

The Future Face of Policing

Sweeping changes internationally are creating enormous problems, opportunities and challenges in which police officers will have to participate. The only question is whether they will participate pro-actively — on their terms — or re-actively — on someone else's terms.

This was the message delivered to the Conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and the South-West Pacific Region held in Perth from 26-30 March.

It came from Mr John Hughes, a Perth businessman who addressed the conference on "The Future of Policing; Ethics, Accountability and Flexibilities", approaching it from a community perspective.

He said that for far too long policing authorities had been compromised into a position that was largely re-active and not pro-active. This basically stemmed from a lack of perception of what the community really needed from the police, and a lack of outward-looking vision from police forces themselves.

"The very foundation of the society we live in depends on effective policing," he said. "The early warning signals are already evident through the growing crime rate and I earnestly believe that policing is at the crossroads, demanding a new vision and a new approach to the challenges ahead."

Community as a customer

He said the community, as the consumer and beneficiary of police services, like any other customer, expected value for money.

"If the community is the customer for police services you have to find out what the community's expectations of the police really are," he said. "The public at large speaks with many different voices from many different directions and they find it hard to articulate their vision for the police over the next 10 years. But you can be certain that the public will be highly critical if they perceive a failure in the police to do what they believe should be done."

"The community is your customer and expects, and should be given, service and in a situation where policing must fight for its share of the public purse, it

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is highly desirable to have the public supportive and on side.

"If they perceive the politicians are not giving sufficient priority to policing, then they can be a potent force for change through pressure on our political leaders.

"Part of your internal philosophy should be that new recruits must be left in no doubt whatsoever that their customers are the 95 per cent of citizens who are honest and law-abiding, and indeed that even the other 5 per cent are, by our standards of justice, innocent until proved guilty.

"Furthermore, they must understand that a uniform and the right to carry a

This article is one of several presented at the conference which impressed Commissioner Peter McAulay with their "Seeing ourselves as others see us" approach to the future of policing. Other addresses will be published in later editions of Platypus.

firearm does not distinguish them as a separate group in a non-uniformed public. For the better part of every day they do not wear their uniform and do not carry a firearm. They are members of the community just like anyone else," he said.

Community expectations

The public expected policing to provide society with an umbrella of safety, to prevent crime and disorder and to protect the person and property. When unlawful acts occurred, the offenders should be quickly caught and subjected to the processes of the law.

The public also expected the police to go about their duties in a calm, friendly, professional and lawful way. Police officers were expected to deal with members of the public in a respectful manner irrespective of the pressures, the dangers and the aggravations imposed on them.

"Obviously it is vitally important to be aware of community expectations, but at the same time, I believe it is imperative that you should be telling the community what the policing priorities are, and what you, as servants of the public and the appointed guardians of the law intend to do about it," he said.

It was obvious to say that in the 1990s the community would expect the police to continue those things done in the past, but in a bigger and better way. The community, therefore, must be provided with a vision for the Future of Policing.

"And it must be a vision which is shared by the community, otherwise the community will not own it and will not see its value," he said. "If the community does not own the vision and share in its development, the likelihood of success is minimal. That is precisely what is wrong with Australia today. There is no vision of the future which is shared by enough people to clearly shape the future. And if we don't manage ourselves well, we will suffer the ignominy of being managed by others."

A vision for the ranks

"The value of a vision is that it will clearly indicate which areas of policing you wish to involve yourself with, that is the extent of the Future of Policing. It is simply not possible to be perfect at everything," he said.

"At the moment the police force deals with corporate crime, violent crime, drugs, theft, traffic offences, vandalism, civil disturbance and domestic disputes. A serious question which the police must ask themselves is whether or not it is necessary, or even desirable, for them to try and tackle all of these areas.

"You need to plan so that the available resources are focused on the actual and perceived needs of the community," he said. "Serious consideration needs to be given to reducing the range of activities the force presently copes with. If you don't have the expertise, even by sub-contracting, to cope effectively in all areas, you should not be there, otherwise you will perform below expectations and deserve criticism. And there are other issues and new concepts, such

as community policing, which need to be factored into the police vision of the future.

"However, the value of the vision will be diminished if your own officers do not identify with it," he said. "The ranks also have to identify with the vision otherwise they will not do the things which are necessary to action the plan.

"There is also no value in having a vision if it is not articulated and actioned. There must be an action plan to give life to the vision. It must be a plan which will survive the short-term political time frame of three years; it must also be a plan which will not change direction as a straw in the wind, but focus, and keep focusing on the needs of the community even if those needs change with time.

Accountability

"Unless you go to the government with an accurately costed 10-year plan which addresses the key policing areas, the Future of Policing will indeed be more of the same because you will again be re-acting and not pro-acting by not determining the police agenda on behalf of the community."

On accountability, Mr Hughes said one way to provide it was to have appropriate yardsticks against which to measure performance. Under the stimulus of the Financial Administration and Audit Act of 1985, the WA Commissioner had adopted modern corporate planning concepts that outlined objectives and strategies which were measured by regular reporting of performance indicators. His reports were informative and a far cry from those of previous commissioners.

Mr Hughes saw a lack of flexibility as preventing implementation of the strategic vision and action plan which was so essential to the Future of Policing.

"Involve the whole force in the process of change," he said. "Once the strategic directions of the plan are known from external and internal market research, the strengths and weaknesses of the force would be determined by analysis of its internal systems.

"Internal analysis is also the first step in designing a participative approach to implementation of the objectives defined by the plan. Here 'participative' means getting the support of the ranks to implement the changes. They are the ones who will execute the plan, and if it does not have their support, nothing will happen."

The police force was no different from any other organisation or business which

needed to market itself to the public.

"You, as Commissioners, have a selling job to do," he said. "You have to sell to the community and you have to sell to the members of the force. You have to sell them on the merit of what you need to do in order to give substance to the Future of Policing. Your vision and your plan must be sold like any other product.

Effective policing

"Your own efficient, dynamic and enthusiastic public relations units are essential and they should work closely and actively with top management. They have a vital role in helping to forge public perceptions and therefore must be selected carefully and paid commercially competitive salaries to help you get the best."

However, public relations should not be restricted only to professionals, he said. Each member of the organisation had a part to play, particularly those with leadership responsibilities, and especially Commissioners.

Every police force also needed ongoing market research to monitor its PR program and to provide the basis for decision-making for future programs.

"In business, the results of a marketing program can be measured in terms of increased sales," he said. "The results of public relations programs are less easy to measure. Yet knowing the outcome is important in reviewing cost and benefits and will assist in designing future programs.

"Qualitative measures can come from unsolicited views expressed through the mail or on community access radio, and are two examples of results which should be carefully assessed.

"More precise measures can be established by professionally conducted market research which quantitatively measures responses to a carefully prepared and tested series of questions asked before and after the implementation of a marketing program," he said.

In conclusion, Mr Hughes said effective and ethical policing was of fundamental importance in maintaining a free and democratic society and should continue to be the foundation of all policing in the future. Commissioners should continue to protect their forces from political interference in operational and organisational matters.

"You will be neglecting your duties and responsibilities to your teams and to the public at large if you fail to develop (action) plans and do not use your best endeavours to persuade your governments to adopt them," he said.

FATS . . . taking the guess out of firearms training

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strike on the screen. It also calculates the accuracy; did the 'bullet' strike the offender or miss?

The system operates on the principal of centre mass aiming area which is taught to all AFP members and in which all shots above the waist are recorded as lethal hits. Hits below the waist or in the arms or legs are recorded as non-lethal hits.

Scoring is very similar to the current system used for the AFP Standard Qualifying Test and the results are displayed on the screen.

A camera facing the student tapes his or her actions and at the end of a scenario, the situation can be replayed with the member's performance displayed on the screen in synchronisation with the scenario, providing excellent training reinforcement.

"The system is designed to get the member thinking about survival and, in fact, a large number of officer-survival techniques are employed during the use of the system," Sergeant Ford said. "For example, 'voice commands and appropriate verbal challenges', 'the use of cover and concealment' and 'weapon handling skills' are used and provide the closest example to an actual confrontation situation that can be achieved during training.

"FATS is not designed to replace the 'Standard Qualifying Test' or live firing practice, but is a natural progression of training designed to equip a member with the knowledge and skills required where a decision relating to the use of lethal force is involved.

"The system has a three-pronged effect; it increases officer awareness, maximises training, and, most importantly, it reduces liability to both the member and the force," he said.

"Civil actions against police alleging misconduct in the use of firearms and the lack of proper training are becoming more frequent.

"The type and amount of firearms training which should be given to police officers has been the subject of discussion for many years but one thing that cannot be argued is that there is an obligation to provide every member of the force with the best training possible," he said.