

Chapter 9

Understanding the Local Context-The Participant's Perception of Needs

Revisiting the Methodology

The Ontario Police College was used as the base to conduct this study in Canada. The focus groups (4) met over a period of twelve weeks at the Ontario Police College. The participants in all of the focus groups consisted of students undertaking both recruit and in service training programmes at the college, instructors, senior officers from the Ontario Police Service and instructors that were from other institutions teaching at the college. Each focus group consisted of between 12 participants and there was a good mix from the categories as described above. Each focus group met 3 times during the course of this study.

As outlined in Chapter 11 the participants were all provided with the questions and some literature on the past and current status of training plans of the Ontario Police Service 35 days before the first meeting. The participants were also briefed on the methodology, aims of

this study and the limited structural arrangements of the focus group meetings.

Analysis of Focus Group Meetings

As with the first focus groups in all of the other countries, the first focus group meetings involved the discussion of question one:

- *In your opinion what are the changes facing general policing over the next five years? Take into consideration cultural, societal and technological factors?*

The discussion was focussed on factors that are relevant to education and training. The participants were told that one of the outcomes of this discussion should be the identification of a list of factors that would influence policing over the next five years. The factors identified were then listed and provided to the participants in order to rank in an order of priority. Ranked in order of priority these factors as perceived by the officers included:

- Changes to the Legislation over the five years
- Adapting to the needs of the 'newer' communities

- Taking diversity seriously both in staffing levels and community levels
- Increase in use of technology by staff and criminals
- Coping with the increased numbers of private police
- Coping with increased standards and levels of education to seek promotion within the police service
- Increase in the use of problem orientated policing

The other factors discussed but not thought of as being of high priority included the perceived loss of powers by police to other state controlled agencies ie. environmental protection agency, anti corruption agency and the decrease in number of police officers over the next five years.

The factors listed above are similar, yet different to the other countries explored in this thesis. For example, there is no mention of their fear of loss of resources a point which came across as strongly in the other two countries, especially Hong Kong. But the participants in Ontario believed firmly that they would have no control over the legislative changes that would be enforced upon them. Moreover despite the situation in Hong Kong (the handover to China), the participants in there did not rate this factor as highly as the participants in Ontario. The

main similarity is in relation to the issue relating to the 'newer communities' and this was expressed by the participants in Hong Kong as a *threat* of immigrants, whereas in Ontario this was clearly seen as a *challenge*.

The issue of private policing was also highlighted as being important by the participants in all countries. Here again the expressions used by the participants in Hong Kong, Singapore and Ontario were different. The participants in Hong Kong were concerned that private policing would erode their independence but at the same time wanted to be able to do less 'community' work. The participants in Singapore were clear that they wanted to be in control of all private policing in that state. While the participants in Ontario were embracing private policing as an alternative that they will not be able to avoid.

The next task was to link these perceived factors to the questions relating to training and education and to see what officers felt was appropriate content for training and educational programmes. The second question was then put to the participants:

- *How should training and education support these changes?*

What should be remembered throughout this exercise is that using critical hermeneutics as the methodology, the important aim is to make certain that the participants start thinking critically about all of the factors discussed at these meetings. The idea is that by doing this and stirring their interest, the participants would be able to make significant changes in relation to the areas discussed.

The participants in all focus groups listed the following in order of priority using the same methodology as used in the previous sections:

- Training should be more flexible and focussed on what is relevant to the officers than what is seen as being relevant by the training college.
- More training needed in areas relating to problem orientated policing
- Staff from the training unit need to be more focussed on what is happening out there in the 'real' world and relate this to training and educational needs
- Staff from training college should be rotated to work in the 'real' policing world to be in touch with the

changes in policing over the last few years and over the next few years

- The Ontario Police College should provide more training in areas such as technology, diversity and cultural understanding and reduce training provided in dealing with domestic violence as this is overdone
- The changing world of policing and what is relevant to policing should be fed back by officers to the training college
- There is a need to provide more guidance on education especially with regards to higher education options and its relationship to what is happening at the Ontario Police College to the officers.

What is really interesting about the above list is that as with the participants in Hong Kong, all of the focus groups listed these in the same order of priority with only one exception. This exception was related to the comment on reducing the time spent on training in domestic violence, as one focus group felt that this was necessary part of their discussion. As the participants were not provided with any specific lists, at first it would seem rather surprising that the participants all came up with similar points. But on further reflection, this was not as surprising as it appeared, given that the participants

had all been working in the same organisation with similar structures and issues even though they may have been miles apart geographically.

When the participants were asked to discuss the above list, the discussion centred around factors such as what was lacking in terms of consultation and communication between the Ontario Police College and the 'real' police world. The discussion concluded that even though there seemed to be many 'taskforces' and formal groups consulting with the service and 'boys in blue', in reality there had been no feedback and no focus group discussion similar to the type that they had been exposed to during the scope of this study. The participants commented that as this study was from outside the organisation the participants could feed back information knowing that they were not offending the hierarchy. This comment when aired publicly obtained support from most participants of the focus groups.

Participants also commented that they had never been asked about what the direction of their organisation should be or what changes would take place over the next five years. When asked by the researcher if this exercise had made them relate training and educational needs to the changes

that would happen over the next five years, all participants agreed that this exercise had provided them with the opportunity to do this. But there was agreement that the first question and the second question may not be as related as the researcher was implying. The explanation for this comment being that training and education had to take into account the changes over the next five years but there were immediate needs such as being in touch with the 'real' world of policing that was relevant at this time.

It must be noted that the participants were unconsciously implying that in order to take into account the future changes, training and education would have to reverse the present locus of control. This is similar to the groups in Hong Kong and Singapore. The need to empower the participants by encouraging them to take part in decisions relating to training and educational needs is stressed by the participants. There is also the need for the learning to be task centred so as to be able to contribute to their real working functions. Again this is similar to the participants in Hong Kong and Singapore. What keeps being pointed out by the participants in all of the focus groups is the need to be involved at every stage of the design and presentation of the training and educational

programmes. The findings provide strong arguments in support of Knowles concept of a learning organisation.

The third set of questions were:

- *What are the specific needs of officers, how could these needs be met through training/education, and what are the preferred processes and methods of training/education?*

As with all of the other focus groups this set of questions involved the most intense discussion. The first stage of the debate was drawing up a wish list of subject/topics that the participants thought were most relevant to be included in their training and educational programmes. From the vast list the participants were asked to rank the subjects in order of priority:

List of Training/Educational Topics Perceived as Most Relevant
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Law and Police Procedures▪ Practical Training: Firearms etc▪ Conflict Resolution/Interpersonal Skills▪ Cultural Diversity Issues▪ Investigation Skills▪ Criminology▪ Psychology▪ Ethics▪ Management

The above list is an exact copy of the list from Hong Kong with one exception. In Hong Kong, the participants listed Language/Writing Skills as being the fourth most important subject whereas the Ontario Police College participants have listed Cultural Diversity Issues in its place.

In true hermeneutics fashion, the participants had not been given any preconceived list by the researcher as the participants would have complete freedom to decide on the subjects/topics that were relevant. The researcher found it rather surprising that the participants from all focus groups and from both Hong Kong and Ontario had very similar lists in order of similar priority with the one exception as discussed above. One explanation for this could be that at the time this study was conducted, all of the issues that were seen to be important in policing were being discussed globally in forums such as the International Chiefs of Police Organisation. This being the case, the participants from all three countries may have been exposed to the deliberations from such organisations. Training/Education was also seen to be a very important human resource issue during this period.

In relation to the second part of the question, the participants in Ontario had been using various processes and methods to fulfil the training/education needs of the officers. These included distance education, face to face classroom instruction and some on-line offerings using the internet and cd-roms. It must be noted that Ontario was the only country in this study to use diverse methods and processes to deliver police education/training. All of the focus groups in Ontario questioned the amount of time provided to the officers to complete their training/education. The comment was on the basis that courses offered by the Ontario Police College in-house provided the officers with the necessary time for study, but courses that were present through distance education and on-line did not provide time release for the officers to complete these programmes. The participants indicated that the main purpose of providing these alternative methods of delivery was to provide cost savings to the Police Service and that their needs may not have been taken into consideration. Here again the participants were united when they revealed that they had never been consulted about their feelings on the courses that were delivered by alternative methods. Many participants in the focus groups also revealed that they had filled in many

evaluations on the programmes but have never received any feedback on these evaluations.

The next question that followed on was in relation to the University Courses that the participants felt would benefit them. Here again, a list of all courses offered at Edith Cowan University was presented and the participants were asked to list in order of priority five courses that they felt were most relevant. The results in order of priority were:

University Courses Considered to be Most Relevant
▪ Police Studies
▪ Social Sciences
▪ Legal Studies (Law)
▪ Justice Studies
▪ Management

The above list was different to that of Hong Kong and Singapore. Furthermore, the participants indicated that 'law' rather than 'legal studies' is what they would have preferred to be listed. In order to cross validate all of the above lists, the participants were asked to rank them

on a scale of 1-9 for the topics and 1-5 for the courses and the results were consistent with the qualitative data as presented above.

The discussion on why the participants selected the above courses proved to be intense with the reasons ranging from the relevance of the course to their current needs, to the participants involvement in the planning for their future needs. What should be noted is that among the countries analysed for this thesis, it was only within the Ontario Police Service where major incentives were provided for their staff to pursue University Education. Both Hong Kong and Singapore have systems that differentiate between senior staff and junior staff when providing incentives for further education. In both those jurisdictions, junior staff are encouraged to attend junior colleges or polytechnics and senior staff are encouraged to attend University. In Ontario, this differentiation is not evident as all staff are encouraged to attend University education programmes.

The discussion on why participants selected the above topics dominated the focus group meetings. The topic list is not surprising given the previous chapter outlining the history of developments in policing. The Canadian Police

Services emphasised and stressed the importance of the emerging communities and the participants agreed that this is an important aspect of police training/education.

The discussion also centered on the notion of undertaking subjects that would enhance the officers capability to perform their core functions effectively. The researcher at this stage asked the participants who had used the term 'core function' what did they think was the core function of their job. It became apparent during this discussion the participants from the Canadian sample did not have a clear understanding of what their core function was. There was a suggestion that this research should also include a focus group meeting solely dedicated to deciding what was the core function of the Ontario Police Service. When the discussion was extended the participants agreed that their main function as police officers in the Ontario Police Service was to maintain law and order. Community policing functions were seen to be secondary, but the participants all agreed that to what extent these functions were secondary was not clear. As the discussion progressed, the researcher noted that the reason for this lack of clarity in understanding their core functions was simply caused by the Ontario Police Service Cheifs emphasis on the function of community policing.

Once the participants had gained a clearer understanding of their core functions, the researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to change their answers to the rankings of courses and course content. All participants agreed that they would not make any changes to their original choices. This seemed rather surprising to the researcher and as the discussion progressed the participants were given many opportunities to change their choices and they declined and stressed that their choice would remain the same for both course content and course selection.

The participants also noted that they were satisfied with the instructors at the Ontario Police College. Specific mention was made of the externally qualified instructors and the participants linked the 'professionalism' of policing with the highly qualified instructors. The researcher asked the participants what did they understand by the term 'professionalism' and the answer ranged from 'a well qualified police force', 'a force where officers were respected by the general public', 'a force where officers were provided with the best training/education', 'a force where officers valued ethics and high work values' and 'a force where officers treated everyone and

each other with the utmost respect'. What is very interesting about this is that when discussing professionalism all participants from all focus groups used the term 'force' rather than 'service'. When probed to analyse this, the participants main response was that unconsciously when thinking of the term 'professionalism', they thought of a uniformed force rather than a service. They analysed this further and concluded that the word 'service' implied some form of weakness. A professional force would be strong and not weak.

The final question that was put to the group was:

- *What organisational/structural changes if any would be required to support these changes?*

It was explained to the participants that the aim of this question was to ask them if they thought any changes were required within the Ontario Police Service to deliver the changes discussed in the previous focus groups. The changes were identified as being changes in content, a more systematic approach to training/ education and more consultation with the officers when designing programmes. The question was also meant to prompt the officers to think about the current structure of their police service.

There were many suggestions on how the Ontario Police Service should change the structure. In summary these suggestions were:

- 1) There should be more overlap with the Ontario Police College and all of the provincial police units. Currently the Ontario Police College is seen to be a separate entity that is only involved in training and there is no requirement for consultation with other police units. This should change and it must be made compulsory that all units interact and consult with the College and vice versa.
- 2) The College should form more streamlined links with educational institutions and universities. If there were a path that could be provided for recruits and senior officers to obtain qualifications from a university and the study done at the College could be recognised as part of this qualification, this would increase the professionalism of the police force.
- 3) The Police organisation should change its thinking to become a learning organisation ie. learning should be encouraged at every stage. This is happening now but there is currently no articulated, planned method of delivering this function at the Police Service.

- 4) Senior staff should take on a mentoring role and should be officially assigned junior and recruit staff under their care. The current structure does not provide any incentive for staff to perform this function.
- 5) Some of the 'academic' training should be out-sourced to reputable academic institutions. The structure should be changed to permit this flexibility for both staff and student exchanges.
- 6) Efforts should be made to make the organisation less hierarchical. This would help in changing the culture of the organisation, and officers would feel more comfortable undertaking study as they would not feel that they may become over-qualified. Currently there is an unwritten law that staff should not be more qualified than their superiors. This does not happen in other government organisations.
- 7) A research unit should be set up within the training unit to research best practice in police education/training. This would help enhance the level and method of training/education provided by the organisation.
- 8) The Ontario Police College should strive to be more like a university and the structure could be changed to reflect this. This would result in professionalisation of the police force.

The above statements were made by the participants and discussed further and only statements that had general agreement among the groups are in the above list.

Discussion

Once again, as in the case of Hong Kong and Singapore, what this study revealed was the officers' interest for some degree of reversal with regard to the locus of control and some degree of consultation in the planning and design of education/training programmes.

Furthermore the principles of andragogical as opposed to pedagogical learning were reinforced, with officers showing their keen interest to discuss and reflect on issues relating to the definition of their core functions and the planning of appropriate learning programmes, when provided with an environment of openness and respect.

Once again the hermeneutical research approach, had helped the participants to question a number of key issues and had encouraged them to reflect on their core functions and the type of educational/training programmes required to strengthen these.

PART VI

TOWARDS A MODEL OF POLICE EDUCATION:

THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY