OPTIMAL UTILISATION OF SPECIALISED UNITS IN CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIME COMBATTING AND THE CHALLENGES THEREOF.

Colloquium Theme: Policing a complex society.

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Policing a complex society

Optimal utilisation of Specialised Units in crime prevention and crime combatting and the challenges thereof.
Abstract

The role of specialisation and specialised units in policing is a reoccurring discussion not only within the South Africa context, but world-wide. It ranges from expressed policy intent, focused mandates, accumulation of specific knowledge and skills to outright elitism in policing – I am or we are special!?!? Specialisation is indeed a centre-piece within the design of modern policing organisations. The question however remains towards its form of existence through individual, projects, functional or organisational specialisation. The South African Constitution defines crime prevention and combating as part of the objects of policing. The discussion will briefly reflect on of the constitutional objects of policing towards an integrated understanding of its intent, various motivations for specialisation, the prevention and combating concepts and practices of policing. It hopes to stimulate the debate on the role of specialisation in policing and specialised units as a formal structure with a police organisation and discuss certain opportunities and challenges posed by it with regards to crime prevention and combating in the South African Context.
Constitutional intent for Policing – Towards an Integrated Understanding

Constitutional Mandate
Sec 205 - Objects of the SA Police Service

Uphold and Enforce the Law
Prevent Combat and Investigate Crime

Protect and Secure the Inhabitants of the Republic and their Property
Maintain Public Order
Do we have and integrated understanding of our Mandate?

- Public Order
  - Maintain
  - Prevent
  - Investigate
  - Combat

- Crime
  - Investigate
  - Prevent

- Law
  - Defines
  - Enables

- Risks
  - Threatens

- Inhabitants
  - Protect and Secure
  - Life
  - Property

- Protects
A dictionary understanding of specialise includes the following:

- Concentrate on and become expert in a particular subject or skill;
- Confine oneself to providing a particular product or service;
- Make a habit of engaging in a particular activity;
- Adapt or set apart to serve a special function or to suit a particular way of life;
- Made or used for one particular purpose, job, place;
- Requiring or having detailed training or expertise in a particular field;
- Presenting detailed information used in a particular field
- Designed for a specific purpose or use;

Policing indeed does have such unique circumstances that might require specialisation.
Circumstances that could require specialised knowledge.

- Political and Policy imperatives
- Science & Technology such as Forensic Services, Cybercrime,
- Professional Policing Practice & Expertise
- Policing Approaches & Philosophy such as Problem Orientated Policing, Sector Policing, Intelligence-led Policing etc.
- Embedded Professional Functions such as legal services, veterinarian services, Pilots etc.
- Criminality/Criminal Practice/Criminal Careers
- Service Delivery focus on specific vulnerable groupings e.g. Women and Children
- Security/Confidentiality as in Counter-terrorism
- Legal Powers such as Designated Forearms Officers, Liquor Control
- Policing Strategies and Programmes
- Threat based Policing/Targeted Performance Areas such as task teams to deal with as surge in ATM Bombings or analysis practice
- Focussed Policing – from incident to offender to criminal practice

This however does not imply that every unit where this is conducted should be structured as a specialised unit.

What happened to the previous specialised units?

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• In 2000, top Management of the South African Police Service (SAPS) implemented an Integrated Strategic Plan which was primarily aimed at organized and serious and violent crimes.

• In the past, the South African Police Service’s specialized units investigated organized crime, serious and violent crime and commercial crime in a fragmented fashion. For example, the Vehicle Crime Investigation Unit - vehicle crime, the Firearm Investigation units - crimes relating to firearms, while the Fraud units investigated fraud.

• In order to give effect to the Integrated Strategic Plan, the South African Police Service had to re-evaluate its approach to investigate methods and its capacity.
This approach to specialized units had the following disadvantages:

- A reactive approach was adopted in responding to reported crimes (as opposed to an approach to investigate the syndicates involved in crimes)
- Investigating officers did not share information/intelligence;
- The organized fashion of crime was often ignored
- Functions and duties relating to investigations within the various units were often duplicated
- Payments for information/intelligence to informers were at times duplicated
- There were also several other shortcomings that had a negative impact on the effectiveness of investigations and the level of services rendered, namely –
  - The way in which units were placed (in that they were geographically not placed in close proximity of major threats)
  - Skewed resource allocation and low productivity
  - The susceptibility of staff to corrupt practices
  - Disempowerment of local level policing (functions that could best be performed at local level, were performed by specialized units)
  - A lack of transformation in the specialized units (with special reference to the composition of these units)
The creation of multi-disciplinary units with a view to effectively investigate—
  – Organized crime (by using syndicate-based intelligence and analyses of the organized crime threat)
  – Serious and violent crime
  – Commercial crime
  – Crimes against women and children

The establishment of Provincial Organized Crime Secretariats.

Streamlining of functions performed by specialized investigation units

Implementation of a vetting/selection procedure for investigating officers attached to the above units regarding security clearances, educational qualifications and personality analyses
• Creation of new units to clamp down on corrupt officials involved in organized crime (as opposed to incidents of corruption in general)

• Optimal use of staff and physical resources in terms of:
  – Operational needs; Priorities; Cost-effectiveness; Productivity; and The equitable placement of resources

• Ensuring public confidence in detective units (units must be acceptable and have credibility in the eyes of the community)

• In practice, the implementation of this process entailed the gradual phasing out of most of the specialized investigation units.

• The functions of the closed units are incorporated into those of the organized crime units, serious and violent crime units, commercial branches, FCS units and the local detective units.

• As the process unfolded, however, it became clear that the Detective Service could not be restructured overnight, which resulted in the adoption of a phased approach.
Little attention was given to the original reason(s) for specialisation

The phased processes were not concluded.

The closure was done from a “one-size fits all” perspective

The focus was again on investigation and excluded Crime Prevention, Crime Combating and the other constitutional obligations which we seem not to understand, thus tend to ignore.

This bring us to the topic:

– Optimal utilisation of Specialised Units in crime prevention and crime combatting and the challenges thereof.
Crime Prevention

- **Primary prevention**
  - Identifies conditions of the physical and social environment that create, precipitate or provide opportunities for criminal behavior (Brantingham and Faust 1976)
  - Used to tackle the systemic weaknesses that offenders exploit so that more strategic problem-solving can take hold

- **Secondary prevention**
  - Aims to reduce risks associated with those people vulnerable to involvement in crime, and to ameliorate the chance of high-risk offenders developing more serious criminal activities.
  - Provides opportunities to identify priorities for resource allocation and targeting

- **Tertiary prevention**
  - Deals with actual offenders and involves ‘intervening with the lives of these offenders in a manner that prevents them from committing other crimes and includes arrest and prosecution, reform and rehabilitation, and institutional education programs’ (Chainey and Ratcliffe 2005: 17)
  - Prevention benefits from the arrest and prosecution of high-risk, prolific and persistent offenders
Crime Combating

- Crime Combating is not clearly defined in law or practice. The dictionary describes it as:
  - To oppose in battle; fight against; To oppose vigorously; struggle against; To engage in fighting; contend or struggle; Fighting, especially armed battle; combat missions; Intended for use or deployment in combat
- It implies the existence of a threat of enemy that needs to be opposed
- Crime Combating in Perspective: a Strategic approach to policing and the prevention of crime in South Africa: Dr FJ Burger 2006 states:
  - There is lack of clarity and understanding, in general, of what crime combating or crime fighting entails, lead to unrealistic expectations of what the police are capable of and, consequently, to unfair blaming of the police when crime levels are high.
  - The recognition of crime as a national security threat, implies an understanding that crime and its risk factors are multi-dimensional, and that the state’s efforts to combat it requires much more than a police force or even a criminal justice approach.
- I am of the opinion that Crime Combating is an underdeveloped policing practice that deploys all aspects of policing to target specific aspects of criminality, offenders or offender groupings such as gangsterism etc. It includes concepts such as Crime Reduction and Crime Disruption through Intelligence-Led Policing.
- The essence is a focussed or targeted approach or stance to address a specific and existing crime problem.
In the book “Police Innovation and Crime Prevention: Lessons Learned from Police Research over the Past 20 Years” by Anthony A. Braga and David Weisburd in 2007, the following is quoted:

“Over the next couple of decades, we anticipate that individual police departments will continue to institutionalize innovative practices by making administrative adjustments to their organizations and by developing a set of supporting strategies that fit the nature of their crime problems in the neighborhoods they police. Administrative arrangements and portfolios of crime prevention interventions will necessarily vary across departments as the police become more specialized in dealing with local crime problems. In essence, we believe police departments will continue their evolution from “production lines” that engage a static set of processes that are used over and over again to produce the same result to “job shops” where each police assignment is treated as a new challenge that might require a new solution (Moore et al. 1997).

We also anticipate some modest innovation in the development of systems to measure the performance of police departments. As police departments engage a broader set of tactics to deal with a wide range of community problems and concerns, there will be a need for sensible performance measurement that captures the value created by police along a number of dimensions such as reducing criminal victimization; calling offenders to account; reducing fear and enhancing personal security; guaranteeing safety in public spaces; using financial resources fairly, efficiently, and effectively; using force and authority fairly, efficiently, and effectively; and satisfying customer demands/achieving legitimacy with those policed (Moore 2002). Appropriate measurement plays a vital role in transforming police departments into the learning laboratories they are now positioned to become in the future (Maguire 2004).”

For me, this sets the tone for a rethink of the role and use of specialisation in policing
Focus and forms of Specialisation

- Primary Level of specialisation should be at cluster and inter-cluster level, and should be inclusive of Crime Prevention, Crime Combating and efforts towards achieving the other constitutional obligations.
- Limited Structuring of Specialised Units such as
  - Serious Violent Crime Units
  - Narcotics Units
  - Environmental Crime Units
  - Vulnerable Groupings e.g. Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences
- Localised Crime Combating Teams
  - Adaptable to localised Crime Problems
- Project based Targeting of Specific Crime Practices, Offenders and Offender Groupings
- Specialised National Programmes and Strategies to address national policies and priorities e.g. Firearms Strategy
- Partnerships Programmes with affected groupings
  - Industry Partnerships
  - Inter-sectoral cooperation
- Specialised Policing Practices, e.g. High-Risk Units
We should attempt to defunctionalise our approaches in dealing with crime problems through integrated approaches and specialisation if required.

**Integrated and interdependent**

- Threat Based Crime Combating
- Risk based Crime Prevention
- Incident/Occurrence based Crime Investigation

**Areas of Specialised focus**

- Affected or Vulnerable Sector or Groups/Communities
- Specific Crime Practices, Offenders and Offender Groupings
- Specific Policing Priorities, Strategies and Practices
- Specialised Policing Practices
Utilisation of Specialisation

• Specialisation should provide for the integrated addressing of crime problems from preventing crime risks, fighting specific crime threats, to the resolving of crime through the criminal justice system.

• As already stated previous specialised units neglected the “up-stream” addressing or prevention of crime. Most of the effort and performance measurement was focussed on the investigation function.

• Such specialised units or initiatives also will act as a mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact on the crime problems and the utilisation of resources.

• The primary value would however be that problem or client orientated specialisation would aid the development of domain knowledge, new solutions and policing expertise to address crime in an integrated way, and therefore grow the policing body of knowledge.
Challenges of Specialisation

- Old specialisation practices re-enforces the static nature of policing design vs dealing with the more dynamic nature of modern criminality.
- It creates a fragmented organisational structure which inhibits the flow of information and communication and an integrated approach towards dealing with emerging crime problems.
- Competing results between general policing objectives and divorced specialised unit objectives.
- Specialisation (within the uniform division and within the organisation at large) adds another level of organisational constraint on the practices viewed as the occupational culture.
- In general specialisation provides for prestige in the job flows to those serving in specialised units, investigative work, especially homicide, and positions most associated with crime control and crime suppression.
- Over specialisation and the higher it is in the hierarchy might place policing priorities that is removed from the community it should serve.
- The organisational form or unit is branded as specialised with little or no specialised practice being developed or maintained - “Frozen” specialisation.
The problem of specialization versus generalization does not lend itself to an easy solution.

Perhaps the best advice on the use of specialization in police organization came from Thomas Reddin, former chief of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Reddin suggested that when specialization is considered to be absolutely necessary, personnel should be rotated frequently through specialized positions:

“a good general rule to follow is to specialize if you must, generalize if you can.”


This proposal seems to be an excellent rule to follow in organizing any size police department.
Conclusion

I believe in a developmental approach or cycle. When a unique crime problem or phenomena occurs that can not effectively be dealt with through normal or general policing,

- Develop a solution through focussed effort such as task teams
- Specialise is you must;
- Succeed in addressing the problem and providing impact;
- Develop and formalise the new practices and solutions;
- Normalisation the solutions into general policing practice;
- Maintain the policing body of knowledge and grow policing.

**Therefore the Management Intervention Vision**

*To ensure the professional knowledge based management of policing interventions towards achieving the outcomes and impact of the constitutional objectives of the SAPS in support of creating an environment where all people in South Africa are and feel safe.*
Questions?

Way forward?