



Leading culture change at New Zealand Police – TEACHING NOTES

This case discusses the challenges facing Police Commissioner Howard Broad in leading culture change at New Zealand Police following the release of the report of a Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct in 2007. The inquiry was established in 2004 following the publication in a national daily newspaper of allegations made independently by two women that police officers deliberately undermined or mishandled investigations into complaints of sexual assault made against other officers. The inquiry found evidence of disgraceful conduct by police officers since the late 1970s. The inquiry report was published around the time of a series of court cases involving senior police officers, which gained extensive media coverage and led to public debate about the culture of New Zealand Police. While the inquiry recognised improvements in police culture in the last decade, Commissioner Howard Broad faced the task of leading on-going culture change and restoring public confidence in the organisation.

Course audience

- Advanced undergraduate students
- Honours/Masters level students
- Middle and senior managers on MBA and executive programmes.

Immediate issues

- What message should the Commissioner be conveying to stakeholders (Government, the public) to restore their confidence in the police?
- What steps should the Commissioner take to develop a more positive culture regarding issues of sexual misconduct by officers?
- What are the difficulties involved with undertaking this culture change initiative?

This teaching note was written by Dr Todd Bridgman, Senior Lecturer, Victoria Management School, Victoria University of Wellington, as a resource to accompany the case study 2008-82.1 and its epilogue 2008-82.2. The use of teaching materials is restricted to authorised persons.

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Basic issues

- What is the role of senior management in leading culture change?
- What actions can be taken to change an organisation's culture?
- What are the challenges/limitations of changing an organisation's culture?
- What are the benefits and limitations of using the organisation as a level of analysis, in relation to culture?

Teaching objectives

- To consider the issues of leading a culture change in a large public sector organisation in a highly charged political environment
- To consider the extent to which the level of the organisation is an appropriate level of analysis for investigating cultural issues
- To explore the issues raised by the political imperative to implement universal policies and procedures on a large organisation operating in an environment where adaptation to the local context is crucial for the success of members of that organisation.
- To assess the extent to which organisational culture can be changed by the leader of an organisation.

Suggested student assignments

- What practical steps should the Commissioner implement to develop a more positive culture in New Zealand Police to alleviate the concerns of the public and other stakeholders?
- What factors would be critical to the success of this initiative?
- What would be the main challenges/threats to its successful implementation?
- What does this case tell us about the issues involved in managing planned culture change?
- What are the pros and cons of examining the culture of New Zealand Police using the organisation as the level of analysis?

Responses to the suggested student assignments

What practical steps should the Commissioner implement to develop a more positive culture in New Zealand Police to alleviate the concerns of the public and other stakeholders?

The Report recognised positive changes in police culture since the late 1970s and its author Dame Margaret Bazley recommended four practical steps for ensuring these changes became firmly embedded in New Zealand Police. These are as follows:

- Positive leadership
 - She believed the key to effective change was to have clear and consistent messages reinforced regularly throughout the organisation, so that staff knew how to deal with difficult situations.
- Giving high priority to the retention and recruitment of women and minority groups.

- This would make it more likely that the culture and values of New Zealand Police reflected those of the rest of society. It was also important to have strong representation of women at higher levels to make it more likely that they would challenge the male-dominated environment rather than feel pressure to adapt to it.
- a periodic external audit of police culture, to assess the “health of the organisation”
 - This could be conducted by an independent body such as the State Services Commission. The audit could canvass the views of police, monitor the representation of women in the organisation as well as instances of sexual harassment and discrimination
- the continued development of effective whistle-blower mechanisms based on the principle of “report and be protected”.
 - Also important is the promotion of a culture that encourages the reporting of misconduct. This could be achieved through a mandatory ethics training programme and leadership within New Zealand Police making their expectations that allegations of sexual misconduct made against colleagues would be reported.

What factors would be critical to the success of this initiative?

- Senior ranks buying-in to the proposed changes
 - unless lower ranks believe that senior leaders are making policies a matter of priority, they were likely to be seen as “flavour of the month” and therefore something that can be ignored.
- Middle and lower ranks
 - Irrespective of the positive values and sentiments expressed by senior ranks, unless lower ranks buy-in to these values you do not have culture change.

What would be the main challenges/threats to its successful implementation?

- the credibility of leaders, both with internal and external stakeholders
 - senior members of the organisation are themselves implicated in serious allegations of misconduct (e.g. Clint Rickards)
 - the Commissioner is criticised for being too intellectual and a “social worker cop” who is “neither strong nor decisive” (John Banks)
- the difficulty of getting buy-in around culture change initiatives in a highly hierarchical organisation
 - Commission of Inquiry recommendations of universal responses carries the risk of alienating those members of the organisation that have not acted improperly
 - For example, mandatory ethics training was recommended to ensure a consistent approach across all districts. Some officers

considered this to be a waste of time, since they did not believe it was possible to teach someone to be ethical. Also, they associated the recent court cases as involving a small group of officers in the central North Island and resented being implicated in their actions by being forced to attend ethics training.

- The top-down approach, driven by the inquiry's recommendations is at odds with an innovative organisational culture where operational staff generate ideas that work well at their local level.
- Seeking to change core values/assumptions that are a product of the nature of the job
 - The risks of the job foster a close bond between police officers, but this lead to a "code of silence" which both contributed to the inappropriate behaviour and hampered its investigation.

What does this case tell us about the issues involved in managing planned culture change?

- When thinking about making culture change we need to be aware that organisations exist within an environment. The nature of the environment will influence the need and ability of the organisation to undertake cultural change
 - This organic view of culture is distinct from approaches that regard cultural change as part of a manager's toolkit for improving organisational effectiveness
 - The culture of New Zealand Police has changed since the late 1970s, not because of deliberate culture change initiatives but because of societal changes. These include
 - The role of women in management
 - Increased awareness of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual discrimination
 - Different expectations of what represents an effective police officer (from tall white European males to men and women who reflect the diversity of the New Zealand population)
- Changing the culture of an organisation is difficult and can only be done over time.
 - Some go so far as saying it is impossible to deliberately change an organisation's culture, although this is overstating the case. Practical steps such as who is recruited, who gets rewarded and promoted, training and communication by leaders can contribute towards culture change. They are however, no guarantee of success.

What are the pros and cons of examining the culture of New Zealand Police using the organisation as the level of analysis?

- Pros
 - The public tends to use this as its level of analysis.
- Cons
 - There are multiple sub-cultures within the police which mean that the imposition of recommendations at the organisational level might make it less likely that the desired culture eventuates. E.g. criticism of compulsory ethics training

Suggested additional reading/data gathering

Useful pre-reading for class would be a chapter on organisational behaviour from a textbook on organisational culture. There are hundreds of such books, most of which assume that culture is a critical variable i.e. a “lever” that can be “pulled” by senior management to change an organisation. An alternative, more organic view of culture regards it as a “root metaphor”, or something that an organisation “is”. From this perspective, planned culture change is seen problematic. An excellent overview of both approaches is provided by Joanne Brewis’ chapter in

Knights, D and Willmott, H. (2007). *Introducing Organizational Behaviour and Management*. Thomson, London.

Instructors and students interested in reading more about the case could read the full report.

Bazley, M. (2007). *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct Volume 1*, Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct, Wellington, NZ.

Bazley, M. (2007). *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct Volume 2: Appendices*, Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct, Wellington, NZ.

Possible teaching aids

There are a range of images available on the internet that could be used to introduce the main characters (Howard Broad, Clint Rickards, Louise Nicholas). These can be located by entering their name as a search term on Google Images. Also available are images of public protests following the acquittal of Rickards on two rape trials.