

Chapter 7

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL CONTEXT - THE OFFICERS' PERSPECTIVES OF NEEDS

Revisiting the Methodology

As outlined in chapter 11, the Singapore focus group had major limitations as there was only one focus group of mixed officers (senior and junior), two staff members of the training unit and a senior commander who participated. The focus group meetings were held over a period of 4 hours and the participants were free to participate and provide their thoughts on the four questions that were posed to them. As with the other focus groups, these questions and the reading material on their force was circulated to the participants 35 days in advance. The limitation of having only one focus group was overcome by validating the data presented at the focus groups through interviews with senior police officers who worked in the SPF.

The Focus Group Meetings

The first question posed to the participants was:

- *In your opinion what are the changes facing general policing over the next five years?*

The participants focussed primarily on current changes, emphasising the range of changes which the SPF had undergone during the past five years. The researcher discussed this observation in terms of how this past change could affect the changes over the next five years. The participants were all very knowledgeable on what the SPF wanted to achieve over the next 'few' years and were also familiar with the terminology used by the senior officers in terms of achieving these changes. One observation made by the researcher is that among all the countries that participated in this study, the participants from the Singapore focus group were the most informed in terms of what their organisation's objectives. The participants were also the most informed regarding changes that had been undertaken over the last few years. The newsletters and information distributed by the public relations and media departments on what is/was happening throughout the organisation in relation to changes in operational matters seemed to be well understood by the participants in the focus group.

The participants identified the following issues in order of priority as the issues that would affect the SPF in the next five years:

- Focus on community based policing
- Changes to the structure of the criminal investigations units
- Setting up of more neighbourhood policing units
- Increase in race related crimes ie. due to immigration offences
- Increase in the use of technology by the SPF
- Increase in the use of technology by criminals that would pose a threat to methods of investigation
- Increase in using the police for non police functions
- Changes in training with specialist skills ie computer crime etc being introduced both internally and through use of external organisations
- Pressure to obtain tertiary or polytechnic qualifications by junior officers
- More participation by officers in decision making at all levels of policing
- The SPF becoming more 'mature' in relation to asking other organisations (eg private security firms) for support and help

The above list is comprehensive as there were no other factors raised by the participants in the focus group meetings with regard to the first question. Some observations made by the researcher in relation to the above list were:

1) The participants did not raise any issues that concerned their future ie. promotions, reduction in funding, reduction in numbers. This issue was raised by groups from the other two countries. On the contrary when the researcher asked about this during informal discussions, the participants seemed very confident that there would be no reduction in funding and promotion was not a major issue. The participants informed the researcher that Singapore operated in a meritocracy and if they obtained the necessary qualifications and worked in the right manner they saw no problems in getting promoted. Senior officers interviewed also indicated that the SPF was willing to create new positions if there was a need and these positions would be offered to the 'right' officers in the first instance.

2) The participants did not see the decision making process as being exclusive to senior officers but expressed a desire to be consulted as part of this process. It was made clear during the focus group

discussion that this was not a complaint but a desire to be involved towards the betterment of the force. It was expressed in a positive light throughout the discussion

- 3) The issue of an increase in the sophistication of criminals related to areas such as commercial crime and cybercrimes was not raised during the discussion. The participants raised the issue of criminals and police using technology to combat and commit crimes. When probed further this was not in relation to cybercrimes but merely the use of the computer to commit traditional crimes such as false invoicing, changing records etc. The use of the internet to commit crimes was raised but the participants felt that it would not be an investigative function that would be undertaken solely by the police. When the researcher raised this during the informal discussions the participants and the officers interviewed indicated that in their opinion they were ready to deal with such crimes and did not see such crimes increasing in the next five years. The participants also indicated that the SPF would use external investigators to deal with these types of sophisticated crimes. The participants then identified the issue in relation to the SPF becoming more 'mature' in asking for assistance from external

sources. When explored further in discussion, it became clear that the real issue is the reluctance of external organisations to understand the workings of the SPF and this was provided as the main reason why the SPF is sometimes unwilling to work with other organisations. Participants identified CISCO as one organisation that was created by the Government of Singapore to deal with this particular issue, and stressed that the SPF and CISCO had a good working relationship when dealing with other external organisations. When explored even further it became clearer that participants had been exposed to examples from countries such as Hong Kong and the United Kingdom where the working relationship between private and public police services are streamlined. The participants noted that as far as Singapore was concerned there was no need to work closely with the private policing organisations at this particular time but this might change in the future. The participants were not so sure if the SPF was ready to embrace this particular issue.

- 4) The participants understood community policing and neighbourhood policing as being an important part of the SPF's strategic vision. It was interesting to note that the participants placed importance on this method of policing but expressed their concern that this

should not override the more traditional methods of policing. The SPF has taken specific initiatives to introduce the neighbourhood policing vision. The participants were very aware of this as it is identified as a major change that would affect policing over the next five years but interestingly the participants also indicated that the traditional methods of policing would still take priority. To explain this further they provided an example as to how when crimes are committed in high rise buildings, the neighbourhood police post was very useful in providing information about the people who lived in the area and also gathered information from the people who lived in the area. The information was then passed on to the relevant department ie. CID, commercial crime division etc. and the officers from these divisions used traditional methods to investigate the crime. The participants compared this with some of the literature that they had come across referring to community policing where local policing posts investigated local crimes. It was felt that this method of policing would 'never' happen in Singapore. The researcher pointed out that as Singapore was a city state, there would be differences in relation to local policing methods.

The next question that was posed to the participants was:

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

The participants had been provided with the training and education plans of TRACOM. As noted during the earlier discussion, the participants were very well informed about the training and educational strategic vision of TRACOM.

Participants emphasised that in their opinion the TRACOM had taken into consideration all of the training needs that might come about as a result of changes in Singapore and specifically in SPF. The participants pointed out that SPF has a specific programme catering to the needs of officers in need of neighbourhood post training. The participants felt that this was a good example of how the SPF had understood future needs ie. by providing training in the necessary areas. The discussion was generally very positive and the participants expressed great satisfaction in the way SPF had identified training needs. It was pointed out that the SPF's strategic vision closely followed the training plans. There was a lot of information available to the officers on the future plans and directions of the SPF and how this tied in with training programmes that officers could attend.

The discussion then focussed on the creation of the 'thinking' police officer and how training and education programmes could create this type of officer. All participants agreed that tertiary courses would help create this vision. Here again the participants stressed the fact that SPF supported officers who undertook part time study and also provided scholarships for further study.

The participants identified a few strategies that TRACOM could undertake to support the changes in a positive manner:

- 1) Increase 'thinking-based' training, and they noted that the training currently being provided for community policing was skills-based. Furthermore they suggested including theories of community policing, comparative studies on what is happening in other ASEAN countries, looking through the Japanese models and linking this to crime. The participants felt that this would help to achieve the 'thinking' police officer vision.
- 2) Participants also identified a need to increase the level of training provided in relation to the changing technology that was being introduced into the SPF. Participants were careful to express this in a positive manner and stressed that whilst there was an increase

in training related to technology, it was targeted at particular divisions within the SPF. It was felt that all officers should be exposed to technology and training relating to technology.

- 3) The participants expressed a need to be consulted when specific training initiatives were introduced within the SPF. While information relating to what was being done within the SPF reached all officers through newsletters and the media division, officers did not know as to how these decisions were made, and were not consulted regarding these decisions. Nevertheless, it was interesting that participants did not see any major problems, in fact, they felt that the initiatives taken by TRACOM were correct, but simply would have liked to have been consulted in a more collaborative fashion.

Based on these comments, the researcher made the following observations:

- The general feeling was that the SPF was travelling in the right direction in relation to supporting the future training and educational needs. These needs were in line with the changes that would happen within the SPF and in Singapore. In fact all participants agreed that this was the case.

- The concept of the 'thinking' police officer is well understood by the officers. What is not clear is how do the officers help or become part of this vision. Moreover, there was disagreement within the focus group on how this vision could be met through the training and educational plan of TRACOM. As discussed above, participants in the focus group identified in an ad hoc fashion how training and educational initiatives could help create a 'thinking' police officer. The discussion on this issue demonstrated that the officers want to be a part of this vision of becoming or increasing the number of 'thinking' police officers within the SPF but need some direction on how to achieve this effectively. This focus group discussion would have initiated some thoughts on the subject.
- The participants, while acknowledging that they were consulted, expressed a need to be consulted more often by senior officers. They felt the need to be a part of the decision making process and in their opinion being consulted when major decisions were being taken by the SPF or TRACOM was an indication that they were part of the process.

Once again the third set of questions involved the most intense discussion:

- *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?*

The debate began with a listing of the topics that the participants thought were most relevant to police training and education. From a vast list of topics, the officers ranked the following 9 topics as highest, in order of priority:

- 1) Criminal Law and Police Procedures
- 2) Policing in Society
- 3) Management
- 4) Police Management
- 5) Criminology
- 6) Investigation Skills
- 7) Ethics
- 8) Practical Training: Firearms etc
- 9) Community Policing

The selection of the above topics bears no surprises as it links closely with observations in other jurisdictions and with the vision created by the SPF.

The Singapore Police Force focus group was in full agreement over these topics and 90% of the participants selected the above topics in that order of priority. This further validated the earlier discussion that the SPF provided good strategic directions to their staff and officers were well aware of the priorities of this plan.

The group made the following points when evaluating their reasons for selecting the above topics:

- The SPF should have well-trained and well-educated officers. The skills based topics should be supplemented with thinking subjects. Law and Police Procedures are the most important areas that sworn officers work in and this subject should be given priority over all others. There was discussion on the value of this subject creating a thinking officer. The final conclusion of the participants was that whilst this subject may not be classified as a thinking subject it is nevertheless important that police officers are able to do their job effectively. To do this they needed to be experts in law and procedures.

The point was made that all officers needed these skills and that only senior officers may qualify to become 'thinking' officers.

- The participants indicated that understanding the role of police in society was very important as the SPF emphasises the link between police officers and community relation officers. Participants felt that as SPF had a vision of improving community policing and neighbourhood police posts, this subject should be introduced. The discussion also revealed that the participants were a little confused in relation to their functions as police officers and at the same time being friends with the community. The issue of becoming over friendly and not being an authoritative figure was discussed and it was concluded that there should be more educational programmes that to clarify this balance. When asked why community policing as a subject was not high in the final list, the participants provided a range of responses, namely: that the subject is already being covered in various programmes, not all officers need to understand this topic in detail but every police officer needs to know the role of police and policing in society; this subject is skills based and does not help to make a thinking officer unless upgraded etc.

- Management was seen to be a topic that covered generic management in a business sense but police management was seen to be covering operational police matters. The participants indicated that to become 'thinking' police officers, both these subjects were extremely important. The participants also indicated that understanding management issues would help them plan and carry out human resource functions. Moreover, if as the SPF emphasises, human resources is their most valuable asset, then it would follow that sworn police officers would need to understand management issues to be able to contribute to the SPF in an effective manner. Operational or police management was seen to be important as a special subject that the participants had never been exposed to. When asked how they had formed a conclusion that this was an important subject, the general feeling was that the participants had not thought about this subject until very recently when a public seminar was held on this subject by a foreign University in Singapore. Only two of the participants had attended this seminar but SPF had sent out some literature on this topic that had interested all of the officers in the focus group. The importance of having specially tailored subjects that were specific to policing seemed to impress upon the participants and

this was the main reason they choose police management as an important subject from the list.

- The topic Criminology was seen to be important as it would equip police officers with the understanding of crime and criminal justice. The point was made that this subject would definitely have an impact in creating 'thinking' police officers within the SPF. It was felt that whilst this was an academic subject, the skills learnt through the subject as indicated by some participants who had undertaken the study of criminology was extremely useful. Participants also made the point that the theoretical base that subjects like criminology and ethics provide, play an important role in creating 'thinking' police officers.
- As with previous groups (Hong Kong) all of the participants felt that investigative skills should be included in any curriculum being offered to police officers. There was disagreement on what this subject should comprise, with 70% of participants arguing that this syllabus should be practical. The other participants felt strongly that investigative skills should also incorporate the basis as to why investigations are undertaken and should be more academic in its approach. When queried as to what they understood to be 'academic' as opposed to 'skills

based', the participants provided one clear answer "Skills is taught by practical officers and academic programmes would be taught by qualified lecturers from academic institutions"

- There was no discussion as to why ethics was selected as an important topic. When prompted by the researcher, the participants explained that being publicly accountable meant that they should be taught ethics as otherwise officers could argue that this principle is not important. Here stress was placed on the fact that if a subject was not taught at the police academy, there would be the feeling that this was not an important topic.

The discussion on the methods and processes that should be used for training and educating for police officers identified the following observations:

- 1) SPF and TRACOM should use methods of training and education that suited the lifestyles of police staff. Learning through correspondence (distance education) was not the preferred method and participants all agreed that the content should reflect the earlier points that were raised. Part-time programmes were preferred by all participants when compared to full time programmes. This was linked to promotional

opportunities as the officers felt that unless they had the opportunity to be 'scholars' (when the government identified staff as being of superior quality and sponsored them to study at ivy league institutions overseas), their promotional and career opportunities would be stifled if they took time off to study full time.

- 2) TRACOM should have more links to academic institutions both locally and overseas. The participants were well versed with the current arrangements that SPF had with a local polytechnic but were convinced that more such arrangements would help enhance their study opportunities
- 3) The participants indicated that their input was sought at various times over the processes and methods of education and training but they had never been briefed on the outcomes from their participation in these processes.

A list of all courses available at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia was distributed to the participants and they were asked to select the 5 courses that they felt were most relevant for police officers. The list contained courses that ranged from basic social sciences in the arts arena to engineering, computing, biological sciences,

physical sciences and police specific programmes such as police studies and security studies. There was intense discussion among the participants in the focus group on the currency of the courses and its relevance to their day to day work functions. As with the groups in other jurisdictions the researcher indicated that the main criteria that the participants should use when deciding on the courses was its relevance and helpfulness in carrying out their duties. The participants selected the following courses in order of priority:

University Courses Considered to be Most Relevant
Police Studies
Management/ Business Studies
Criminology
Basic Sciences
Law

In order to cross validate the above results, the identified courses and topics were listed and distributed and the participants were asked to rank on a scale of 1-9

for the topics and 1-5 for the courses. The results proved to be consistent with the qualitative data as presented above.

The discussion on this list of courses identified some interesting observations:

- 1) The participants felt that training and education in the above courses would help them become problem solvers. The word 'problem solvers' was used for the very first time by the participants when discussing courses and when queried about this and asked to reflect as to why this term was not brought up before, the participants did not manage to identify any clear reason. The one point on which they were in agreement was that tertiary study would result in officers becoming more responsive 'thinkers' and 'problem solvers'.
- 2) The participants stressed that tertiary courses should be offered to only one section of police officers as it was not appropriate that all officers become university graduates. When asked to reflect on this reasoning, issues such as the quality of all officers to undertake tertiary studies, the financial burdens of tertiary study, the need for all officers to be tertiary qualified and the lack of positions in upper ranks were

brought up. The participants also outlined that Singaporeans believed that their population should be qualified in skills based areas as well as in academic tertiary study.

The last question was:

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

This question did not result in much discussion. The participants felt that the current organisational structures within the SPF were well equipped to deal with the changes proposed in their previous discussions. The existence of TRACOM was highlighted as a successful change that was a result of the perceived changes that the SPF would undergo over the next ten years. The participants all agreed that TRACOM would be able to deliver the training and educational ideas that had been discussed in the focus group meetings.

Discussion

While the concern to reverse the locus of control and increase their involvement in decision-making, was not as pronounced as among participants from Hong Kong, the focus group from Singapore nevertheless referred continually to

the fact that they would like to have been more involved in decision-making. The difference however, was that whereas officers from Hong Kong were dissatisfied with the decisions made by those planning their educational programmes, in Singapore the officers were largely satisfied with the general developments. Just as a matter of respect they would have liked to have been given the option to participate more.

Throughout the discussion, the officers continually referred to the importance of being "thinking" officers and mentioned the need for "problem-centred" learning, yet there seemed to be a lack of understanding of what this was. Their newsletter and media, like many forms of pedagogical learning, had taught them the key words and phrases but this did not mean that they understood in practice what these terms meant, nor had they achieved many of the andragogical principles of learning.

On the other hand, they did seem to be motivated by self-esteem and more human factors of learning rather than promotion and the possibility of higher salaries, and their interest to develop an understanding of comparative policing across ASEAN countries instead of Western countries again indicated a level of autonomy and

commitment. The hermeneutic approach of the focus group once again resulted in a questioning and reflection about these issues and hopefully will have ignited a process of development and change.