PART IV

A HERMENEUTIC STUDY OF THE SINGAPORE
TRAINING COMMAND (TRAMCOM)
Chapter 6
UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL CONTEXT – THE RESEARCHER’S PERSPECTIVE OF NEEDS

The History of the Singapore Police Force

Singapore was set up as a colonial territory for the British East India Company in 1819, by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. At that time it was an island of 263 square miles with a population of approximately 150 residents (Nalla, 1999), within four years it had a culturally heterogeneous population of 10,000 (Harman, 1991). In 1826, Singapore, together with the Malacca and Penang were incorporated into the Straits Settlements Police (TRACOM, 1998), and within a year Raffles had set up a small peace keeping force for Singapore, consisting of a sergeant and 12 constables, whose aim was to maintain English Law (Igbinovia, 1987).

Until 1850, there was legal chaos in Singapore. The officers from the English East India Company administered justice without scruples, applying Chinese Law to the locals while ignoring the wrongdoings of the British and European subjects (Leong, 1990). By 1881, the Force had grown and included: an acting Superintendent, three
European constables, and assistant native constable, 14 officers, and 110 policemen (TRACOM, 1998).

As in case of Hong Kong, the development of Singapore into a merchant port brought with it problems of piracy and violent crime. In 1843, crime rates had reached such a level that a protest meeting was held by the English population, resulting in the appointment of Thomas Dunman as the first Superintendent of Police. Dunman was highly respected by the European merchants and initially put great effort into establishing useful contacts with the Chinese (TRACOM, 1998).

In 1957, the Police Act was passed, establishing a regular police force with police posts and mobile patrols in the outlying districts. By the same act Dunman became the first full-time commissioner of police. Dunman’s task was not easy, most the recruits were unemployed men who joined the force on a temporary basis until they found other jobs, since the work involved long hours and staff were underpaid, making bribes the best way to supplement their income (TRACOM, 1998). Nevertheless, Dunman introduced many new initiatives to improve the morale of the police, reducing their work hours and teaching them to read write, and is generally regarded as having laid the groundwork
for the structuring of the early Singapore colonial police force. During his period as commissioner, the Singapore Volunteer Force was established with 410 European, Malaysian and Chinese policemen (TRACOM, 1998). Only a small number of Chinese joined the Force and special efforts to recruit them met with little success, resulting in most being brought from Hong Kong.

As Singapore grew and problems emerged, specialised units were introduced highlighting the flexibility of the Singapore Police Force (Harman, 1991). For example, the Detective Force was set up in 1884, being organised as a separate unit under Inspectors Holmyard and Richards, while other units included: the Marine Branch, set up in 1916; the Internal Security Branch, set up in 1919; the Traffic Branch, set up in 1926, and; the Communications Branch, set up in 1936 (Harman, 1991).

In 1903, the direct recruitment of gazette officers began, using competitive examinations as a means of selecting confident, efficient staff members and upgrading the Force (TRACOM, 1998). Motor cars were also introduced as a means of improving quality and efficiency of the services provided (Nalla, 1999). These changes helped to develop the Force into a powerful body with approximately 2,000
officers, and while gang fight did still occur, Singapore by the 1930s was a peace, safe island (TRACOM, 1999).

On February 16, 1942, the Japanese took control of Singapore and Yamashita set up his military headquarters at Raffles College. Although the civil and criminal courts remained open under Japanese rule, and cases were heard in public, they were frequently settled by means of 'bribery behind the scenes' (TRACOM, 1999), and military system was superior to the judicial system. Throughout the war, anti-Japanese elements within the police were viciously rooted out using the Kempeitai, an entity that employed secret agents and informers to isolate suspected disloyalty. New recruits tended to be cruel and corrupt and "often, people did not know why they were arrested and under what offence they were charged" (TRACOM, 1999).

Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, the British once again took control of Singapore and, one of their most urgent needs was to rebuilt confidence in the Force:

"..The police were so hated and despised as tools of Japanese oppression and cruelty that in the first weeks after the liberation police stations had to be guarded for fear of reprisals." (TRACOM, 1999)
Under Colonel Foulger, order was quickly restored and for the first time, Asians became officers (Nalla, 1999). Another important event was the setting up of a women's unit, with 10 female constables, who proved extremely useful in cases involving women and children.

But despite the changes, in 1950, the so-called 'Maria Hertogh Riots' erupted, and a number of riot squads were set up to quash the crowds. Racial, political and labour unrests continued to arise throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, but most were suppressed by the police's Special Operations Branch.

The year 1955 saw the initiation of the gradual process of Malaysianisation of top posts within the civil service, and local police officers were promoted to higher ranks within the Police Force, so that by 1957 over 58% of the senior officers were locals. In 1959, Mr. Ong Pang Boon became the first Asian Minister of Home Affairs, and he introduced several changes in the Singapore Police Force. One notable change was that all senior officers were required to attend courses on the social and political forces that were active in the region, and education in public affairs and public relations were seen as crucial
(TRACOM, 1998). These courses were held initially at the Political Study Centre.

In 1963, Singapore joined with the Federation of Malay to become Malaysia, and the Force became the Singapore component of the Royal Malaysia Police Force. However, Singapore soon gained its independence in 1965, and the police force was renamed the Polis Repablik Singapura, and it came under the Ministry of the Interior and Defence.

The Singapore Police Force Since 1965

Following independence, a major campaign using press, radio and community centres was launched to change the local attitude towards the police, encouraging Chinese recruits to join the Force in an effort to break down their existing image as the bastions of British rule. As part of this process, in 1967, Mr. Lim Kim San, Minister of the Interior and Defence, introduced compulsory national service which included work with the Special Constabulary and the Vigilante Corps of the Police National Service Command (TRACOM, 1998). Youth were specially targeted, and the police Cadet Corps was promoted among all secondary schools.
The Force was also modernised, new cantonments were built and old police stations were replaced, communications networks were set up, and computers were installed. In 1968, the Polis Repablik Singapura joined in the International Criminal Police Organisation at the 37th Assembly of Interpol (TRACOM, 1998). Moreover, in 1969, the Force 'shed its last vestiges of colonialism' (Vreeland, 1977), replacing its old khaki shorts with blue uniforms, and changing its name to the Singapore Police Force (SPF). Thus the Force had taken on not only a new vision of policing but an entire new look and image, symbolic of the transformation from a colonialist force to a national service (Nalla, 1999).

In the following years, the SPF placed much emphasis on the development of a community policing model, and in 1981, the well acclaimed Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) was set up (Harman, 1991). The aim of the Scheme was to address some of the problems arising from the growing urbanisation in Singapore, and to overcome the feeling that community spirit and involvement in local concerns was declining (Shan, 1998). Moreover, the rhetoric behind the new scheme was the need to move away from reactive policing towards proactive community based policing, that
enhanced police-public relationships, and hence Neighbourhood Police Posts (NPPs) were established.

"The NWS was conceived to encourage mutual care and help among neighbours, through residents keeping an eye out for each other's premises, and through mutual discussion and dissemination of crime prevention messages. It was hoped that through the scheme, the civic-mindedness, neighbourliness and social responsibility of the community in the context of crime prevention would be enhanced. This would then contribute to keep neighbourhoods safe from crime."

(Chiong, 1998)

The Scheme resulted in the development of some 100,000 Neighbourhood Watch Groups (NWGs), all comprising of approximately 5 households, each led by a Group Leader. Since 1981, community based agencies and residents' committees were formed and their concerns and needs were communicated to the police through the NPP system (Singapore Police Force, 1998).

While the NWS was haloed by some as a creative and innovative means of changing the relationship between the police and public within Singapore (Harman, 1991), others viewed it as compatible with 'an intrusive model of policing', which rather than being a mechanism for promoting community involvement, served as a means of greater community control (Austin, 1987).
In 1995, the Singapore Government introduced a radical new policy known as the Public Service for the 21st Century Programme (PS21). The programme aimed to encourage public service organisation's within Singapore to play a leading role in "nurturing an attitude of service excellence in meeting the needs of the public" and in "fostering an environment which induces and welcomes continuous change" (Mah & Fun, 1998, p. 93). The PS21 represented a major paradigm shift for all public services, and consequently the SPF set up a Police PS21 Steering Committee to review what the new programme meant in terms of the Corporate Strategic Service Intent (Mah & Fun, 1998), and in particular, what organisational changes and what service improvement measures would be required within the Force?

Several changes were introduced, but one which took the led was the re-design of the Neighbourhood Police Posts (NPPs), with the launching of the Neighbourhood Watch Zones (NWZs) programme in 1997, a pilot scheme aimed at addressing some of the shortcomings of the original NWS (Chiong, 1998). Instead of the small neighbourhood groups, the NWZ scheme aimed to strengthen resident committees and associations, providing them with a more powerful voice and overcoming problems caused by the
fragmented nature of the project. Rather than working directly with the public, since 1997, each NWZ has been led by a Liaison Officer and/or Assistant Liaison Officer elected from the resident committees and associations, whose duty it is be to communicate with the NPP officer (Chiong, 1998). Moreover, it was argued that this system would provide officers with more challenging jobs and with 'better career progression' (Mah & Fun, 1998).

In addition to the redesign of the NPPs, the PS21 programme resulted in a re-organisation of the department and in a massive drive both to encourage 'quality service' and to develop a 'learning culture' - changes which have been continually expressed in terms of introducing a Best Practice Culture (Tang & Shyh-Gang, 1997). According to the rhetoric, the essential characteristic of building a learning organisation is to maintain a climate in which officers are continually encouraged to develop to their full potential, a process which requires:

- A shift in mindset thus encouraging a positive attitude towards learning and change
- The fostering of an environment in which people become resources for one another, thereby developing strong service teams and team management
Commitment on the part of the officers towards providing quality service to the public and to being accountable to the public (Mah & Fun, 1998).

This latter point has been an issue of particular concern, because if the police are to work in partnership with the community and gain their confidence, then they should be as transparent as possible (Scott-Arul, 1998). Through open dialogue between the officers and their supervisors, and between the officers and the community, SPF has attempted to develop a more open and trusting working environment, which in turn has improve commitment and morale (Scott-Arul, 1998).

According to some, the success of the PS21 Programme in transforming the SPF from a law enforcement agency to community service were clear from the results of the various Public Opinion Surveys. For example, in the 1996 Public Opinion Survey, 97.6% of all respondents rated the level of security in Singapore as ranging from good to excellent, and that public assistance had contributed to one third of all arrests (Wee, 1998). Moreover, in the same year, the Hong Kong based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (Perc) rated Singapore, above Japan as the safest nation in Asia, attributing this safety to the fact
that the police have the full confidence of the local people (Shan, 1998).

The Socio-Cultural and Political Structure of Singapore

Since independence, the population of Singapore has doubled, reaching 3.89 million in 1998 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 1999), with immigration accounting for a large proportion of that growth. To cope with the increase, the newly independent government launched a massive programme of industrialisation, extending industries to smaller estates in Kallang park, Tanjong Rhu, Redhill, Tiong Bahru, and Tanglin Halt, thus creating new clusters of population and hence new pressures for the SPF. Public housing was given a top priority by the government and home ownership was encouraged, with Singaporeans being allowed to use their Central Provident Fund savings to pay for these.

In 1968, the Economic Development Board was reorganised and from then on it has played a central role in promoting Singapore as a major industrial centre. The Monetary Authority, created in 1970, was responsible for implementing monetary policies. Although the country was hit in the 1970s by the effect of two oil crises, and it
has since felt the shock of a severe price erosion in the disk drive industry, high economic growth was maintained throughout the 1980s and 1990s, following the Government’s economic restructuring programme in 1979. This programme involved the modification of education policies, the expansion of technology and computer education, and the offering of financial incentives to industrial enterprises. Areas of particularly high economic growth included the telecommunications equipment and media segment, petrochemicals industry, and transport engineering in the aerospace industry.

A factor which has added to Singapore’s economic stability and growth has been its political stability. Since the general election of 1968, the country had a one party Parliament, with the People’s Action Party (PAP) winning all the seats in repeated elections until 1980, while conceding only two seats in the 1984, 1988, and even in the 1997 election. In 1991, when Lee Kuan Yew stepped down after being Prime Minister since 1959, and Goh Chok Tong became Singapore’s second Prime Minister. However, in 1993 the republic’s first presidential election was held. So today, Singapore has a government system that comprises a President and a Prime Minister.
Singapore's strong fundamentals helped cushion it against much of the impact of the regional and global crash which started in mid 1997. Growth for the year slowed to 1.5% and 28,000 jobs were lost as compared with 19,500 lost in the last recession (Tay, 1998). As the effects of this slump started to be felt by local retailers and developers, the Budget of 1998 disappointed many, who had hope it would 'pump prime the economy to stimulate internal demand for goods and services' (Tay, 1998). Instead it focused on issues such as infrastructure, defence and education.

Particular concerns, however, were raised by the cutting of wages and the halving of employer's contributions to the Central Provident Fund, and the impact this would have on workers ability to meet home loans, and pay other costs. Moreover, there was anxiety about the plight of the jobless. Moreover, as Simon Tay summarises:

"...economic success is not just a dollar and cents issue for Singapore. Economic success has held a special place in Singapore's idea of itself. Economic growth was the primary mission in the early years of separation and independence. It has been the measure of a rising confidence that Singapore can survive and indeed thrive as a sovereign state. It is the core contract between the government and the people, and provides, alongside regular and fair elections, legitimacy for the rule of the People's Action Party, since independence."

(Tay, 1998)
Much of Singapore's economic success in the past has been built on regional peace and stability. However, recent tensions with Malaysia and Indonesia, and the growing crisis in East Timor are threatening this situation and all eyes at present are on international affairs. Violence against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, sparked a strong public outcry in Singapore, as did President Habibie's words referring to Singapore as a "little red dot on a map" (President Habibie, National Rally Day Speech, 1998). But despite the possibilities of serious future tensions, to date these incidences have had a positive effect, spurring nationalist feelings regarding the safety and high quality of life which exists within Singapore (Tay, 1998).

Crime and the Criminal Justice System

Although the Singapore legal system was initially based to some extent on that of the English, it has over the years developed its own distinct penal law and criminal procedures (Nalla, 1999). For instance, crimes are divided into 'seizable' and 'non-seizable' offences, and sentences range for whipping to punishment by death.
Table 4

CHANGE IN CRIME RATES BETWEEN 1996 AND 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>1997</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecent Behaviour</td>
<td>1,069</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housebreaking</td>
<td>1,737</td>
<td>1,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>2,467</td>
<td>2,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snatch theft</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating &amp; Related Offences</td>
<td>2,378</td>
<td>2,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rioting</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Act Offences</td>
<td>5,603</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Crime</td>
<td>2,110</td>
<td>2,147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: Police Life, 1998)

It is arguable whether in addition to their community policing programme, the strict penal code has contributed to Singapore’s low level of crime (Igbinovia, 1987). Figures for 1997, indicate that there were a total of 44,773 cases of criminal cases - or 1,443 crimes per 100,000 residents, a fall of 6.8% from 1996 (Police Life, 1998). While the number of crimes per 100,000 may seem higher than in Hong Kong - where the figure is 1,036 - these statistics are deceptive, in that, in Singapore the data includes a large number of immigration act offences and offences for cheating (forgery and impersonation), whereas Hong Kong omits these. Nevertheless, despite the overall downward trend in crime, the most distressing indicator is that murder, rape and juvenile crime are all
on the rise and there is believed to be a growing problem of triads and loans sharks (Foo, 1996).

The Police Academy and the New Training Command (TRACOM)

As mentioned previously, training has played a major role throughout the history of the SPF. The first training initiatives began in 1887 at the Police Depot, which was a temporary establishment located in Robinson Road - these early educational efforts were formalised later in 1929, with the opening of the Police Training School. During the Second World War, the Training School was closed down, however, after the fall of the Japanese at the end of the war, there was an urgent need to rebuild the forces and hence in 1941 a nine month training programme was established for new recruits, with a similar programme being set up in 1949 for women officers (TRACOM, 1998).

Following independence, the Force took on a new image and with it came the need for greater training and new directions. The old Police Training School was renamed, becoming the Police Academy, and at this time compulsory residential, basic training became a requirement for all new recruits. Although the training periods varied slightly over the years, today basic training is six
months for officers, with all officers requiring a minimum entry qualification of three high school credits (Nalla, 1999).

With the introduction of the PS21 programme and the massive campaign to develop the SPF into a "quality service for the public", a vastly more complex and comprehensive training structure was required. As such, the Training Command (TRACOM) was developed, and the old Training Academy and Training Department were discontinued. Since its initiation, TRACOM's objectives have been firmly rooted in the development of a 'learning culture' in an effort to 'imbue a spirit of learning in all the officers to cope with changes in the environment' (Mah & Fun, 1998). Achieving this, has involved commitment to the following areas:

- The formulation of long-term training policies and plans
- The co-ordination and control of training activities (in terms of performance standards, expenses, etc.)
- The improvement of training capabilities (through use of new techniques, infrastructure and trainers)
- A continuous review of basic philosophies underlying current practices used by the SPF, and the development of studies on 'best practices'
- The training of police officers and the promotion of a learning culture (TRACOM, 1998)

As well as the Basic and Advanced Training Programmes and Continuous Education Centre, TRACOM has developed a number of specialist schools, with its key focus being on the development of:

- The Neighbourhood Police Centre Course (NPCC) to help officers develop the skills required for the Neighbourhood Watch Zone (NWZ) and Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) programmes.
- The After Action Review Programme (AAR) to encourage officers to reflect together on activities and analyse processes
- The Learning Organisation (LO) Facilitation Course to encourage senior officers to develop among members of their unit the ability to be thinking officers
- Tactical Awareness Courses to ensure that police are up to date in the use of modern technology and tactical skills (Police Life, 1998).

Part of TRACOM's process for service quality development
included the drawing up of a comprehensive plan to train 3,800 officers by the end of the 1998 fiscal year. This training covered all areas including technology development and participation of the SPF in the interactive multimedia network system known as Singapore One, aimed at reaching the public, at work, within schools and even in their homes (Police Life, 1998).

Leadership training was another major thrust of TRACOM’s work in its initial years, and the development of the leadership training curriculum and infrastructure was successfully completed in November 1997 (Police Life, 1998). The concept behind this leadership training was that the Deputy in Charge of the NWZs should not just be managers, but also trainers of the officers, ensuring “that the new officer continues to learn as part and parcel of his work” (Koh, 1998). But while the concept of police training at all levels has been widely implemented by TRACOM, there has also been a growing awareness within the SPF of the need to build alliances and strengthen relationships with higher education institutions.

In 1998, two Memoranda of Understanding were signed with Temasek Polytechnic, enabling officers to carry out continuous education in the Certificate or Diploma of
Police studies and the Degree in Police Management (Police Life, 1998). The courses have involved interdependent and independent study, and have been organised in a way that allows minimum disruption of officers' work schedule. Other programmes in Singapore have included: the University Diploma in Policing developed by Edith Cowan University, which is aimed specifically at aviation security personnel (Srinivasan, 1996); and the Memorandum of Understanding with Nanyang Technological University which has resulted in formal research in the field of road safety (Police Life, 1998).

The concept of the 'learning organisation' promoted by TRACOM, inherently requires staff members to become continuous learners, and hence self directed learning must move beyond the phase of merely being a buzzword (Zemke, 1998). To this end TRACOM set up a series of Self-Learning Centres (SLCs), which unlike formal learning centres, promote an ability and interest among the officers to learn alone and allow the officers to learn at their own pace (Police Life, 1998). At the centres, special study rooms are available for students with multimedia computer-based learning packages, books, videos and other learning tools.
Thus throughout its short history, TRACOM has promoted many strategies to stimulate the development of what it has referred to as "Thinking Officers", and its policy papers are dotted with numerous references to the creation of a "Learning Organisation". Terms such as the 'empowerment of officers' and the 'development of their problem solving skills' abound, as do statements on creating an adaptive, innovative and progressive organisation (Khoo Boon Hui, 1998).

At the heart of all TRACOM's programmes has been the belief that in the present changing world, skills and knowledge are perishable commodities (Zemke, 1998). As Alvin Toffler stated in his book *Future Shock*:

"The illiterate of the year 2000 will not be the individual who cannot read and write, but the one who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."
(In Zemke, 1998; p. 68)

In line with this reasoning, TRACOM's efforts to build a learning organisation have drawn heavily on the theories of Peter Senge (1990), who popularised the concept of The Fifth Discipline. In his policy statement for 1998, the Commissioner of Police even uses Senge's five suggested technologies - systems thinking, personal mastery, mental
models, shared vision, and team learning - as the key factors required to convert SPF into a learning organisation (Khoo Boon Hui, 1998).

- **Shared Vision.** The creation of a shared vision or mission was the initial step in the creation of shared actions and strategies for achieving coordinated operations within the service.

- **Mental Model.** In line with Nonaka’s belief that inventing new knowledge is not a belief but a way of being (Nonaka, 1991), Commissioner Khoo Boon Hui (1998) says “...there is a need to identify and question our Mental Models, or simply, the beliefs and assumptions that each of us firmly and deeply believes in. We have always thought that crime was solely a police concern until community policing was introduced. Officers have always regarded investigation as the job for investigators until uniformed personnel were asked to perform simple investigation” (p. 7).

- **Personal Mastery.** Developing officers so that they can develop their full potential has been a major goal of TRACOM. The job re-design of the NPC system and the Continuous Education Programme have been to examples of such initiatives.
Team Learning. Part of the process of developing a learning organisation has involved the use of the After Action Review (AAR) Programme, which involved the use of team sessions to 'flesh out learning' (Police Life, 1998). This process which began as a learning tool, now is used to improve the objectivity of management and to encourage officers to reflect on situations and experiences, and to learn from them.

Systems Thinking. Or the inter-relationship among units, so that officers view the organisation as a "whole" rather than as a series of units, is vital if SPF is to become a learning organisation, because without it changes will remain piecemeal. One method through which TRACOM has tried to deal with this issue by job rotation and the training of staff in a variety of duties.

But while TRACOM's terminology sounds highly desirable, to what extent are these theories still largely abstract, or to use Garvin's (1993) terms "...murky, confused and difficult to penetrate" (p. 78)? What concrete changes are required and what critical issues must be resolved for these theories to become effective? To what extent is there a clear well-grounded definition of what is needed within the SPF and what constitutes from their perspective
a learning organisation in practice? What guidelines exist for its management and how feasible are these guidelines in practice? What measurement tools exist for evaluating and correcting procedure? According to Garvin (1993) these "three Ms": meaning, management, and measurement are central to successful implementation, and systematic problem solving based on scientific method, rather than simply diagnostic guesswork is essential for accurate and purposeful learning.