



Leadership Development

Police leaders have always had to adapt to new challenges and quickly learn new skills writes James Slessor, Managing Director, Accenture Police Services.

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In recent years this has become even more important with changes in the nature and types of criminality and increased responsibilities on the service. Modern police leaders are expected to master a much broader set of capabilities than their predecessors.

Today, officers regularly find themselves involved in increasingly complex financial discussions and having far greater levels of political interaction than in the past. This, along with the need to forge new partnerships, means officers must understand and collaborate with a wider range of public, private and third sector organisations than ever before.

Direct engagement with the community through increasingly diverse channels and a 24/7 media cycle demands greater visibility from police leaders. These challenges place great pressure on supervisors and managers to show leadership within their organisation – while also delivering on their day job of fighting crime.

To ensure success, those in leadership positions must be given appropriate support, training and development. By providing effective leadership development programmes (LDPs), police forces can develop new competencies and critical-thinking skills among officers to deliver successful policing.

In 2011, Accenture interviewed 1,000 force supervisors to identify key success factors underpinning best practice leadership development programmes. Our research found:

1. Action learning works best in a policing culture – while many leadership programmes are based on case studies, these do not work well for police officer training. Action learning (role play) is important to the success of leadership development

programmes and having officers think through challenges as part of a problem-solving team is crucial. Working in team groups enables officers to share and learn from their peers and makes their learning experience more powerful;

2. Specific leadership development activities complement the day job – according to the 70:20:10 learning philosophy, 70 per cent of adult learning comes through on-the-job experiences, 20 per cent from performance feedback and ten per cent from formal learning. Through surveys, focus groups and interviews, police forces can determine what assignments, responsibilities and activities create successful leaders. These can then be developed into career plans and formal staffing assignments. Creating a formal model of experiences aligned to career development shows the next generation of leaders how they can progress their careers within the force; and

3. Give employees tomorrow's challenges today – getting officers to think about the 'big picture' and consider problems more holistically is important to successful LDPs. Usually the tasks officers undertake demand tactical problem solving skills but research shows giving aspiring leaders a mix of problems to solve is the best approach; some operational and others which encourage them to solve wider organisational challenges.

Accenture recently created a supervisor development programme for a US law enforcement agency that included all the elements outlined above. In common with many police organisations, prior to the project the agency did not have a standard approach to leadership development tailored to its needs, nor could it define what an 'effective supervisor' was within the organisation.

Today, this programme has expanded to include an interactive two-week supervisor development school with more than 85 customised learning experiences. The programme targets aspiring supervisors and seeks to give them the skills and tools necessary to become effective leaders.

The world we live in is changing rapidly. Taking the time to develop highly-skilled police leaders will be key to delivering a successful police service of the future

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