

Operationalizing a police performance management system

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Abstract

Performance improvement strategies across the police service are required to embed a performance management culture, to meet the demands for greater efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery demanded by governments. In this paper a High Performance Police System (HPPS) is proposed to enhance the prospects of successful implementation.

Keywords: Police, Performance, Management

Introduction

Clearly central government remains the primary source of funding for the police service here the total provision for policing revenue grants in 20011/12 will be £9,341m an overall decrease of 4% from 2010/11. This reduction in revenue will be sustained from 2012 to 2015 through year on year decreases of 5%, 2% and 1% which will result in total government funding falling to £8,546m in 2014/15 (HC 695, 2011).

In order to achieve this target the UK Government acknowledges that there will be an impact on the police workforce through a reduction in headcount and a need to 'reshape' the performance management system for the police service. This need for improvements in the performance management system of the UK police service has been particularly highlighted in the UK Government's CSR as 88 per cent of this total spend, goes on the workforce which, now stands at 142,363 police officers, 78,120 police staff and 16,376 police community support officers (Home Office, 2010).

The need to increase productivity within the constraints of a decreasing budget will require full scale business re-engineering across the entire police service. The increased use of benchmarking, management information and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) value for money profiles will provide some opportunities for informed decision making. However 'to be able to increase delivery and balance budgets, police authorities and forces will need to ensure that business processes are as efficient and effective as possible and they must adopt business process improvement as part of their on-going efforts to increase value for money' (Home Office, 2010b:2)

There are therefore clear expectations from the UK Government for the police to rise to the challenge of improving their performance across a broad cross-section of activities which in turn is likely to have a fundamental impact on the nature of policing in the UK. The mechanisms by which this is intended to be achieved are fourfold.

First there will be a greater level of local accountability for individual Chief Constables through the election of local Police and Crime Commissioners from November 2012. It is recommended that the newly appointed commissioners will be responsible for 'the budget, staff, estate and other assets in their force area' (HC 511:17). Second, there will be a greater focus on partnership working throughout the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Thirdly, overall responsibility for managing the performance of police forces has shifted from the Home Office to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). Fourthly, the Home Office will neither set nor maintain top-down numerical targets for individual police forces. The Analysis of Police and Community Safety (APACS) framework, under which comparative assessments of policing performance are published, will remain but the Home Office will no longer make graded assessments under this, which has been interpreted by some as *de facto* targets' (Home Office, 2008: 83). This, therefore marks a significant shift in responsibility and focus in terms of the future police performance management system and places a greater responsibility on the role of individual police authorities (Police and Crime Commissioners from 2012) to be pro-active in monitoring police performance data at local levels. Such performance data should reflect activities related to achieving local goals set by police authorities and future Police and Crime Commissioners which reflect national policing priorities as articulated through the Home Office (HC 511:24) and improved national benchmarking across police force areas.

Reforming the Police in England and Wales

Running in parallel with UK governments' thinking a recent report by the United Nations (2010) identified amongst others two key questions to be addressed in consideration of how reforms to public services and how service delivery might be improved:

- How can public administration secure the provision and expansion (maintenance) of public services under the conditions presented by the (financial) crisis, and how can citizens be engaged to that end?
- How can multilevel governance and decentralization contribute to better public service delivery at the local level? (United Nations, 2010: 12).

These questions are pertinent when considering the impact of proposed reforms on the police service in England and Wales. Such reforms reinforce a long held aspiration by successive UK governments that public service organizations should become more accountable, customer focused and responsive to stakeholder needs (Ackroyd, 1995; Pollitt, 2000; Osborne 2006; Fryer et al, 2009). And that this should be achieved through a transformation of management practices, processes and culture. (Bitici et al. 2006; Andrews et al. 2006). Improvements in performance management systems are seen as an important element in achieving this. (Brown, 2005; De Waal, 2007). The difficulty is that whilst the principles of performance management are relatively simple, implementation becomes difficult as organizations respond to environmental changes through restructuring, downsizing or through the application of new business process improvement methodologies.

This clearly has an important impact on a crucial element of the performance management system, namely performance measurement. Given ongoing reforms across the public services the reliability and validity of various performance measures have come under scrutiny as longitudinal monitoring is affected by changing organizational goals and objectives (Radnor and Barnes, 2007). This is particularly so in the case of the UK police service where the evaluation of productivity and performance of police forces as well as individual officers remains a contentious issue (Home Office, 2009, HMIC, 2010).

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(HMIC) value for money profiles will provide some opportunities for informed decision making. However 'to be able to increase delivery and balance budgets police forces will need to ensure that business processes are as efficient and effective as possible and they must adopt business process improvement as part of their ongoing efforts to increase value for money' (Home Office, 2010 p 2) and to improve police performance overall.

To achieve this however there is a need to understand the conceptual difficulty in arriving at a precise definition of police performance. This is widely reported with a number of academics (Albert and Dunham, 2001; Maguire, 2004; Shane, 2010) who identify that performance is commonly found in two forms, either as trait dimensions that are scored subjectively by the officer's immediate supervisor based on observed behaviours, or as activities arising from the tasks related to the police function that are scored objectively based on the number of instances per activity (e.g. motor vehicle accidents or directed patrols). Kelling *et al.*, (1974) suggest that simply putting more officers on the beat or increasing marked police cars do not necessarily translate into crime-related actions. This is more a matter of budget priority rather than police effectiveness.

We argue that an important yardstick for evaluating any management strategy including performance measurement should concern its usefulness. It is important to ask specific questions as to what officers' get from performance measurement, how it is measured and how widely is performance measurement used in a given organisation? Performance is also affected as much by social and political conditions, legal structures and social settlements as it is by explicit management action (Williams *et al.*, 1993).

In the United Kingdom (UK) and more specifically in England and Wales the UK Government continues to conduct or sponsor research into the complexities surrounding appropriate performance measures for the police (Home Office, 2008; Flanagan, 2008; Berry, 2009; HMIC 2010). This is in addition to legislative changes that have been made with the intention of giving a clearer focus to police performance priorities.

In order to further embed the required performance management culture needed to meet the demands for greater efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, a High Performance Police System (HPPS) is proposed to enhance the prospects of successful adoption of performance improvement strategies across the police service. The conceptual model can be seen as a 'cause-and-effect diagram to illustrate the different relationships providing insights into various factors influencing the performance management in the police. It consists of six inter-related drivers which can encourage good performance management but also can be contentious. They are each discussed during the following sections.

Clarity of organisational objectives

It is crucial to have a greater clarity about the key organisational objectives. Despite crime rates falling to a high time low since 1997, there is a growing scepticism about what has been achieved in tackling crime (O'Connor, 2010). Notwithstanding the limited evidence of the utility of mission statements in policing and performance (see DeLone, 2007; Lynn, 1996), once developed they provide a sense of legitimacy and identity for a organisation and can help to resolve the amorphous and loose connections between policy and service delivery (Shane, 2010). Focus groups and meetings with key stakeholders, employees, community groups and other criminal justice agencies can help to identify organisational priorities (Kaptein and van Reenen, 2001). It is also argued (Neely *et al.*, 1995) that key questions include analysing whether the measures reinforce the organisation's strategies and objectives; whether these measures reflect and match the organisation's culture and if they focus on the user experience?

Role of External Environment

In the UK, police performance management has tended to reflect the political and policy priorities with the governments of the time. Police measures have undergone substantive changes. In 1999, DETR first published performance indicators for police to be used under “Best Value” initiative (Lynn and Elliot, 2000). From 2005-2008, the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) was in use which was replaced by the Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS). The coalition government’s controversial proposals to introduce elected Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012 will result in new governance structures within England and Wales. This in turn is likely to result in a new set of performance indicators that will further increase the scrutiny of police performance. Such increasing levels of performance scrutiny are being highlighted in the context of a reducing budget for policing services, with fears of police job losses being muted at all levels within the UK police service. Certainly at the local level and increasingly, nationally, the police associations are organising campaigns, such as: ‘Protecting the Frontline’, as a response to a perceived threat to job security of frontline officers. This in itself is fast becoming a major political theme in policing in the UK in face of the global recession impacting on public sector (police) budgeting (Neyroud, 2010).

There is also a growing international dimension to this ‘frontline’ debate (O’Shea, 2010; Innes and Thiel, 2008) with the ‘international’ nature of budget cuts seen as having the potential for restricting the ability of the police to respond to increasing demands on their services as levels of crime rise at local level but also the ability to counter serious organised crime and acts of terrorism at a national level. There is therefore the need to balance both the local and national interest in terms of resourcing the police through an effective performance measurement system. Such a performance measurement system can be analysed by asking questions such as:

- Whether there is an alignment between national and local objectives regarding performance measurement?
- What is the nature of the inter-relationship between the various police forces, the HMIC and the government?
- Whether performance can be benchmarked across the given service or wider environment?

Clear accountability functions

Concerns over police accountability and the control of wide ranging police discretion impacting on individual’s civil liberties is as old as policing itself (Feilzer, 2009). In order to judge police agencies whether they achieve their desired outcomes and provide the best level of service, clear accountability structures need to be embedded across the organisation (See Gaines and Cain, 1981 for a full discussion of accountability structures within organisational functions). Accountability is usually associated with punishment in a typically command and control system; rather it should focus on performance measures (Shane, 2010). The implicit logic behind the UK Coalition Government’s proposals in having elected Police and Crime Commissioners by 2012 centres around strengthening accountability in the police force. The argument given is that local accountability of the police will be enhanced through clearer strategic overview being provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Operational matters will remain at the discretion of Chief Officers although clearly the relationship between both the Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Officers will be pivotal in defining the success of the new arrangements.

Coherent set of performance indicators (PIs)

There is no agreement about the precise role played by the PIs in organisations (Smith, 1990). Logically there cannot be a correct list of performance indicators and they can only be judged in terms of their usefulness and the cost of generating the information they contain relative to the benefits derived from their use. Likierman (1993) classifies these general characteristics in four groups: conception, preparation, implementation and use.

Shane (2010, p. 15-16) argues that before performance indicators are collected, the structure of each of the performance dimension must be taken into account. It includes some key components:

- The goals or outcomes are measures of the degree to which a service has achieved its intended effect, and as defined, meets the needs of its recipients in terms of quantity and quality.
- The critical dimensions are the principal aspects of a goal that, if achieved, are intended to assure the goal is accomplished.
- Success indicators define the attributes or characteristics to be measured and include a particular value or characteristic used to measure output.

There are significant methodological limitations of using surveys as research tools in measuring the performance of public services (Cantor and Lynch, 2000). The British Crime Survey (BCS) has been in use since 1982 and over the years it has changed from a research tool to a system of performance management (Hough et al., 2007). In an empirical study, Feilzer (2009) examined whether the data collected through the British Crime Survey (BCS) can be considered as valid and reliable indicators of local police performance. Her analysis showed that perceptual measures included in the BCS and used as performance measures are under-conceptualised, invalid, context dependent, strongly related to social-demographics and are unreliable

Meaningful performance reporting

Growing scepticism amongst public has been mentioned earlier in the paper. The MORI 2007 survey (IPOS MORI 2008) reported how a large proportion of public do not believe crime is falling and more than 60% of the public have not heard of HMIC. The Casey Report (2008) describes that less than one percent of respondents relied on published statistics as their source whether the crime was increasing or decreasing. Information about policing is increasingly available outside police agencies through different sources including national TV and newspapers, official websites, local newspapers and televisions, internet and social networking sites. A recent editorial argues this issue well (O'Connor, 2010).

Research on factors that drive public confidence conducted by the NPIA and Metropolitan Police (Neyroud, 2010) demonstrates the importance of good quality information put out to public. Performance information must be easily accessible and the terminology used also becomes important. Communication becomes an important aspect of reducing public scepticism about policing.

Balanced reward and punishment mechanism

The way each police force treats its staff also has a bearing on the overall organisational performance. The notion of developing High Performance Police Systems (HPPS) would have the potential of embedding a performance management culture within the police service through relevant training and development. Raising awareness amongst individual and teams of officers within local communities in identifying meaningful and measurable goals could improve both morale and motivation. Clearly this sits well with ongoing work detailed in the

‘The National Workforce Modernisation Programme’ (WFM), run by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). The central aim of which is to ‘help the police service improve the quality of service it delivers to the public whilst at delivering value for money’.(NPIA/ Home Office Final Report, 2010). Clearly in order to achieve this, the motivation, knowledge, skills and experience of individual police officers need to be focused on clearly defined objectives/goals which will result in effective policing outcomes. This ‘performance’ enhanced cultural shift will take time however given the clear financial pressures currently facing the police service such individual understanding and local empowerment have the potential to make significant impacts on improved police community relations and more effective use of reducing police resources..

Discussion

Performance measurement is the essential foundation on which performance management can be built. The management of performance measurement concerns making decisions about measurability. Rather than taking performance measures for granted, reflection on the measurability of input, process, output and effect is essential to reach agreement about the indicators between all stakeholders. Only then can a technically sound performance measurement system be developed (Van de Walle and Van Dooren, 2005). Performance management is thus about critical analysis of measurement practices, but also about convincing about the validity and legitimacy of the system.

Increasingly public satisfaction and confidence in policing has been one of the central planks of the current UK Government’s agenda on law and order. Through primary legislation (Home Office 2011) it seeks to improve policing performance through changes in the relationship between central government, police forces and the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners. The intention is to move away from centrally controlled performance targets to local indicators for police forces to improve public confidence in whether local crime and community safety priorities are being identified and addressed.

To manage and monitor this effectively much government effort has been focused on consulting over the appropriateness of current police governance and accountability arrangements to perform such a task (Berry, 2009; Home Office, 2010; HMIC, 2010).. Following such consultation and mirroring the political ideology of the UK’s new coalition Government the decision has been made that in 2012 police authorities will be abolished and replaced with directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners. The intention being that local accountability of the police will be enhanced through clearer strategic overview being provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Operational matters will remain at the discretion of Chief Officers although clearly the relationship between both the Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Officers will be pivotal in defining the success of the new arrangements.

Such new arrangements will have as a central theme a vision to improve the overall performance of the police service in England and Wales across a series of metrics. Such improvements are seen as fundamental to maintaining the legitimacy of an organisation that again sees itself at the centre stage of public debate. The conviction on 3rd January, 2012 of two suspects for the murder of Stephen Lawrence some 13 years earlier again has put into the spotlight the failure of the police to investigate the original offence. This coupled with the riots that occurred across the UK in August, 2011 and subsequent enquiries into its cause, clearly identify weaknesses in police command and control systems but markedly point to a failure in their performance to anticipate and prevent such outbreaks of widespread disorder. This in itself has led to calls from politicians of all persuasions for greater accountability of chief officers (Home Office, 2010b) and a more robust approach to performance management across the police service as a whole.

Conclusions

Our model discussed in the paper looks at the performance management system at three broad levels:

1. At the first level of the performance measurement systems by looking at performance indicators, accountability relationships, the usefulness of performance reporting structures. level of an organisation
2. At the next level of organisational context in terms of objectives, goals, and the culture.
3. At the level of external environment by looking into the alignment between national and local objectives regarding performance measurement.

For all its merit, our analysis has some limitations. Like any other models, it is also open to criticism, amendments about the choice of our six drivers and the absence of others. As an emergency response service, the police have a very command and control system of accountability in which formal procedures take precedence over informal action. Often the policy making takes place in a fast-changing political landscape having far reaching implications of police performance. This might not leave much room for 'learning' as hinted above. We would however argue that the benefit of a 'system' approach is that performance management system is seen not merely within specific performance indicators and organisational targets but from an broader perspective in which the external environment is also analysed. This will provide an opportunity to police organisations to develop into 'learning organisations' (Senge, 1994).

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