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'What works?' in police intelligence practice?

Abstract

This report analyses police intelligence practice in Britain through the lens of the 'what works?' concept. It is based on a survey of a self-selected group of intelligence staff together with interviews with a random sample of their number. Participants reflected on: their skills and abilities; their training; their successes and their failures; and the utility of the structures and processes within which they operated. We found that respondents broadly agreed on what contributed to effective practice. For example, analysts, intelligence officers and managers ranked a skilled workforce as of greatest import. Human intelligence (HUMINT); operational teams, capable of responding quickly to intelligence; information technology; and plentiful sources of intelligence in their communities, were consistently ranked the top four significant factors in their successes.

At the same time, we conclude that while the 'what works?' approach has some value when applied to policing, there are clear limits to its explanatory power. We conclude that the 'what works?' approach also raises important, albeit largely ignored, questions about institutional memory and identity and that institutional and cultural factors represent significant barriers to the adoption of evidence-based practice in policing.

Key words: intelligence; evidence-based practice; organisational culture; 'what works'?

Introduction: Policy transfer, evidence-based practice and 'what works?'

There are extensive literatures on policy transfer, emulation, Evidence-Based Practice (EBP), and lesson drawing (see for example; Dover and Goodman, 2011; Marsh and Evans, 2012; McCann and Ward, 2012; and Clifton and Fuentes, 2014). In the UK, there are obvious parallels between the pursuit of evidence-based education and evidence-based policing. In both cases, the drivers have been persistent media and scholarly criticism of the status quo, which eventually found supportive audiences in government and enthusiastic supporters in the relevant institutions. In education, for example, Hargreaves advocated a 'double transformation' of educational research and practice (1996 cited in Biesta, 2007 p.2). At the same time, in the policing milieu, the same arguments were being made by researchers such as Bayley (1996) and Sherman (1998); the latter with particular success in Britain, that policing policy and practice should be determined by the same kinds of scholarly and scientific research. Within a short period, EBP became the new orthodoxy in policing and across Britain's public sector. The worldwide recession at the beginning of the twenty-first century has only intensified governments' search for evidence of what works; it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that EBP has now become something of an obsession for governments and institutions across the world.

Problem-solving is core business for governments and it is easy to see how the putative solution of a problem by one would attract the attention of others if they knew of that success; even more likely if it was the kind of intractable, multi-faceted, social problem - associated with unemployment, healthcare, crime and justice or the like - that routinely defeats governmental efforts to fulfil manifesto pledges or improve the lot of their citizens. In that sense, the UK's Government is no different from any other. In March 2013, it announced its plan for a 'World first network of independent "What Works?" centres' (Cabinet Office, 2013 p.i). Today, at least formally, that network is a reality. It is made up of research hubs for education, local economic growth, health, early intervention, well-being, ageing, and finally, crime reduction with which this article principally is concerned.

Table 1 – UK College of Policing's interpretation of the benefits of 'What Works?'
(Source – CoP, 2016 p.1)

Benefit	Example
More informed decisions	Evidence will be translated into practical insights that the police service and their partners can easily use
Better value for money	Guidance will be clear, helping decision-makers to access and apply the evidence locally to make choices about where to spend and disinvest
Reassurance and accountability	Sharing knowledge about 'what works' with the public will help build confidence in the police service and its crime reduction partners
Collaboration and partnership	Links will be strengthened between the police service, crime reduction partners and the academic sector
Prevention, not reaction	Evidence will be provided on the most effective approaches that can help prevent crime

Just like the other hubs, the crime reduction centre aims to systematically assess and synthesise evidence of 'what works?' and to produce outputs that provide practical advice for professionals. The centre is administered by the College of Policing (CoP) and is supported by a commissioned partnership programme jointly funded by the College and the English Social Research Council. Table 1 outlines what the College expects to achieve by refocusing its efforts in this way though the evidence that, despite the College's best intentions, those outcomes necessarily will follow is equivocal. Certainly, there is considerable evidence from the health and education sectors, and from policing itself, that testifies to the challenge of implementing public policy no matter how rational and well-intended it might be (see for example: Hill, 2009).

Challenging the 'what works?' concept

Dolowitz and Marsh's (1996) comprehensive analysis of policy transfer focused on strategic, policy-focused, decisions and highlighted the significance of actors not just inside the apparatus of government but in a myriad of corporations, international organisations, and transnational enterprises that exerted pressure on governments to embrace change through the process of policy transfer in a wide variety of ways. Initially barely challenged, the notion that what works in one situation or environment necessarily will work in another, is not now without its critics. Questions have been raised about the efficacy of much of the research effort. Particularly in relation to the use of experiments and randomised control trials - common currency in the field - and about the capacity of relatively blunt comparative tools to provide solutions for what often are resource-intensive, complex and challenging social problems. In the context of education but

requiring no great intellectual leap to see its relevance to the wider debate, Biesta (2007 p.78) has argued that 'the whole discussion about evidence-based practice is focused on technical questions — questions about "what works?" — while forgetting the need for critical inquiry into normative and political questions about …what is desirable'?

Greene (2015) has argued that the use of the medical model in police research may have positive implications but that the adoption of the 'what works?' model has shifted the cognitive lens through which policing and police research is judged. Punch (2015 p.1) sees experimental research as promising more reliable findings than have been achieved hitherto, but argues that its utility may be limited to discrete areas of crime control such as situational crime prevention strategies. Policing can be complex and multifaceted and there are 'challenges to how far one can go in experiments with human subjects given that police work is not always a stable environment that can be "frozen" and kept confined to simple variables over time. As Thacher (2001) has argued, experimental research cannot always provide an answer; some topics simply are best approached using other scholarly methodologies. Punch (2015, 1) argues that a slavish adherence to EBP represents the '"McDonaldization" of policing – "one size fits all" and "everyone can do it" and the infantilization of the basic policing task through a neglect of the cop's craft and an undermining of her identity and motivation as a front-line professional'.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach, which is standard in the social sciences, was used to critically assess 'what works?' and its utility to the assessment of intelligence practice (and by extension, other complex and multidimensional activities and environments) in law enforcement agencies. Substantially, the empirical data on which this paper is based were collected in a case study of post-NIM intelligence practice in England and Wales.

Research design

Secondary data were collected through a systematic review of the existing scholarly literature, relevant official reports, and reviews and so on. Primary research data first were collected from a survey of law enforcement intelligence staff.[i] The survey was piloted with a small convenience sample *(N=4)* (ultimately, 3.6% of the sample used in this study). No significant changes were made to the survey document as a result of the pilot. More data were collected in semi-structured interviews with randomly selected members of the larger sample. Survey participants provided both qualitative and quantitative data. Participants provided personal accounts of their professional experiences and assessed individual elements of that work using Likert scales. They

also ranked each aspect of the work according to its perceived importance to their successes. A standard quantitative research tool, SPSS, was used to interpret the quantitative data; the NVivo program was employed to make sense of the qualitative feedback through a process of constructivist thematic analysis. Using a constructivist approach, *inter alia* researchers collected respondents' views of the situation being studied; focused on a single phenomenon (in this case intelligence practice in the wake of the NIM review); studied the social and professional contexts of respondents; and sought as a result to encourage reform of the police institution.

Assessing the wider utility of the research design, we adopted an emic approach to explain the research respondents' interpretation of their activities and behaviour, to obtain insider accounts of intelligence practice. We recognised that the research would benefit from a complementary etic approach that drew on the relevant literature and which allowed us to say something meaningful about our observations and the ways in which they might be applied to other cultures both within and without the police institution. Those approaches determined our research design and helped us to generate patterns of meaning that we already have tested in sub-projects (which assessed the utility of police staff selection and CHIS recruitment policies) and will go on to test empirically in further studies.

Research sample

A self-selected sample of intelligence staff was surveyed (*N=110)*. The sample was made up of: DOIs - the most senior staff in the intelligence environment (*n=7*); intelligence managers, those tasked with day to day control of intelligence operations (*n=17*); intelligence officers - caseworkers (*n=62*); and intelligence analysts - technicians (*n=24*). Participants initially were recruited at an ACPO-organised conference held as part of the NIM review process. Subsequently, the snowball technique was used to reach other respondents with similar knowledge and experience in sufficient numbers that the research findings could reasonably be claimed to represent the views of Britain's law enforcement intelligence community. The sample included members of 28 separate police forces and law enforcement agencies in England and Wales. 32 respondents were female, 73 were male; five respondents did not declare their gender. Participants self-identified their role and whether they considered themselves 'specialists' or 'non-specialists'; the former working in roles investigating serious and organised crime while the latter largely were employed in local policing units, which traditionally have not benefited from the same levels of training and support as their specialist colleagues. Members of this larger group were selected for interview using the lottery system of random sampling (*n=12*). In this paper, the participants are anonymised; they are referred to by role and by number.

Table 2 - sample characteristics (job role and specialist/non specialist)

	N	%
Analyst	24	21.8
Intelligence Officer	62	56.4
Intelligence Manager	17	15.5
Director of Intelligence	7	6.4
Specialist	61	55.5
Non-Specialist	49	44.5

Challenges encountered and limitations of the study

Few meaningful challenges were encountered in carrying out the study. The support of the College of Policing and the authors' association with the police intelligence working group seemed to open as many doors as necessary. It was disappointing that no one from the national detective agency, the National Crime Agency (NCA) participated in the research but in the name of methodological consistency, participation was entirely voluntary, the researchers made no attempt to influence that. It is believed *a priori* that this simply reflected the limited involvement of the agency in the wider NIM review rather than a rebuff to the researchers.

In the ranking exercise, respondents chose from a list of 11 factors. The research team compiled that list. The disadvantages of such an approach are: the risk of influencing choice; other possible responses being overlooked; the order of the options presented may influence choice. Conversely, such choices are: easier to code; allow for statistical summaries of data; and enable researchers to categorise data and to present the results in a way in which they can more easily be interpreted by the reader. We argue that the options presented were both familiar enough to the respondents (because they routinely are used in that milieu) and distinct and clear enough that in this case the positives outweighed the negatives of this approach. The study presents a partial view of the intelligence world in the sense that all the respondents worked in that environment at the time the research was conducted. In our view, the research is indicative of the views of, and generalizable to, the UK law enforcement community's intelligence staffs. It is not necessarily generalizable to the wider law enforcement community though it is reasonable to infer that many of the views expressed by research participants would be shared by others in the police institution.

Research findings

This section, reports the results of the ranking exercise completed by respondents. It also summarises the key points from the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the survey and semi-structured interviews with intelligence staff. The results of the ranking exercise (Question 5) are presented first because they provide a useful introduction to the data that follows. Next comes the data that directly addresses the survey questions. Finally, the data collected through the survey and semi-structured interviews that were examined thematically. The themes identified were: capability and capacity; direction and control; partner and community engagement; information technology; and intelligence success.

Ranking exercise

Table 3 – Analysts' ranking of factors influencing success

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skilled staff	22	1	7	2.36	1.941
IT	20	1	8	4.60	1.930
Dedicated operational team	22	1	11	4.64	2.804
CHIS	21	1	10	5.10	3.113
Community intelligence	21	1	11	6.05	3.186
Analytical products	22	3	11	6.50	2.365
Open source	21	2	11	6.81	2.892
Effective liaison	21	4	10	6.90	1.921
Environmental scanning	22	1	11	7.09	3.637
Communications data	20	3	11	7.10	2.532
NIM	22	1	11	7.64	3.580
Valid N (listwise)	19				

Respondents ranked the factors they saw as influencing the success of their practice. Tables 3-6 present the results of that exercise. As the tables show, respondents broadly agreed on the things that really mattered in their practice. Analysts placed skilled staff, dedicated operational teams and HUMINT at the top of their rankings. The appearance of information technology (IT) in second place on their list is unsurprising given the importance of IT to intelligence analysis in the modern era. Intelligence products such as social network and crime pattern analyses, which

are central to analysts' work, now ordinarily rely on software such as IBM's i2 Analyst's Notebook and Anacapa's criminal intelligence analysis programs.

As these tables show, there was little disagreement amongst intelligence staff on what really mattered in their work. What is just as worthy of comment here is that the NIM, something in which the police service has invested a great deal of organisational energy, almost was overlooked by respondents (even if their responses to the survey and interview questions acknowledged the value of formalised, uniform, intelligence structures and processes). Though it is worth adding the caveat that this was not reflected in the qualitative responses.

Table 4 – Intelligence officers' rankings

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skilled staff	56	1	9	2.20	1.833
CHIS	57	1	11	4.33	2.466
Dedicated operational team	56	1	11	4.46	2.879
IT	57	1	11	5.07	2.597
Community intelligence	57	1	11	5.37	2.956
Effective liaison	57	1	11	5.84	2.631
Communications data	56	1	11	5.86	2.362
Open source	57	1	10	6.05	2.310
NIM	55	1	12	7.38	3.913
Analytical products	56	2	11	7.54	2.427
Environmental scanning	53	1	11	9.23	2.562
Valid N (listwise)	49				

Table 5 – Directors' of intelligence rankings

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CHIS	6	1	8	3.50	2.588
Skilled staff	6	1	9	3.83	3.125
IT	6	1	7	4.00	2.530
Dedicated operational team	6	2	9	4.83	3.061
Community intelligence	6	2	11	5.00	3.347
Effective liaison	6	3	10	6.17	2.639
Open source	6	5	10	7.17	2.137
Analytical products	6	5	11	7.50	2.168
Communications data	6	6	10	7.83	1.835
NIM	6	2	11	8.00	4.000
Environmental scanning	6	1	11	8.17	3.656
Valid N (listwise)	6				

Table 6 – Intelligence managers' rankings

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skilled staff	16	1	6	1.81	1.377
CHIS	17	2	7	3.88	1.764
Community intelligence	17	1	10	5.00	2.574
Effective liaison	17	2	11	5.24	2.333
IT	17	1	10	5.88	2.804
Communications data	17	2	11	5.94	2.926
Open source	17	2	9	5.94	2.304
Dedicated operational team	17	1	11	6.12	2.713
NIM	16	1	11	7.25	4.155
Environmental scanning	15	4	11	8.53	2.356
Analytical products	17	3	11	8.71	2.024
Valid N (listwise)	15				

Analysts (*n=19 valid*) were most likely to rate 'skilled staff' as the most important function in effective intelligence practice. The second highest ranked function was IT. In contrast, those working as intelligence officers or managers were less likely to rank 'IT' as being an important function in effective intelligence practice with both of these groups more likely to

exclude it from their top three tasks. 'IT' was ranked third in effective intelligence practice by DOIs. Analysts considered 'NIM' to be the least important element in effective intelligence practice. Intelligence officers (*n=49 valid*) were most likely to rate 'skilled staff' as being the most important function in effective intelligence practice. The second highest ranked function was 'CHIS' (more commonly known as HUMINT). Officers considered 'environmental scanning' to be the least important function in effective intelligence practice. Managers (*n=15 valid*) were most likely to rate 'skilled staff' as being the most important function in effective intelligence practice. The second highest ranked function was 'CHIS'. Managers considered 'analytical products' to be the least important function in effective intelligence practice. DOIs (*n=6 valid*) were most likely to rate 'CHIS' as being the most important function in effective intelligence practice. They ranked 'skilled staff' second. DOIs considered 'Environmental scanning' to be the least important element in effective practice.

Specialist intelligence workers (*n=51 valid*) were most likely to rate 'skilled staff' as the most important function in effective intelligence practice. The second ranked function was 'CHIS'. Specialist intelligence workers considered 'environmental scanning' to be the least important function in intelligence practice. Non-specialists (*n=38 valid*) were most likely to rate 'skilled staff' as being the most important function in effective intelligence practice. The second ranked function was 'CHIS'. Non-specialists considered 'environmental scanning' to be the least important function in effective intelligence practice.

Questions 1 & 2

These questions asked respondents to assess their own skill levels and to consider whether they had received adequate training for their role. 88.2 percent of the sample (n=97) considered themselves to be experts in intelligence practice; 63.6 percent agreed with that proposition and 24.5 percent strongly agreed. Although those who classified themselves as specialists were more likely to consider themselves to be skilled intelligence workers, this result was not statistically significant (see Figure 1).
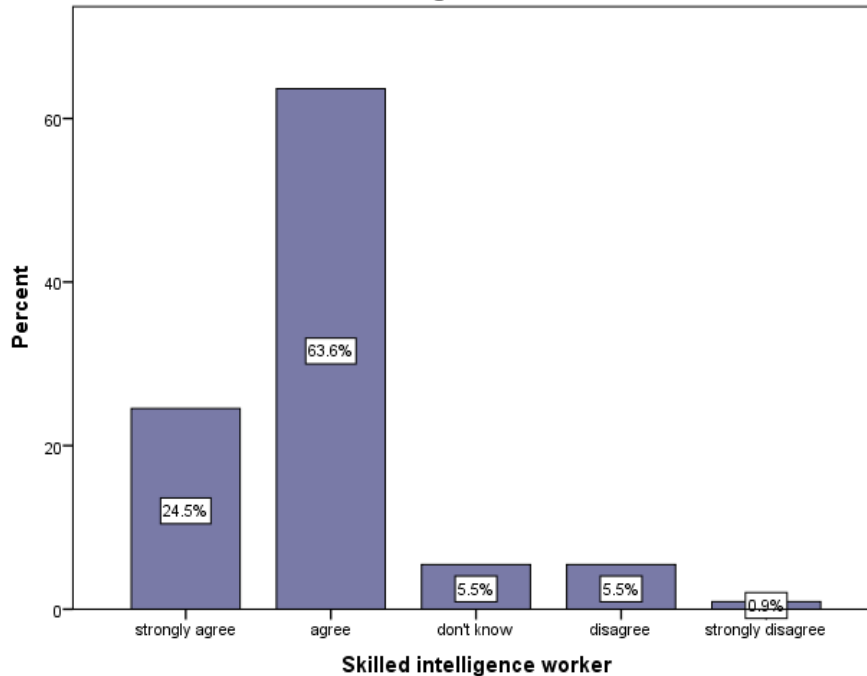
Figure 1 – Respondents' perceptions of themselves as skilled practitioners

Across the sample, there was greater disparity in responses to Question 2 than any other. About 40 percent of respondents failed to answer in the positive (see Figure 2). DOIs were less likely to consider themselves to be adequately trained (57.1 percent 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'). Conversely, the majority of analysts (70.8 percent 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed') considered that they were adequately trained for their role. Accepting that on the basis of the statistics, almost 60 percent of respondents felt that their training was adequate it also must be acknowledged that the explanatory power of quantitative data is limited. For example, highlighting the inadequacy of the training they had received, DOI N110 said:

> There are a number of courses and training which I am still waiting to receive … [which] are core to my role, and managing some of the greatest threat, risk and harm in force – it seems wanting that after 18 months in post I have received no formal training.

A second DOI, N112, said:

> My work in intelligence started with a posting to the unit as a sergeant for a short while. You basically learned by doing the role. I returned to intelligence as a DI and again learned by doing and sharing experiences with other practitioners. When promoted DCI and after spending time as a District crime manager I returned to intelligence and again had no specific training for the role.
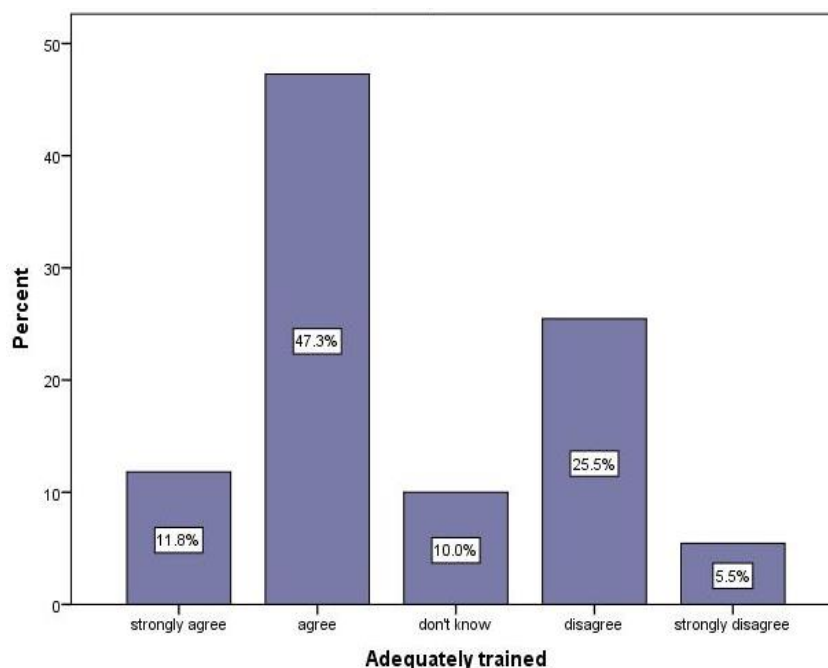
Figure 2 – Respondents' opinions on adequacy of training received

A third, N98, said:

> I have been well trained for my role but I believe that the training could have been better, more focussed on innovation, creativity and more joined up with other law enforcement agencies.

Manager N24 said that though in their view intelligence training was 'sporadic and infrequently updated', their training:

> Had been accumulated over a number of years, was rarely refreshed, was not generally recognised externally and did not provide any formal qualification. There was no national standard for intelligence practitioners to be measured against in terms of competence.

Manager N64 spoke about 'an air of mystery' surrounding intelligence practice with some insiders 'reluctant to take time to share their knowledge and remove the mystery' from the work. Like many of their colleagues, N64 had not received any formal training. The subject of informal 'on the job' training came up repeatedly in the study. Manager N106 said that most of their training was 'learn as you go along'. Managers N19 and N47 both had been in post for six months, had received no training for their roles but anticipated receiving training in the following six months. Manager N40 argued that 'on the job' training was an important element in professional development. They said:

> Learning by mistakes often is a good way to ensure that you do not fall foul of the same problem twice. Looking back, I would have liked to have had the intelligence

manager course slightly earlier on in my posting, however having it too early would have meant that I did not have any context to put to the learning.

Manager N79 echoed that view. They said:

The skills I have developed have come through my own contacts and interest in the profession. My personal thoughts are that there is limited training that can be given to assist in the development of these skills without being put into a practical context'.

However, Manager N46's observations on their experience provided another dimension to that debate – one that many outside the law enforcement bubble might struggle to rationalise. They said:

I performed the role for eighteen months without any form of training other than 'here's your office, now crack on!' The expectations were high but I was offered no support, training or mentoring. In such a high risk world, I have found this quite astonishing.

Broadly, intelligence officers responded in a similar vein. Many, such as Officer N34, had received 'no formal training directly associated with the intelligence field'; some felt that their training was adequate but that adequacy was proportionate to their agency's expectations of them. Officer N107 noted that they were 'only told what to click and what not to click on their force intelligence system'. Officer N103 summed up many of the frustrations expressed by those staff. They said that:

Officers are allocated to essential training … far too late. Training is too heavily weighted on the technical use of police intelligence systems, as opposed to teaching individuals the investigative and legislative understanding they require. There is a lack of understanding and consistency as to what constitutes a good intelligence product. Staff often … simply regurgitate intelligence and fail to make an assessment of the intelligence picture.

In sum, the responses to questions 1 and 2 highlight the impact of a lack of formal intelligence training/education or the availability of provision at the most appropriate times. This risks undermining the formal commitment to intelligence-led policing in that it risks giving rise to the development of informal and sub-optimal understandings. Most significantly, it raises the question of how far there is a shared understanding of the meaning, possibilities and limitations of 'intelligence'.

Question 3

Some of the responses to questions 1and 2 also provide useful context for explaining understandings of how intelligence fits with policy evidenced in answer to this question. In light of the budgetary constraints on policing in the modern era, respondents were asked if they considered intelligence work a front office (and therefore largely safe from budget cuts) or a

back office (and therefore ripe for pruning) function. This question stimulated a wide range of responses that could not easily be categorised. No one questioned the premise of the question, which was an interesting finding in itself. Certainly, there was little consensus on this point. DOIs N98 and N99 both felt that it was a back-office function. Whilst three other DOIs took the opposite view. DOI N110 said that 'intelligence should be a front-line function – and deeply embedded in both core and specialist policing'. N110 believed that the reason it was not perceived in that way was 'cultural'. They said:

> Intelligence is seen as a support function rather than a driver for proactive management of assets. Historically the hours of work tended to be Monday – Friday and office hours, attracting people who perhaps wished to be in a back-office function. The department lost its dynamism and now needs an infusion of real talent.

DOI N112 agreed with that argument. They said that 'intelligence needs to drive business [so that it guides] … proper resource allocation and problem solving'. DOI N113 too considered intelligence practice to be a front-line function. They said that intelligence collection, 'particularly source work (HUMINT) was 'very much in the front line' arguing that:

> The value of source intelligence often has only a limited life as the location of stolen property or of a wanted person will only be current for a very short period of time. The gathering of intelligence by field intelligence officers also is front line as it may include observation and surveillance of … subjects.

Though it would be wrong to see that apparent disagreement between intelligence directors in binary terms. DOI N98 explained in interview that in their force, intelligence had long been a back-office function because of invisibility to the rest of the force and the limited contribution of the force's staff. N98 went on to outline the steps that they had taken to educate staff, to provide further training and to make a number of structural changes that encouraged staff to be more proactive and to remove blockages from the intelligence system; N98 felt that they had made significant progress on both those scores.

Manager N104 said that the work required 'proactive decisions around threat and risk and …firmly has an operational strand'. Manager N106 gave an example of the kinds of demands that were made upon them in their work. They said:

> Last Saturday - my day off - I was on the phone for four hours and made over 70 telephone calls regarding two unconnected operations. There was a crime in action which required source tasking from the on-call Detective Superintendent. I spoke with six source handlers and two deputy controllers to task sources to identify key intelligence objectives laid down to help save a life – that is not back-office work.

Manager N24 felt that the identification of intelligence work as a back-office function simply represented a 'lack of understanding of the value that strong intelligence functions can provide

to community safety and fighting crime'. N24 was critical of senior managers outside of the intelligence milieu who in their view 'lacked awareness of the ways in which intelligence officers can support local investigations and impact upon local crime problems'. In the same vein, Manager N33 believed that in 'austere times' where 'resources are stretched to the limit, intelligence gathering is vital and an excellent cost saving tool'. Manager N40 also highlighted that:

> In a time of reduced resources, we need the ability to go out and collect good quality intelligence with which to direct our staff to deal appropriately with the threat, risk and harm faced by our communities. That sort of intelligence cannot be gathered solely by sitting in an office … but we're losing about 30 percent of our staff.

Intelligence officers' views on the subject also were mixed. Officer N01 believed that the front line consisted solely of 'response, neighbourhood and CID'. Officer N02 said that intelligence work should complement front line response but was not in itself deserving of that label. Officer N05 agreed with that view. Officer N06 saw the work as both front line and back office. They said that it was 'a front line… managing day to day risks [and] back office as regards longer term intelligence development and strategic work. That was a point developed by Officer N03. They agreed with N06, saying:

> The best intelligence possible will always be via the eyes of a police officer or via a recording device which necessarily requires front line activity. This can be overt or covert, but some evidence will be obtainable only using covert methods. However, in the modern world of computer systems and databases a lot of backroom activity is needed. My current role… is entirely back office and other than the supervisors it is entirely civilian staffed. They administer our intelligence system, make decisions on intelligence reports and deal with outside agency and partner referrals.

Officer N101 was in no doubt that the work was a front line activity because it was a continuous process that actively supported officers on the front line in their ongoing investigations. They said:

> The assistance provided extends from basic help with RIPA applications, advice on directing investigations to achieve their objects through the most cost effective and proportionate means. As well as covert assistance, implementing level 2 static and foot observations, implementing covert tactics, dealing with the subsequent PII issues, and sensitive disclosure.

Question 4

Respondents were provided with a set of options and asked to rank (on a scale of 1-5: 1= strongly agree; 5 strongly disagree) whether, in their experience, the success of their work was reliant on the following tasks: effective cooperation with other agencies; skilled staff; relevant technologies; open source research capability; intelligence products; effective direction and control of the work; field capability (so that investigations are not limited to inquiries that can

be made from a desk; covert policing capability; community engagement; and finally, NIM products and processes. Respondents were most likely to rate effective intelligence practice as 'needing effective cooperation', followed by the 'need for skilled staff'.

It is worth noting that the majority of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that effective practice relied on every one of the tasks. Few respondents 'disagreed' or 'disagreed strongly' that any of the tasks were necessary for effective practice. Respondents were most likely to identify that effective intelligence practice relied less on 'NIM products' than other tasks. There was little variation in responses between specialist and non-specialist intelligence workers. Analysts (*n=22 valid*) and DOIs (*n=7 valid*) were more likely than intelligence officers (*n=60 valid*) and managers (*n=16 valid*) to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that effective practice relied upon the use of 'relevant technologies', which perhaps reflects the demands of their roles (respectively) as interpreters of data and overseers of intelligence policy as much as practice.

Thematic analysis of responses

This process was used to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset. Data coding ultimately produced a number of concepts that served to sort, organise and also to explain the collected data.

Capability and capacity

The problems of selecting, training, developing and motivating intelligence staff variously have been documented by many researchers (including the first author) - see for example; Innes *et al*, 2005; and Cope, 2004. The research seemed to confirm some of those early impressions of the intelligence workforce but also raised questions of understanding and capability outside of those staffs. For example, DOI N98 said that they considered themselves to be well trained for their role because of their passion for intelligence but they found, when they took up the post of DOI in their force, many did not share that enthusiasm for the subject. N98 said:

> I became concerned that intelligence wasn't seen as the most important thing to do … just 22 percent of officers were putting in a piece of intelligence every month … only eight percent were putting in two pieces a month … 57 percent of road policing officers did not contribute to intelligence at all … Then we have 300 special constables and they haven't received any intelligence training … and 172 volunteers and again [no training] - so little contribution [from them].

Manager N10 said that community engagement was an important part of intelligence work and that more should be done to encourage patrol officers to build contacts and submit intelligence. DOI N111 identified similar issues in their force. They said that educating front line officers was

key to improving intelligence practice because it would provide the space for intelligence officers to work more effectively. They said that officers:

> Need to understand how to deal with intelligence. In many cases, they could deal with the problem directly and record having done so on other recording mechanisms. Intelligence should not be seen as a means of passing on the work to others. Front line staff need to be upskilled on how to submit good quality intelligence.

DOI N108 said that, unsurprisingly, the capability of staff was limited by the structures and processes within which they operated. N108 said that those then in use in their force were neither 'sleek enough nor flexible enough' for the service's needs. Though that situation was compounded by the lack of understanding of the power of good intelligence. Reinforcing the conclusions, we drew from responses to questions 1 and 2, they said that staff 'need to understand what intelligence is, what it is not; how it can be gathered; how it can be developed; its strengths, its limitations, and the opportunities it presents'. Officer N23 agreed. They said 'There's a tasking process in place in the police but jealously guarded by management and although outlined in NIM... many police officers and staff have no concept of what a tasking process is and how it operates'.

As the ranking exercise illustrated, there was very little disagreement on the need for skilled intelligence staff. That may be entirely unsurprising but many respondents made the obvious link between staff capability and the quality of their outputs. Officer N02 said that there was a need to develop experience and skills so that an ethos of and pride in professionalism was encouraged', which perhaps suggests that ethos was lacking in their force. Manager N10 summed up many respondents' views on the importance of having the right people in the right posts when they said that:

> Skilled intelligence staff are the most important part of good intelligence work. Those members of staff that are interested in the work, who know where to look, know who to ask, know how to communicate and know how to write relevant and informative reports, are priceless.

How that might best be achieved was moot. DOI N110 called for a career pathway for staff, which they felt was:

> At the heart of many issues currently experienced within intelligence. A career pathway with training for police staff is much needed. Investment is required. Police officers should also commit to roles when certain training is provided – we have suffered from significant loss of skills due to secondments and staff moving to others areas of business... We train staff and then seem to lose them. That is not cost effective.

There appeared now to be much less resistance (to that identified for example by Cope, 2004) to the principle that people other than police officers could be effective intelligence officers. Manager N24 considered that the replacement of sworn officers in intelligence roles was not, of itself, a significant factor, but that 'recruiting the right calibre of personnel had not adequately compensated in that area'. Intelligence officer N52 highlighted that skilled intelligence officers were hard to come by. They said that the work, 'requires a certain type of thought process and problem solving skill. Without skilled staff, everything else starts to fall apart'.

We are aware that efforts are being made to introduce occupational standards, competencies, range statements and the like to intelligence work but, as this analysis already has shown, issues of competency and – perhaps even more importantly - understanding of intelligence are bigger than the intelligence workforce. Analyst N06 summed up the frustrations of many respondents with their response to the question 'what limits the success of your work'? They replied 'Constant distractions and interruptions due to daily bureaucracy, processes, reports of unnecessary detail and meetings, reducing time being spent on actual analytical development work'.

Direction and control

Direction is a key component of the intelligence cycle, the (arguably flawed) model that underpins intelligence practice in the Western world (see Gill and Phythian, 2013). Many respondents talked about its importance to their work. For example, DOI N108 said that 'intelligence cannot be self-serving. It needs direction and focus'. It was clear that in many situations/ environments staff were not just directed but also encouraged and supported but arguably in too many places those features were lacking. Intelligence officer N52 said that in their workplace:

> Direction sometimes appears to be given when in reality there is no realistic likelihood of any kind of progress or the 'direction' is very vague and not specific. For example; asking, or being required to ask, for direction and being told to 'develop intelligence'.

Analyst N82 said that in their force, 'there was a bit of a culture of "tick in the box" requests – where inspectors are tasked with dealing with a particular issue and request analysis so they can say they are doing something'. Officer N02 said that in their experience direction had always been 'hit or miss dependent on the knowledge of those in control'. Officer N05 said that 'Too many officers ask for all intelligence, they will not know exactly what they want or what systems

are available'. That was a point that was endorsed by Officer N07 and Analyst N75. Officer N07 said:

> We have not had a higher analyst for approximately three years and therefore no real direction or tasking. When requests do come in... they are often very vague or again asking you to fit intelligence to an operation already planned - so it is worthless.

A significant number of respondents felt that a balance needed to be struck between directing the intelligence staff and giving it the freedom to identify any emerging, and as yet undefined, threats. Officer N03 said that:

> If a specific intelligence requirement exists, then a directed tasking around it will lead to better results. However, trawling intelligence in a general way can often lead to finding an intelligence requirement you didn't know you had. So, there has to be a healthy balance between targeting existing problems while being open minded to searching for problems you don't know you have.

Manager N24 echoed that sentiment when they said that, 'the intelligence department should have a role to play in setting the direction and should not be passive in this process'. Analyst N22 said that criminality was ever changing, ever developing. 'Therefore, very specific directions may be detrimental to the work being done. Direction obviously is needed but in the right way without being too narrow'. Officer N61 felt that intelligence should be treated as 'a recognised specialisation with long-term career path'. They argued that direction was not lacking but it was pointing in the wrong direction. N61 said that the organisation was conflicted with managers promoted into the department without an intelligence background, 'making decisions based on what they think is the way to do things when in fact they are wrong, which creates divisions and destroys good work'.

Partner and community engagement

Most respondents agreed on the importance of partner and community engagement. Intelligence officer N80 said that it was important to build trust, understanding of the purpose of intelligence, how information can be provided, and it benefited others whether that was 'the law enforcement community or the community at large'. Manager N75 said that engagement was 'pivotal to providing a full intelligence picture, especially when analysing the harm caused by organised crime groups'. However, DOI N108 said that the importance of the role of community intelligence was often overlooked by the police.

The notion of a social contract between intelligence staff and their communities, was central to many respondents' conceptualisation of this dynamic. Officer N06 said that it was 'important to maintain good community engagement in order to build trust and ultimately gain more intelligence between public and partners'. Officer N101 talked about the value of

engagement in providing a 'lifestyle-type picture of a subject or premises' but noted that was very much dependent upon officers 'working directly with the public submitting … [intelligence reports] and whether the community was engaging with the police'. DOI N14 said that it was 'essential to have support from the public in identifying observation points, CHIS, intelligence gathering and prevention of those joining gangs'. Using a softer, perhaps less business-focused tone, Manager N24 said:

> The value of information held within communities cannot be overstated in tackling crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour, terrorism and a whole range of issues affecting public safety. Access to that information is only possible through good engagement and strong relationships with the right people and communities.

DOI N110 felt that there was much more that could be done to develop the police/community relationships. They said:

> All too often we fail to engage with our diverse communities – many of whom do not have English as a first or second language. There is still much to be done in being more creative and innovative. The processes we employ tend to be well used, and mildly successful but limited.

Arguably, there was greater tension between police and partners than between police and communities. That perhaps reinforces the view that the challenges of joint-working between agencies that may share a vision but have very different working practices, structures and cultures, should not be underestimated. Manager N106 said that in many cases, intelligence simply was information and 'if we are unable to obtain up to date information from other agencies we are left hamstrung… and risk making genuine mistakes based on [out of date] intelligence'. Officer N52 noted that information from 'councils and [other] agencies with access to personal data that the police did not hold was 'particularly important'. Manager N75 acknowledged that effective communication/relationship building was key to the work of intelligence staff but highlighted that relationships could be complicated in the intelligence milieu because of the requirement to protect sensitive intelligence. Picking up on the point of what may and may not lawfully be shared, Analyst N82 said that it was difficult to have a joined up approach to problem solving. They said:

> I have dealt with outside agencies and forces in the past and found that information sharing was pretty much a one-way street. Often it seems that the reluctance… to pass on information is due to confusion with what information can be shared with whom. Greater clarity on this across all partners and forces would facilitate a free flow of information and intelligence, which in turn would allow more accurate intelligence analysis.

DOI N110 too challenged the utility of some partnership arrangements. They said that partnership seemed logical but that:

> Within intelligence it seems [that] …processes and protocols inhibit, rather than encourage the free flow of information. Meetings often lack purpose or clear intent. Large weighty documents are produced which don't really inform. Co-location – dynamism – a can do attitude – clear direction are all key to ensuring that real service delivery is achieved.

Information technology

Officer N03 succinctly summarised the majority view on the significance of information technology to intelligence practice. They said that IT broadly fell into two categories; what commonly is understood as office IT and technical equipment. They said:

> In terms of IT, access to databases and computer programs that are fit for purpose are the backbone of most intelligence work. Regardless of the front-line work being carried out, the intelligence gathered needs to be recorded and then retained in a format that makes it easily searchable in the future. Therefore, computers and their software make a real difference to investigations in the present and future. Likewise, the latest technical equipment, in terms of radios, recording devices [and so on] …provide the best product in the end in terms of evidence.

Office IT is of course expensive and, in the information age, needs almost continuous updating and that places a heavy burden on policing – and on institutions in general. Officer N05 said that in their force more access to open source tools such as GB Accelerator – a service for public sector organisations that allows them to locate individuals involved in crime - was needed. N05 said that they had used GB Accelerator, 'a wonderful tool' that had been taken away due to cost. They said that their work had suffered since. Manager N10 acknowledged that the police usually were playing 'catch-up' with crime and criminals. They said that the police were slow in keeping up with technology because of cost issues. N10 expressed the view – no doubt uttered by many officers over the years that the police 'needed to be able to keep up with technological developments as criminals are always ahead of us'. Adding further to that long list, in the same vein, DOI N99 said that up to date technology was 'essential so that we can keep pace with the criminal underworld in order to successfully generate intelligence about them'.

In the context of technical equipment, DOI N98 said that the justification for it was 'all part of pushing the boundaries of law enforcement agencies working as one with every advantage technology can bring'. Echoing Manager N194's comments about the air of mystery surrounding intelligence practice, Analyst N111 believed that there needed to be 'wider dissemination internally of these technologies'. They added 'Sometimes there is so much secrecy around intelligence that staff appear to talk in riddles. That's exclusive and limits staff development'. Officer N23 said that with the exception of the specialist squads, the police were 'slow to respond to emerging technology, and were playing catch up time and time again' even

though 'massive police budgets and huge IT departments existed within the police'. Very much endorsing those concerns, DOI N110 said that it was 'Critical, critical, critical!!!' that the police should have the equipment they need but that their 'technology was often woeful and simply not fit for purpose'.

Intelligence success

Despite (or maybe even because of) the prominence given by the media on the subject of intelligence failure, some respondents argued for the utility of considering intelligence success. Officer N03 defined success as 'getting to the point where you have at least disrupted criminal activity or, even better, [provided] evidence to use in a prosecution'. N03 provided two examples. In the first case, a CHIS gave information that mobile phone sellers in an identified area were receiving stolen phones. The information was developed by N03's unit and an undercover officer deployed to test and corroborate the CHIS information. A number of phones were purchased by the officer; each was found to be stolen. Once that was confirmed, the offenders were apprehended. In the second case, the deployment of a covert recording device not only confirmed the guilt of some suspects but also the innocence of others – an important factor in retaining the confidence and support of communities.

Officer N05 provided an example of an unresolved shooting that developed into a threat to another person's life ('a tit for tat' kind of situation). Excellent research based on CHIS information eventually identified the name and address of the intended victim. This was enough to persuade an operational team to take on the investigation, fulfilling the police's duty of care to the potential victim and also helping them to solve the shooting that was at the root of the issue. Analyst N21 spoke more generically than some other respondents but highlighted the different dimensions of success in their work. Those included 'identifying when stolen products from a burglary have been sold at computer exchange shops'; identification of suspected thieves from CCTV images; 'seeing a reduction... of crime within a particular area as a result of my direction of patrols'.

Providing evidence that the focus on performance in some parts of the service was as strong as it ever has been, Officer N57 said that success in intelligence work was about 'arrests and convictions that come directly as a result of intelligence supplied'. N57 gave an example of an operation that targeted the cultivation of cannabis because of its connections to anti-social behaviour and harm in the force's communities. They said:

> We regularly receive intelligence... identifying people who produce cannabis and/or giving the locations of these farms... [We] recently ran a covert operation targeting the mass production and selling of cannabis... over an 18-month period [with]

>...local operational officers working closely with intelligence staff constantly developing intelligence received from a variety of sources. The result was the dismantling of an OCG... and the associated ASB problems were significantly reduced as a result.

Providing an example which illustrates the sheer variety of the threats that intelligence staff must deal with, Manager N73 described a request for assistance from a Silver commander at a large public order-type event where there was expected to be disorder. They said that:

>During this event, disorder did occur and a terrorist group took the opportunity to plan a bomb attack on uniform police. [Time-critical] ...intelligence of this attack was passed to the intelligence unit and [as a result] a liaison officer was co-located in the Silver command room and was able to pass on intelligence in 'real time.' The command room were able to remove the uniform officers from the area of the attack in good time and the threat was removed/disrupted.

Conclusions

The aim of this research was to apply a 'what works?' lens to the law enforcement intelligence milieu. However, at an early stage of the project, once we reviewed the relevant literature and analysed the first returns of survey data, we recognised the limitations of that approach in this context. One positive outcome of the research has been to identify what practitioners see as barriers to success ('what doesn't work'); for example, in relation to staff selection and training, the direction and control of intelligence work, and the quality of information technologies. Given that intelligence practice so often is associated with failure, this research represented a welcome opportunity to redress the balance. However, while the successes identified via this research may provide pointers for others, they do not amount to firm evidence of 'what works'? The popular perception is that knowledge of 'what works?' can provide advantage for public sector organisations. A great deal of evidence has been brought forward to make that case but like Thacher (2001), Biesta (2007), and Punch (2015) before us, we found that though that may be true in principle, multi-faceted and complex activities like intelligence practice simply cannot be explained using relatively unsophisticated, comparative, tools. In short, while this research found many positive features of intelligence practice, we cannot, and do not, claim that what we identified amounts to 'what works?' in that milieu.

As the first author found in a study of intelligence-led policing (James, 2013), it has proved difficult to galvanise the police institution to make the kinds of changes that its intelligence staffs and those who champion their cause feel are necessary. There may be many reasons for that. The action orientation of policing and its commitment to a 'can do' culture mitigates the influence of intelligence and intelligence staff on policing outcomes. Wong (2015)

found in his study of the Hong Kong Police (substantially, still operating the British policing model) that staff too often relied on tradition, experience, and faith in their own judgement so that in decision-making, confirmation bias was the norm. The first author identified the same tendency in British policing; the consequence of which *inter alia* was the side-lining of intelligence staff and their assessments (James, 2013).

Perhaps the essence of the debate about the utility of intelligence is best captured in the argument about whether the work is a frontline or back office function or whether in reality it is a joined up, in practice an indivisible, function. The labelling of a function as frontline or back office has a significance that goes beyond semantics; particularly in this age of austerity for the public sector. We argue that it is counter-productive. Commonly, frontline implies essential services whilst back office functions are ancillary and therefore dispensable - or at least fungible. This study found that even amongst intelligence staff there was disagreement on this point. DOIs (arguably those with the greatest power in intelligence) were divided on the subject. Marginally, the majority view was that intelligence was a front-line function, which should be 'deeply embedded in both core and specialist policing' (DOI N110) and 'needs to drive business' (DOI N112). Managers, broadly, were critical of those who saw intelligence as anything other than central to operational policing and felt that the cuts to police budgets only strengthened their case. Given the pressure on the public sector to save costs, it is understandable why many in policing would favour the former, the axe has to fall somewhere, but the discourse is skewed by the tendency to post the sick and injured to intelligence units, which to our minds represents another example of the undervaluing of intelligence practice.

For all the evidence of the efficacy of intelligence practice that has been brought forward in public inquiries, by researchers, and by the police institution itself, the extent to which one believes that it can or will 'work' in law enforcement depends on a subjective assessment of its value and purpose. Spicer (2015) has highlighted the ubiquity of power in those kinds of debates. He argued that to effect change in an organization, one must know how the decision-making process really works. That includes 'identifying key players, knowing their strengths, weaknesses... hidden agendas [and so on]'. The 'politically astute' insider will therefore know how to use that system to their advantage (Spicer, 2015 p.1). We recognise that relying solely on the insider (or emic) perspective for this study has produced a distinctly partial view of the intelligence world. It is well understood that insiders' perceptions are shaped and bounded by the culture within which they operate but our study has revealed much about the dynamics of the police institution. We argue that it is reasonable to infer from our data that the power in policing does not lie in the intelligence milieu and that intelligence, as a discipline, does not have

enough political support in the wider police organisation or at least that the argument for placing intelligence at the centre rather than at the periphery of policing has not yet reached a critical mass. Until that tipping point is reached, what amounts to the credibility gap described by our respondents will remain as wide as ever and we can only see the the shortcomings in staffing, technology, equipment and so on, continuing.

Much of the evidence that has been brought forward for the success of EBP has been drawn from SCP schemes, hotspot policing strategies, or similar crime control initiatives even if, in recent years, efforts have been made to extend its utility and appeal. Ritter and Lancaster (2013) argue *inter alia* that no matter how persuasive the case for EBP, police organizational culture always will be a significant barrier to its acceptance by the rank and file. In his recent study of the Hong Kong Police, Wong argued that policing in the former British colony, which is largely based on the British policing model, was atheoretical. Based on 'tradition, experience, and faith' (Wong, 2015 p.61). In a previous empirical study, the first author of this paper found the same evidence in the context of British policing; arguing that meaningful change will not be effected until organizational culture is transformed and decades of orthodoxy and tradition overturned (James, 2013). Arguably, without those changes – which go beyond the current drive for professionalization and far beyond the utility or otherwise of 'what works?' - EBP will join the long list of putatively promising policies, which ultimately have failed to influence British policing in meaningful ways.

In instrumental terms, this study is a valuable first step in identifying discrete elements of practice, such as CHIS recruitment strategies, that may be analysed comparatively. It also has identified matters of significant import in intelligence work. Not the least of these is the concept of reach. Commonly, operational reach is defined as the distance over which military power can be deployed decisively. In this context, it is explained as the ability of an intelligence staff to project its influence beyond the limits of its physical setting to shape policing outcomes. That will invariably be determined by the quality of leadership, direction and control, staff skills, IT, equipment, its field capability, and so on that have been discussed in this study but reach also is determined by the extent to which intelligence staff, their practice, and their products are recognised as credible by the wider organisation.

Credibility and reach are inextricably linked; we argue that is a significant factor in 'what works?' in intelligence practice. In other words, we contend that improving the credibility of intelligence staff, practice and so on, will result in greater acceptance of the workforce's efforts, which in turn will lead to greater credibility and a greater investment in training and education (which may help practitioners make the kinds of decisions around the better direction of the

collection effort, which our research identified as problematic) - and so on and so forth - creating a virtuous circle in a chain of events in which the effects increase exponentially to the benefit of the institution and the communities it serves. That also may help develop the kinds of career pathways that practitioners consider essential to professional development and ultimately to better practice.

Ultimately, the prospects for any organisational reform invariably are limited by the extent to which those with real power in the institution believe change is both in their best interests and will deliver practical benefits for the institution. The evidence suggests that largely those are political rather than operational decisions.

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