

Optimising policing for the future

Police forces must develop dynamic new operating models and organisational structures to meet future demands and to ensure they are best positioned to maximise the benefits of technology, writes James Slessor.



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Today's police forces are increasingly seeking to embrace advances in investigative technology and improve operating processes. The remarkable sophistication of new DNA and forensic techniques has led to the detection of offenders for crimes that would in the past have been unsolvable. Police are enlisting the help of technology experts to combat cybercrime and terrorism and using powerful new video analytics tools to identify suspects.

Frontline officers now use mobile devices to access information quickly and efficiently when on the move and to let colleagues know their locations and activities. Crime mapping and 'hot spot' analysis have also grown in sophistication and advances in analytics are helping to make predictive policing a reality. Standalone police databases are being integrated – and at times shared with partner agencies to help ensure a joined-up approach to policing. Once paper-based, police activities such as dealing with lost and stolen property are now increasingly digitalised.

While this is a reassuring picture of modernisation, police services must do more to meet the increasing service demands of citizens and today's complex policing and security environment.

However, the good news is that, according to a recent Accenture study, police leaders across the world are keen to exploit new technologies and know they must improve their processes to meet future challenges. The use of the internet, social media and mobile applications in daily life means citizens now expect a 24/7 'Always On, Always Aware' police service. Police leaders understand that to deliver the services citizens expect they need to keep abreast of the same technologies that citizens themselves are using.

Technology is only part of the answer

It is becoming very clear, however, that new technologies alone – though highly beneficial at a tactical and operational level – can have limited value strategically if police forces do not also consider the impact new technologies must have on the way forces' resources are organised and deployed.

New technologies will be most effective if used within an organisation that has structured itself to exploit technological benefits and operates effectively and efficiently. Forces that understand how best to allocate officers and employees to meet service demands will gain most from technology adoption.

Forces that seek to preserve traditional organisational structures and practices will not be able to maximise returns on investments in technology. These forces, as they fall short of optimising the performance of their people, will also fail to derive maximum value from their budgets.

Developing new operating models

Most police forces operate using a well-established mix of uniformed response and community officers and increasingly specific proactive teams, all supported by civilians in a range of different roles. The demands of future policing will, however, require even greater structural flexibility within police organisations.

To become a dynamic police force capable of meeting all future service demands, police leadership must review and, where required, change force operating models, even if these models may have served them well in the past. The use of diverse datasets

and analytics tools can provide high-quality evidence-based decision-making capabilities to support more informed force planning and greater workforce optimisation.

The task of workforce optimisation becomes more complex as forces must not only consider their own organisational structures but also review how they work with partner organisations. Effective relationships with other law enforcement agencies and public and private organisations are key to collaboration and connectedness between criminal justice partners and wider stakeholders. This means that to optimise policing for the future, police leaders must look beyond their own organisations and engage with all stakeholders.

Accenture recently supported the Toronto Police Service (TPS) to undertake a strategic review to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its policing services. The TPS was seeking a better understanding of the number of officers required to meet current service demands and to draw correlations between strategic decisions and the service's size. For this project, Accenture's workforce optimisation solution for police provided TPS with an analytical framework to assess the organisation's needs and objectively determine the changes required to help achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness.

Changing demands require new organisational approaches

Today, similar questions are being asked across UK forces. Citizens' demands for police services are changing and so too must police operations. A recent report by the think-tank Reform claimed that fewer than two people per hour

visit most London police stations. The Metropolitan Police Service is currently considering closing up to 65 station front counters across London as it seeks to adopt new organisational structures that better meet citizens' new service requirements.

However, citizen demand has grown in other areas of policing, notably around online fraud and cybercrime, as well as more localised challenges such as anti-social behaviour (ASB).

In the UK there are examples of police and local authorities working together successfully to combat ASB, but some authorities are struggling to commit resources to support policing efforts at this time of reduced budgets. In such cases, police become the 'agency of last resort' to deal with ASB – a major demand on their resources in local communities. Neighbourhood policing teams – which are consistent, visible and rooted in their local communities – require the commitment of a significant number of police and community support officers at a time when forces' resources are already stretched.

Developing innovative partnerships – with other public sector agencies and with the private sector – can help to meet these new and growing challenges, ensuring that highly-trained police officers spend as much time as possible on frontline duties rather than on administration and other back-office tasks. In Ireland, An Garda Síochána has freed-up the equivalent of 16,000 man-hours a month for frontline duties through an arrangement in which private sector partners manage CCTV camera networks across the country.

The organisational model for the future cannot be static

Today, police forces everywhere must strive to structure themselves in an optimum way that strikes the right balance between community policing (which enjoys high popularity) and proactive policing and investigative work.

There is of course no single, magic formula for the optimised use of police resources, but constant self-scrutiny and analysis – and a willingness to adapt and change, including looking outwards to the use of partners – will reap dividends for forces.

Planning for regular, set-piece events – such as the Notting Hill Carnival in London or G20 and similar summits – has grown in sophistication and some of the best and most agile public order policing practice in the world can be found across UK forces.

The challenge is of course to apply those gold-standard qualities – sharp analysis, flexible strategic resource planning and the ability to learn and adapt – across all police force operations, on a sustained basis.

Essential frontline support

Effective leadership and the championing of change – not just at the summit of a force but at all levels – are vital to drive transformation. Many forces are working with their most experienced officers to help change existing operating models and develop new ways of smarter policing for today and the future.

Across many forces, working hours and shift patterns have been adapted successfully to ensure there are

appropriate numbers of officers on the streets at times of peak demand to meet public need and expectations.

Most frontline law enforcement officers have – like the public they serve – embraced the latest technological innovations. Officers who use this technology in their private lives understand the benefits it can deliver to their working lives.

When police leaders work with these experienced operational officers they can, together, successfully address the internal challenges that arise when established ways of working are changed.

A force that merely seeks to adopt new technologies but fails to optimise its resources and embrace new ways of working, including collaborating with a diverse set of partners, will not reap the full benefits of technological innovation. Those which optimise their internal structures and use both their own and partners' resources more effectively will find the prize is a high-performing police force fit for policing in the 21st century.

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