Leading change in policing: Police culture and the psychological contract

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LEADING CHANGE IN POLICING: POLICE CULTURE AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

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ABSTRACT
In a rapidly evolving society, the role of policing is constantly changing and is a much more complex role than in the past. Managing of police organisations must balance the needs of the community as well as the needs of staff. The psychological contract is an important consideration in staff management and therefore in contemporary police leadership as it includes overt and tacit beliefs, understandings and obligations between the employer and employee. Breaching the psychological contract can have negative consequences for the organisation and it is argued in this paper that by having clearly articulated organisational expectations, the police leader can overtly manage the psychological contract making the management of change in a police organisation more effective.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

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Vernon White is a Senator in the Senate of Canada. He has worked for 31 years in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, moving through the ranks from Constable to Assistant Commissioner. He also worked for the Durham Regional Police Service and the Ottawa Police Service in the role of Chief of Police between 2005 and 2012. His experience covers investigations, supervision, Aboriginal/First Nation and community policing roles. He holds a Bachelor Degree (Sociology/Psychology); Masters Degree (Conflict Analysis and Management), National Executive Institute of the FBI and a Doctorate of Police Leadership. Vernon is an Adjunct Professor with Charles Sturt University.

Dr Susan Robinson

Dr Susan Robinson is a criminologist who has worked for over 20 years in the public service in South Australia, the ACT and the UK in the areas of child protection, juvenile justice and adult corrections. She currently works as an academic with the Charles Sturt University School of Policing Studies where she teaches Bachelor of Policing and postgraduate students. Susan holds a Bachelor Social Work (Hons) from the University of South Australia and a PhD (Sociology/Criminology) from the Flinders University. Her current research interests are in women in policing, stress resilience of police officers and crimes against children.
INTRODUCTION

Police leaders have a complex and challenging role in which they find themselves balancing a variety of demands related to operational areas and community needs while simultaneously managing the needs of the organisation for the future. This is all done within the context of managing the many challenges of modern life, including new technology (Batts, Smoot & Scrivner, 2012; Kegan, 1994). Additionally, one of the most important areas of responsibility for police leaders is the management of police personnel. Traditional police management has followed a paramilitary structure and has been greatly influenced by military management approaches (Murphy & McKenna, 2007). The introduction of existing and emerging technologies to enhance policing has changed the way in which the policing role is undertaken and in the process, has challenged the viability of maintaining the traditional policing management model. Furthermore, in an environment of fiscal austerity, governments globally have become more and more concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector management (Parker & Bradley, 2000) and this includes policing organisations. These changes to policing, along with significant changes to the structure of society, including community expectations of the role of police, have required police departments to consider more contemporary and diverse management approaches in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

Effective and efficient management requires police leaders to adapt to the changing needs of the organisation and involves gaining a better understanding of the organisation’s culture and subcultures (Wood, Zeffane, Fomholz, Weisner & Creed, et al 2010; Parker & Bradley, 2000). In police organisations, this is especially important for building effective teams that are prepared for the challenges of the job. The psychological contract is a significant factor in the maintenance of effective teams (Rousseau, 1996). The psychological contract refers to the shared beliefs and expectations staff, have of their employer and the beliefs and expectations the employer has of their staff. Understanding and respecting the psychological contract between frontline police and police leadership goes a long way to improving this relationship and increases the likelihood of positively implementing organisational change. This paper discusses the psychological contract and the role of leadership in managing change in police organisations.
LEADERSHIP IN POLICING

Organisational leadership has attracted a great deal of scholarly interest in recent years. Sopow identifies there are, “...over 35,000 credible journal articles, books and other publications with over 2,000 definitions of leadership, leadership models, systems, and theories” (Sopow, 2009, p.3) but despite this extensive body of work on organisational leadership there is “an absolute dearth in the area of leadership training and leadership theories that are applicable for and within police environments” (Haberfeld, 2006, p.3). It is generally accepted that the leadership role in policing involves a specific set of personal attributes and key competencies in addition to different dynamic qualities that can change or be modified depending on the situation (Batts et al, 2012; Sopow, 2009). The modern policing role is constantly changing and is a much more complex role than in the past and to effectively fill this more complex role, police in the field need to be supported by leaders who are flexible and who possess a broad range of consolidated policing skills and experience.

When defining police leadership, Haberfeld (2006) states, “...the definition of police leadership must include the ability to make a split-second decision and take control of a potentially high-voltage situation that evolves on the street” (Haberfeld, 2006, p. 3). This definition explicitly describes the elements of leadership on the frontline leadership qualities but fails to take into account the more senior leadership roles where decision making is more administrative in nature.

Police leadership, which refers to the leadership provided by senior ranking officers in the police hierarchy, is a different form of leadership that encompasses a range of leadership qualities including personal characteristics, traits, behaviours and performance. It incorporates the ability to understand and manage police culture. Cultural leadership is an important factor to include in effective police leadership, particularly when introducing change (Marcus, 2009) and includes the need for police leaders to act independently of the culture while still being able to understand it and be accepted by the overall membership.

Morreale (2004) presents the idea that leadership is a process rather than a position and that leadership involves ‘leading’ rather than ‘ruling’ over subordinates. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a difference between leadership and management that is particularly pertinent to the policing context. Dalglish & Miller (2010) have attempted to describe the difference between leadership and management:
Management is an explicit set of tools and techniques, based on reasoning and testing that can be used in a variety of situations. It involves specific skills like planning and budgeting. Leadership involves having a vision or what the organisation can become, creating a different future, and having the strategy to get there. (Dalglish & Miller, 2010, p.8).

In addition to fulfilling the management tasks required of all public sector managers, police leaders must also ensure the police organisation meets the needs of a changing society and this involves selling a vision of the way forward to front line and senior police officers. It also entails influencing and guiding the policing organisation towards change while maintaining membership and public confidence in the police service (Murray, 2000). It is therefore essential that police leaders possess both management and leadership skills in addition to being skilled in managing change.

POLICE CULTURE

Effective change management must take the organisation’s culture into account and work with the organisation’s culture to harness energy and commitment to change (Murray, 2000; Wood et al, 2010). The culture within police organisations is strong and is a significant influencing factor when introducing change into a policing organisation. Police culture has been variably defined by researchers over many decades but can be generally described as a set of shared values with common behavioural norms, rules and actions (Durivage, 1992; Skolnick, 1994). The very nature of the policing role has created an organisationally specific culture that is unique to policing. As with all organisational cultures, the police culture consists of widely shared attitudes, values and norms but what differentiates police culture from other organisational cultures is the constant potential for life and death encounters combined with the unique stresses and strains that originate in the policing environment (Paoline, Meyers and Worden, 2000; Chan, 1999). For these reasons the police culture emphasises solidarity and unmalleability, which leads it to be extremely resistant to change, especially when the culture itself is the focus of change (Lawson, 2011). Also evident within the police culture are the expectations held by each individual officer within the organization. Some of these expectations are overt and others are tacit but all come together to form the psychological contract between the police officer and the service.
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

The psychological contract is the contract between an employer and employee that typically represents more of a belief or a set of expectations, than a firm commitment (Held, 1993). The psychological contract contains the spoken and tacit beliefs, understandings and obligations between the employer and employee, often setting out the dynamics of the relationship itself and the manner in which it operates (Rousseau, 1996). There have been studies completed and articles written by a number of researchers regarding the psychological contract and the impact it has on the relationships found within an organisation. Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau (1994) looked closely at the changing environment within an organisation and the way in which the employers and the employee’s expectations change and grow over time. This research identified a disconnect between the expectations of the employer and employee but this was not seen as a necessarily negative condition as this research identified this state as offering potential opportunities for improving the employer-employee relationship. The work of Conway and a number of other researchers such as Coyle-Shapiro (2005), Conway & Briner (2009), Coyle-Shapiro (2011), and Conway, Guest & Trenberth (2011) is indicative of the importance of the psychological contract and the challenges faced in the human resource management of employees.

Del Campo (2007) considers the possibilities of future research in relation to the psychological contract while at the same time weighing the possibilities against the historical context of the work environment. Another important study investigated the psychological perceptions of a group of individuals hired after graduating from an MBA program. Many failed to attain the level they had come to expect they would achieve through the recruiting process. The new employees indicated that they were in fact in a form of social contract when in the student role and that they felt they had been let down in the expectations they felt they had been given as part of this relationship with the education facility that supplied the employer (Rousseau, 2008). Similarly, students who train to enter the police service hold expectations that they believe will be met once they are sworn in. These are psychological contracts rather than employment contracts (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000) but are still believed by the employee to be “……a form of terms and conditions between themselves and their employer…”, or at least a tacitly understood exchange between the two (Rousseau 1989, p. 123). Simonsis (2000) reviews the recruiting of the next generation and the expectations that the employer has in the recruiting of this group of people. Generation specific expectations in employment is a component that is becoming ever more important to
Argyris (1960) was one of the first theorists to refer specifically to the psychological contract and was conceptualised by him as a direct relationship between an employee and a supervisor. Argyris (1960) surmised that the employee would maintain a specific positive level of production if the supervisor guaranteed and respected the continuity of the employee’s group norms. He suggested that the psychological contract is strongest between the frontline supervisor and the worker, excluding the organisation from being influential, in appearance at least, in the contract.

Argyris (1960) further argued that the psychological contract is an implied and implicit agreement between a supervisor and employees and that at this frontline level, a positive relationship lessens complaints and increases productivity as a result of increased transactional agreement, with limited interruption from higher levels in the organisation. Other organisational theorists of the same era agreed with Argyris and saw the psychological contract as a set of obligations on the employer to maintain the relationship (Levinson, Price, Munden & Solley et al 1962). Blau (1964) suggested the psychological contract was a clear social exchange where favours are exchanged in a reciprocal manner. Becker (1986) labels this process “the norm of reciprocity”. Becker describes the norm of reciprocity as being the expectation that people will respond to each other in kind, mutually exchanging favours for favours. Blau (1964) and Becker (1986) conceptualise the psychological contract as a mutual understanding and exchange of principles that overtly or tacitly exist between management, the organisation and employees. Menninger (1963) made the analogy that the dynamics of the psychological contract was akin to the way in which a doctor and patient interact with both having mutual responsibilities for the success of the relationship (Levinson, 1966; Menninger, 1963). This research identified five qualities contained within the psychological contract as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Qualities of the Psychological Contract (Menninger, 1963).
It can be seen from Figure 1 that Menninger (1963) broke down the psychological contract into five specific elements. What is not addressed in Menninger’s model however, is the difference between the transactional and relational aspects of the contract.

THE EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP

Rousseau (1989) differentiated between the transactional and relational components of the psychological contract identifying that the transactional component would provide the employee with the technical benefits of the job such as hours of work, salary, vacation, and other business-like matters of the contract. Recruiters, managers and mentors play an important role in communicating reciprocal obligations to employees and in this regard the line manager is of particular importance (Guest & Conway, 2000). The relational component refers to the trust and loyalty factors derived from the relationship developed between employer and employee and the transparent and tacit expectations that exist between the two (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995). The relational component in particular is an important aspect in being able to understand the psychological contract. Rousseau (1989) focuses on the relationship between employee and employer, explicitly distinguishing between the individual’s subjective perceptions and separating these from the objective agreements reached in the relationship itself. Crucially, the employer and employee may not be in agreement or may not have the same understanding which can lead to feelings that the psychological contract has been violated by one or the other (Rousseau, 2001). Importantly however, Rousseau (1989) also argued that the psychological contract could become more stable and stronger over time as trust increases. Trust is derived from the promises made and ultimately kept between the two parties to the contract (Rousseau, 1989). Guest and Conway (2004) developed a simplified model of the psychological contract which is depicted in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Simplified model of the psychological contract. (Source: Adapted from Guest & Conway, 2004)](source)

This model shows the relationship between a positive psychological contract and the performance of the organisation (Guest & Conway, 2004). Guest and Conway (2004) clearly identify that a negative impact on the psychological contract could have a detrimental impact on work
performance and productivity. Notwithstanding organisational influences, individual factors such as personality also shape how individuals construe the psychological contract and how they subsequently behave. Raja, Johns and Ntalianis (2004) found that personality predicted the type of psychological contract formed, while Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman (2004) found that exchange related dispositions influenced employee reciprocation. This process of reciprocity continues for the life of the employment relationship and forms the basis of trust on which the relationship operates (Cassar & Briner, 2011). Sometimes however the reciprocal relationship becomes unbalanced and this can lead to one or the other party becoming disgruntled. For example, Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau (1994) argue that self-serving biases cause individuals to over-estimate their contributions and under estimate organisational costs involved in meeting their needs.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Employment trends and increasing awareness of the importance of the psychological contract resulted in a changing focus in human resource management in the mid to late 1990’s. This was a period in time that saw a shift from lifetime employment with one employer to several changes of job and career. It also saw the introduction of less secure work environments with casual and part time employment on the rise (McLean, Parks & Kidder, 1994). There were higher levels of work-life balance being accentuated within the context of employment in an environment of greater flexibility and acceptance of diversity (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). This resulted in a movement away from relational theory and the psychological contract, toward the adoption of managerialism and an acceptance of transactional management theory that emphasised tangible, business related results. This approach seemed to dominate the modern thinking around employment until the end of the 1990s (Sparrow, 2000) and heralded a version of the psychological contract where employees expected to be 'looked after' through the course of their employment in return for their loyalty, hard work and commitment.

In the 2000s, the modern workplace is for the most part, without the expectation of long-term job tenure or security. The expectation of long-term job tenure has shifted as the new generation of employee is focused on work-life balance and more autonomy in the work environment (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Cennamo and Gardner (2008) suggest that the new generation (the millennia generation) must have a new iteration of the psychological contract that takes into account the changing expectations of employees including mentoring and training that opens doors and
opportunities for them outside the organisation (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008; Loughlin & Barling, 2001). This once again demonstrates a greater emphasis on relational aspects within the psychological contract (Duxbury, 2007). The millennia generation appear to be less concerned about maintaining a position within their present organisation and view their careers as more mobile than previous generations. Accounting firm Ernst & Young, identify the psychological contract as being important for the positive development of a relationship with the new generation of employees and is achieved through the fostering of leadership skills and identifying opportunities for innovation (Wellin, 2007). Ernst & Young see this strategy as an opportunity to extend the longevity of employment for individuals in the company and see this as beneficial to the organisation. The psychological contract at Ernst & Young is overtly expressed and is summarised in Figure 3.

Ernst & Young focused on individual success being an automatic expectation within the organisation, that success can only be achieved within the context of the psychological contract and that it will include personal/employee and organisational/employer success. In Figure 4 Wellin (2007) identifies the intent of the psychological contract within Ernst and Young.
In Figure 4 the importance of the psychological contract is clearly evident in that the company identifies the expectations that employee and employer have in their relationship. It is this level of awareness, understanding and mutual responsibility within the psychological contract that allows organisational leaders to introduce change with minimal negative impact to the employer-employee relationship.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Kotter (2011) presents change management as the utilisation of basic structures and tools to move an organisation through the required change while minimising the negative impact on staff. According to Kissler (1994) in modern employment, employees have an inherent need to take personal responsibility for their work lives instead of depending on their employers to do this. Guest and Conway (2004) support this conclusion finding that with changing employee expectations and aspirations there came about a change in thinking for the employer toward providing more information to staff about decision making processes. This has resulted in more employees wanting to be involved in the development and decision making of the organisation rather than standing by and watching change occur.

Change is an inevitable part of life and implementing and managing change is an inevitable part of leadership. When an organisation is undergoing significant change, there is a need for employees to feel secure that the psychological contract will not be violated. This is closely related to perceptions of justice and procedural fairness which may include an expectation for those impacted by change to be treated with respect and dignity and to be informed about what is expected of them (Cropanzano & Prehar, 2001). Molloy and Whittington (2005) suggest that two of the critical components to successful change are: 1) involving employees and 2) having and implementing an effective communication strategy. It is argued that once this is understood by employers change management is likely to be more effective.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN POLICING

It is challenging to implement change in any organisation, but particularly so within the policing environment, however the inability to do so can have serious ramifications in regard to developing a healthy and ethical police culture (Chan, 1996). Any change required in a police organisation is often considered by the police membership to be radical even when it is relatively minor in nature. This is due to the police culture which attempts to resist change and maintain the status quo. This culture is very difficult to counter (Marks, 2000). In addition to introduced change, the society and
the communities in which police operate are constantly changing and at a rapid rate. Bayley (1994) and Friel (2000) identify the changing environment in which police are operating and suggest that there has been a movement from a purely public policing model in the past toward a more blended community and justice model in modern times. It can be seen in their work that the police officer role has also changed considerably over time as a result. Crank (2004) and Matthews (2007) have looked at changes in modern day policing and both focus on the subtly changing internal environment brought about by the introduction of the new breed of employee often referred to as the generations X and Y, both of which are identified as bringing diversity to policing but at the same time different challenges when introducing change. These generations are more technologically savvy than ever before and rather than resisting change seem to bask in it (Anderson, 2009). They are easily bored and are restless to move up the corporate ladder so consolidating change at any level may be difficult. This also means that police leaders need to engage different cultural sub groups within the police organisation when introducing change. A body of literature exists that relates to the challenges faced in developing strategies to ensure that appropriate leadership is in place for future generations (Crank, 2004; Matthews, 2007; Marsick & Watkins, 1996).

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

In a successful police organisation, the proactive management of the psychological contract commences before the recruitment process is completed. Niehoff and Paul (2001) state that the organisational literature made available to prospective applicants, in addition to the interview process and orientation process, will all contribute toward the formation of the employee's psychological contract. What occurs during the recruitment phase has an important influence on their expectations of the organisation (Niehoff & Paul, 2001). This is the foundation of the employer-employee relationship and is fundamental to the formation of the psychological contract. Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro and Delobbe (2006) found that newcomer induction and socialisation tactics were important in influencing the formation of the new employee’s psychological contract during the first year of employment. Developing a solid foundation and positive relationship, in line with the organisation’s expectations, allows for the intentional formation of an overt psychological contract that is more likely to be understood and accepted by both parties leaving less chance of disappointment or dispute. In addition to this, it is important for the employer to actively develop a basis of trust and positive interaction with employees. The
tacit understanding between the employer and employee that develops in the recruitment and early employment phases becomes highly resistant to change following this formative period. According to Feldheim (1999) when the employer is seen to be fair and to keep promises and agreements made, it will build the necessary trust and positive inter-relationship between employer and employee. In policing, where the internal culture is so strong, it is to be expected that breaches of the psychological contract will affect this trust and positive inter-relationship more quickly and have a greater impact than in other areas of employment.

BREACHES OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT
Breaches of the psychological contract are often felt before they are recognised. The employee may feel angry and deceived as a result of a failure of the employer to fulfil what the employee feels is an obligation embedded in the psychological contract (Cassar & Briner, 2011). The employer may also feel aggrieved if the employees fail to meet their expectations. Such circumstances are referred to as breaches of the psychological contract. Morrison and Robinson (1997) stress the importance of having a workplace that is transparent, inclusive and without deception as this is said to be extremely important in developing a successful and positive employer - employee relationship. A breach of the psychological contract can have a negative impact on the organisation and ultimately the success of the corporate enterprise. The issue of perceived deception goes to the heart of trust between employer and employee. Trust and positive inter-relations within an organisation are important elements for sustaining productivity and work quality (Lester & Kickul, 2001).

POLICE LEADERSHIP AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT
Mello (2003) identifies leadership in change management as being the ability to listen to and guide subordinates to bring them willingly and incrementally toward change rather than scaring them into sudden change. This is important in a policing context where familiarity and certainty are highly valued. Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that the majority of police leaders in the western world have progressed through the ranks, thereby attracting higher expectations from police membership to value tradition and not to introduce change. Geller and Swanger (1995) identify that police organisations are often constrained by the very paramilitary model that allows them to deliver effective policing as this model and the culture that goes with it does not adapt well to demands for change or accountability. The hallmark of an effective 21st-century police leader may first and foremost lie in his/her ability to initiate, adapt and respond to change in a rapidly
evolving policing environment. Police leaders must work with the police culture to bring about change whilst preserving the trust inherent in the psychological contract. This is more easily achieved when there is overt and clearly articulated expectations such as those developed by Ernst & Young (Wellin, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Leadership is generally regarded as the primary key to effective and successful performance in the provision of police services to communities and improving police leadership is central to any police reform agenda (Schafer, 2008). There is a need for the leader in a successful police organisation to be a generalist, with proficiency in a wide variety of policing roles and functions. Additionally, leaders are required to be at the forefront of change and policing organisations are no exception in this regard. It is important that leaders manage and lead change because this provides the foundation of success or otherwise of the change implementation process (Bratton & Gold, 1999). The role of policing is constantly changing and is a much more complex role than in years and decades gone by (Rogers, Lewis, John & Read, 2011). To effectively fill this broader and more complex role, police on the ground need leaders that are flexible and who possess a broad range of consolidated policing skills and experience. Sherman (1997) identifies the need for police leaders to have experience and understanding in the complete breadth of policing roles and functions to be capable of delivering guidance to lower ranking officers on the complex issues found within the community and to also manage the complexities of change implementation. It is argued that by developing and maintaining clearly articulated and widely circulated organisational expectations that are negotiated and developed with the police membership. The police leader can then overtly manage the psychological contract prior to and throughout the change process, making the management of change easier to accomplish. In the truest sense, this is leading the way for the future of policing.

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2. Expectations From The Past
3. Interdependent
4. Psychological Distance
5. Dynamic

**Model of the psychological contract**

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**Figure 1**

**Figure 2**
Figure 3

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<th>What Ernst &amp; Young expects from its people</th>
<th>What employees can expect from Ernst &amp; Young</th>
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<td>Do the right thing and succeed for clients</td>
<td>Recognise and reward individual’s contribution</td>
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<td>Energy, enthusiasm, stretch and excel yourself</td>
<td>Enjoyable place to work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build relationships, teamwork and the courage to lead</td>
<td>Care, listen and respond to people’s ideas and concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take charge and personal responsibility for your career</td>
<td>Continuous learning opportunities, access to knowledge and support for personal and career growth, and achieving your potential</td>
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Figure 4

E&Y gives its people
- Recognition & reward for Individual Contribution
- An enjoyable place to work
- Care, listen & respond to people’s ideas and concerns
- Continuous learning opportunities

WHAT THE EMPLOYEE EXPECTS FROM E & Y

E&Y expects from its people
- Energy, enthusiasm – stretch & excel yourself
- Build relationships, teamwork & the courage to lead
- Take charge & personal responsibility for your career
- Do the right thing & succeed for clients

WHAT EMPLOYEES GIVE TO E & Y