourcing' such fundamental policing practices as foot patrols, investigations, prisoner escort, as well as many of the so called 'back room' functions of policing, appears to be gaining momentum. Should this process continue, there may be problems with the accountability of public policing, as private policing provision shifts accountability to shareholders and increased profit rather than on quality of service as a whole.

PROBLEMS FOR POLICE LEADERS

How does this rationalised approach present problems for leaders in the police? Well, one of the major problems for police leaders if this approach continues at pace can be something called the Irrationality of Rationality (Weber 1957). Rational systems inevitably spawn irrational consequences. They serve on occasions to deny any sort of human reason. Goldstein (1979) identifies in part the problem by this example:

> Complaints from passengers wishing to use the Bagnall to Green Fields bus service that drivers were speeding past bus queues of up to 30 people with a smile and a wave of the hand, have been met by a statement pointing out that it is impossible for the drivers to keep to their timetable if they have to stop for passengers. (Goldstein 1979:236)

Preoccupation with the smooth running of the organisation for its own ends can take priority over the fulfilment of the initial purpose of the organisation. For example, the modern police in England and Wales, traditionally associated with the Metropolitan Police Act 1829, was based upon crime prevention through surveillance, with criminal detections being secondary in its core function. Clearly things have changed, and the core role for the police, at present, and within the rationalisation process, is the detection of crimes within the framework of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control as discussed above.

The future of policing continues and will continue to be formed by the rationalisation process.

All bureaucracies risk becoming so preoccupied with the running of the organisation, and getting so involved in their methods of operating, that they appear to lose sight of the primary purposes for which they were created. Retaining that vision will be a major challenge for police leaders. Further, as the rationalisation process becomes more and more embedded within organisations such as the police, it may come to dominate and be less possible to escape from. This is what Weber (see Ritzer, 2013) meant when he referred to the Iron Cage of Irrationality. Despite the economic benefits that rationalisation undoubtedly brings, it is these kinds of problems that need to be acknowledged so that police leaders can face them with their eyes wide open.

POLICE IN LONDON, 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

The future of policing continues and will continue to be formed by the rationalisation process, propelled across most democratic countries by an economic recession that fits in with many modern governments' philosophy about the provision of public services, including the public police. Consequently, the rationalisation process may assist in fuelling a drive for policing for profit and the interests of commerce, not necessarily policing for community. The increased use of private provision opens up all sorts of questions regarding accountability and governance in terms of the community, and we may witness an era when accountability becomes reduced to accountancy.

Potentially, therefore, the very legitimacy that the police depend upon from communities could be under threat.

What we may also witness - and arguably have already witnessed in some organisations - is the introduction of a 'fast food' style provision of policing services to communities who have to queue for service, delivered by semi-qualified police assistants overseen by the manager of the day; presumably through some link to the accountability processes of the public police. However, one can never be certain of satisfaction of the product received. Although there may be an illusion of quality of service, rather like the complaints procedures seen in some fast food outlets.

Some believe that the rationalisation process leads to a de-humanising of workers who function only within the bureaucratic rules of rationality (Ritzer, 2013). Therefore

the type of worker required under this strict approach may be one who will not question, or display the ability to use skills and knowledge unless it is required to actually improve the rationalisation process. Under the rationalisation process, then, it is not desirous to invest in training and education of police officers to a high standard, who can deal with and handle complex issues, utilising discretion based upon a wide professional and academic base of knowledge and informed by various disciplines. This is perhaps more prevalent for those staff considered to be generalists in their field rather than specialist staff. However, limiting investment to the lowest amount of training that the police feel their staff need, especially at those with regular customer interface, can be problematic. Undertrained staff that receive the minimum amount of training can actually damage the support required by the police from the public in the democratic policing model. Potentially, therefore, the very legitimacy that the police depend upon from communities could be under threat.

METROPOLITAN POLICE STAND READY

Rationalisation is very much quantitatively driven, very often at the expense of quality of service to the person at the receiving end, be they witness, victim or perpetrator. Satisfying the demands for numbers could become paramount over service. Senior police officers will need to be politically aware of the impact of such an approach. They will have to possess skills to negotiate strong political pressure whilst trying to ensure that service, and the foundational principles of democratic policing, are maintained. This calls, perhaps, for a different kind of senior police officer than hitherto required. They, along with their senior colleagues, will need to possess business acumen and associated skills to navigate the organisation through potentially difficult times.

CONCLUSION

Any democratic policing model, if it is to be truly that, must have the support of the community it serves in order to function properly. The democratic policing model provides the legitimacy required for the police to function with and alongside the public. By applying the rationalisation process continually and by becoming so engrossed in the system itself, the danger is that what the community need from the police and what the police want to deliver will become separated by this process. The so called 'service gap', which involves the difference between what the public want from its police and what the police want to give to the public, could in fact become wider. Indeed, already, we see assertions that the police and public in some democratic countries have become separated (Sergeants, 2009).

The challenge for police leaders does not just lie in external environmental threats. Understanding the internal environment and drivers for change and how they can affect the very philosophy of democratic policing is equally important.

The UK experience suggests there is growing recognition of the damage to the democratic policing model that the pursuit of rationalisation can have. The publication of Lord Stephens independent report into policing is one example (Stephens, 2013) in which he claims that neighbourhood policing teams, the visible manifestation of democratic policing in that country, should be preserved at all costs in order to preserve that model. This clearly highlights the unintended consequences of continual rationalisation without thought for the long term impact.

The challenge for police leaders does not just lie in external environmental threats. Understanding the internal environment and drivers for change and how they can affect the very philosophy of democratic policing is equally important. The rationalisation process itself may create a de-motivated workforce, one that does not buy in to providing a quality of service to people who need help. Whilst an over emphasis on quantitative measurements of success may cloud the possible poor quality of service the public receives. Police leaders need to understand the unforeseen consequences of the rationalising process in order to ensure that community support and interaction is not side-lined. Instead it should be maintained and encouraged to grow through greater innovation in engagement and communication methods. This is at the very heart of the idea of the democratic policing model and will be one of the greatest challenges for police leaders into the future.

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