

## **Treading the thin blue line: embedding culture change at New Zealand Police TEACHING NOTE**

This case discusses the challenges facing incoming Police Commissioner Peter Marshall in embedding culture change at New Zealand Police. A Commission of Inquiry in 2007 found evidence of disgraceful conduct by police officers since the 1970s, and produced recommendations for developing a more positive culture. Since then, a series of monitoring reports by government agencies has concluded that while there had been significant progress on implementing the Commission of Inquiry's recommendations there was little evidence of change in police culture. The sense of urgency had been lost, police employees were complaining of "change fatigue" and there was a growing divide between senior management and frontline staff. Marshall was facing criticism from multiple stakeholders – the Minister of Police wanted more evidence of culture change, while he was also under pressure from police employees and the police union to defend the reputation of Police.

### **Course audience**

- Advanced undergraduate students
- Middle and senior managers on Public Management and Business Administration programmes at Masters level

### **Teaching objectives**

- To illustrate the difficulty of balancing the competing views and interests of stakeholders.
- To examine how to maintain momentum through a long-term, transformational change initiative in a large public sector organisation.
- To consider how to overcome cynicism, change fatigue and other forms of resistance to change.
- To assess the extent to which it is possible for leaders to manage an organisational culture change from the top-down.
- To consider what constitutes evidence of successful culture change.

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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 2011-132.1. The use of teaching materials is restricted to authorised persons.

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## Theoretical resources

This is a multifaceted case that can be used to teach a variety of subjects, including leadership, change and culture. The following resources are suggested for helping students analyse the various issues in the case:

**Kotter, J. P. (2007). 'Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail'. *Harvard Business Review*, January: 96-103.**

A popular framework for analysing change leadership is John Kotter's 8-steps for transforming organisations. This can be used to get students thinking about the practical steps that Marshall should take to embed the culture change at Police.

**Kotter & Schlesinger, L. (1979). 'Choosing strategies for change'. *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, 106-114.**

Another of Kotter's major contributions to the subject of change management is his 1979 "classic" on overcoming resistance to change. This framework can be introduced to get students to consider the kinds of resistance that Marshall is facing and how he could overcome each form of resistance.

**Brewis, J. (2007). 'Culture'. In Knights, D & Willmott, H. (eds.) *Introducing Organizational Behaviour and Management*. Thomson: London: 344-374.**

This case presents an excellent opportunity to introduce students to the debate about the extent to which it is possible for senior management to lead culture change from the top-down. In this overview, Joanne Brewis identifies two competing schools of thought - mainstream and critical perspectives. Mainstream perspectives see culture as created at the top and therefore a "variable" that can be manipulated by effective leaders. Critical perspectives, in contrast, see culture as emerging organically as organisational members act to cope with what their jobs require of them. Critical theorists are therefore sceptical about the ability of organisational leaders to "engineer" cultural change.

**Schein, E. (2004) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: 3-23.**

Edgar Schein is a leading "mainstream" theorist. Schein argues that in organisations with a dysfunctional culture, it is the responsibility of the organisation's leaders to highlight the dysfunctional elements and to manage a change in the culture. This reading is a useful introduction to his work.

## Suggested student assignments

- *What are the views of New Zealand Police's stakeholders in relation to the need for a change in police culture?*

**Louise Nicholas** and others who had made complaints against the police will be wanting clear evidence that the culture which lead to the instances of sexual misconduct has changed for the better. **Police Minister Judith Collins** was not the Minister when the Commission of Inquiry reported in 2007, but she is accountable as a Minister to the public to ensure that the Commission of Inquiry's recommendations are successfully implemented. New Zealand Police Association president **Greg O'Connor** has the job of representing the interests of police officers. He is concerned at the on-going criticism of police culture and their effect on police budgets, greater levels of bureaucracy and the morale of frontline officers. O'Connor believes that the culture of New Zealand Police is both a reflection of the nature of police

work and is what makes them an effective police force. The **New Zealand public** had their confidence in New Zealand Police shaken by the incidents surrounding the Commission of Inquiry, however surveys suggest this confidence had been improving since 2008. Compared with other jurisdictions, public confidence in New Zealand's police force remains high.

- *What would your advice be for Peter Marshall on how he should manage these different stakeholder views?*

The Commissioner is in a difficult position. He is under public pressure from the Police Minister to deliver culture change within Police and will be held accountable by future monitoring reports. However, he has taken charge of an organisation where there is a deep division between frontline staff and senior management. He is also under public pressure from the police union to defend the reputation of New Zealand police and to preserve what they see is a positive and functional police culture. In his first days as Commissioner, Marshall has differentiated himself from his predecessor, Howard Broad, who acknowledged the need for change and argued that it would be a long-term initiative. Marshall said he will not stand for the reputation of the organisation being unfairly maligned. He also stated that he viewed the culture of New Zealand Police as positive. These statements could be interpreted as placing him and the Police Minister on a collision course in the future. Alternatively, it could be argued that by defending his staff, he has taken an important step in winning back their trust and confidence, which is a prerequisite for any changes he intends to lead from the top-down.

- *What actions could Peter Marshall take to improve the trust and communication between frontline officers and police national headquarters?*

Marshall's public defence of Police and its culture is an important first step in attempting to win over frontline officers and middle management. This, and other forms of symbolic management, will be important. It is paramount that the artefacts of the organisation's culture symbolise the desired set of attitudes, beliefs and values. For example:

- the promotions process needs to send the message that promotions are based on merit, rather than an attempt to hide non-performing staff, or those who have curried favour with police management.
- The performance management and disciplinary process needs to send the message that those who do behave in an appropriate manner will face consequences that befit those actions.
- There is a perception that Police headquarters is out of touch with the issues faced by frontline officers. There is also a perception that senior management have previously made promises about being more visible on the street, but that these promises have not been kept, creating cynicism and a lack of trust. Any commitments made by Marshall will need to be kept and he might need to come up with alternative ideas for hearing the concerns of frontline staff.

The "change fatigue" will be difficult to address. This reflects both the volume of change initiatives undertaken and the way those initiatives have been implemented. The level of change fatigue suggests the organisation would benefit from a period of relative stability. A difficulty is that the organisation is already committed to implementing all of the Commission of Inquiry recommendations. However, there might be other, discretionary initiatives that could either be put on hold or cancelled. Publicising these efforts would send the message that senior manager understand the change fatigue and are serious in their efforts to address it. For those initiatives which Police has no choice but to implement, Marshall and his management team would be wise to communicate clearly the rationale for the change,

involve middle management and frontline officers where possible in designing and implementing those changes, and recognise the efforts of those involved in, and affected by, the changes. This might generate a more positive attitude towards change within Police.

- *Is the low proportion of women in New Zealand Police a problem? How could the representation of women be increased?*

It is notable that the representation of women in New Zealand Police is low compared with Australian jurisdictions and this can be seen as a contributing factor to the incidents which lead to the Commission of Inquiry. Policing has traditionally been a male-dominated occupation and the inquiry concluded this was one of the factors which encouraged officers to condone or turn a blind eye to inappropriate sexual activity. One strategy for leading culture change at NZP would be to increase the number of women recruits, with the hope this would, over time, dilute the male-dominated culture. This is not an easy fix, however. It is possible that women would be socialised into the existing masculine culture, thereby limiting the effect of the change, and also possible that increased representation at low ranks might not flow through to representation in senior positions within Police. Increasing women at more senior ranks has the opportunity to send the message that the organisation is genuine in its commitment to a more representative force. However, this must be done in such a way that it is not regarded as tokenism. The SSC report noted that women in the organisation were opposed to “affirmative action” policies.

- *To what extent is it possible for Peter Marshall to change the culture of New Zealand Police, even if he wanted to?*

Most of those involved in this case, including the Police Minister, the authors of the PwC report and former Commissioner Howard Broad believe that with the right skills and level of commitment it is possible for senior management to engineer a change in the culture of Police. Drawing on the critical perspectives mentioned above, students should be encouraged to think about the limitations of this assumption. For instance, the organisation is very large (12,000 staff), highly dispersed geographically through New Zealand and has a long history. Each of these is likely to be a constraint on any efforts to change the organisational culture. In addition, there is also the “occupational culture” of the police. Police work is, by nature, dangerous, and as New Zealand Police Association president Greg O’Connor stated in the case, cynicism is prevalent amongst police because of their experiences with criminals and with the criminal justice system. There is little Marshall can do about each of these aspects, suggesting that the assumption is in control of the organisation’s culture might be naive and overly optimistic.

- *What would successful culture change at New Zealand Police look like? In other words, how would we know the mission had been accomplished?*

An important distinction to make is between compliance and culture change. Culture change is defined as a change at the level of beliefs and values, with these changes manifested in behaviour. Compliance, in contrast, is merely a change at the level of behaviour. Since the Commission of Inquiry released its recommendations, there had been a number of changes to governance structures and organisational processes, as the organisation moved to implement the recommendations. However, the Auditor-General and SSC monitoring reports concluded there was little evidence of culture change. It is important to stress to students that evidence of desired behaviours would not, in itself, be evidence of a change in underlying attitudes,

beliefs and values, because employees might exhibit those behaviours merely to comply with the organisation's wishes. Therefore, evidence of culture change would require a shift in attitudes, beliefs and values. This is difficult to measure, though the results of attitude surveys would be one indicator.

- *What would be an appropriate time frame to expect the desired culture changes to be embedded?*

Here it would be worthwhile getting students to assess the claim made in the SSC report that enhanced performance management procedures could change the culture of Police within two years, rather than a generation as is claimed by some. Mainstream approaches to managing culture, which view culture as a variable that can be changed by competent senior manager, take an optimistic view, believing it can be achieved in a short-time frame. Critical perspectives, in contrast, are far less optimistic. Some critical writers argue deliberate culture change from the top-down is either unlikely to succeed, or is only possible over the long-term, as the organisational culture develops organically.

### **Possible teaching aids**

There is a range of audio-visual material to supplement the teaching of the case. These can be used as an introduction for students who might not already be aware of the issues. There are also interviews with the key stakeholders.

A brief TVNZ news report summarising the findings of the PwC report (2 mins)  
<http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/report-slams-police-culture-1-23-video-4001371>

Louise Nicholas, the woman whose complaints against police officers led to the Commission of Inquiry, speaks on release of the PwC report (3 mins).  
<http://www.3news.co.nz/Police-conduct-report--Louise-Nicholas/tabid/309/articleID/194838/Default.aspx>

Police Minister Judith Collins comments on the PwC report in January 2011 (8mins).  
<http://www.3news.co.nz/Police-conduct-report--Judith-Collins/tabid/309/articleID/194840/Default.aspx>

New Zealand Police Association president Greg O'Connor speaks following the release of the PwC report in January 2011 (2 minutes)  
<http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/police-association-president-greg-o-connor-culture-report-2-08-video-4001941>

Former Police Commissioner Howard Broad responds to criticism of police leadership made by the PwC report (17 minutes)  
<http://www.3news.co.nz/Police-conduct-report--Howard-Broad/tabid/309/articleID/194837/Default.aspx>

Peter Marshall is interviewed by Paul Holmes on Television New Zealand current affairs programme Q+A following his appointment in April 2010. He addresses concerns raised by Police Minister Judith Collins and the PwC report about the need for continued culture change at New Zealand Police (8 minutes).  
<http://tvnz.co.nz/q-and-a-news/interview-peter-marshall-8-35-video-4109844/video>