Australian police management education and research:
a comment from “outside the cave”

Margaret H. Vickers
Lecturer, University of Western Sydney, NSW, Australia

Keywords Police, Management development, Management education, Management theory, Research

Abstract Examines police management education and research practices from an observer’s perspective. Believes that with changes in management education and research practices police managers should be able to respond better to the issues they face. Highlights the anti-intellectual subculture and the emphasis on practice and experience within the Australian police education programs. Supports the change to an organisation which values theory, reflection and critique. A more holistic approach to management is required. The choices of research methodology should be considered more in the quest for more valid and useful information.

A comment from “outside the cave”
I was reminded, when reflecting upon my experiences with Australian police management education and research, of Plato’s (1997) Republic and the famous allegory of the cave where Socrates addresses the relations among appearance, reality and knowledge. For those unfamiliar with Plato’s “cave”:

The allegory pictures an underground cave with its mouth open toward the light of a blazing fire. Within the cave are people chained so that they cannot move. They can see only the cave wall directly in front of them. This is illuminated by the light of the fire, which throws shadows of people and objects onto the wall. The cave dwellers equate the shadows with reality, naming them, talking about them, and even linking sounds from outside the cave with the movements on the wall. Truth and reality for the prisoners rest in this shadowy world, because they have no knowledge of any other (Morgan, 1997, pp. 215-16).

The difficulty arises when an “outsider” (in this case an academic) enters the cave and sees that the shadows believed by the inhabitants to be “truth” and “reality” are just reflections of a more complex reality, and that the knowledge and perceptions of the cave dwellers are distorted and flawed. Apart from the difficulties an outsider might undoubtedly face with any lengthy confinement within the cave, if one were to try and share one’s knowledge with others in the cave, one is likely to be ridiculed for one’s views. This paper has evolved through the author’s experiences as a management academic exposed to

The author is indebted to the feedback provided by two academic groups. First, colleagues at the University of Western Sydney – Hawkesbury, Faculty of Management Research Colloquium and, second, participants at the Association of Employment Practices and Principles (AEPP) Conference held in San Francisco in October 1998. Both groups provided insightful and valuable feedback helping this author crystallise both her place and her message.
Australian police management education and research practices. Whilst not claiming to be an “insider” to police organisations, nor of having experience with every police management education and research initiative, nor of truly being able to be in “the place” of members of police organisations, it is judged that, sometimes, the naive and unenculturated can speak of things that may not be observed or commented upon from within. It is acknowledged that some police members may have already “left the cave” and one may only guess at the tension and discomfort experienced by them upon their return.

The purpose of this paper is to address, in general terms, some of the problems witnessed by this author. It is one author’s view – no more and no less – and a heartfelt view born of academic (as opposed to police) experience. It is not intended to be another “police bashing” exercise. The distinction is also carefully made here between police management and operational education. For example, there is no suggestion that one should learn to discharge a firearm through purely abstract knowledge, or hone the skills of hand-to-hand combat through just reflection or critical thought. Similarly, the interest here is not about police recruit (or pre-recruit) education. What is addressed here is the need for police managers – at all levels – to be able to respond better to the management issues they may face as practitioners. It is believed that, through a shift in the emphases of management education and research practice, this may be better achieved.

This is not a new problem, nor is it restricted to Australia. The increased complexity of police work is a worldwide phenomenon. Police management traditionally involves the management of special projects, handling citizen complaints, setting operational priorities for subordinates, scheduling work, communicating with other personnel, and taking charge of complex operations (for example, hostage and barricade situations, SWAT or containing collective violence) (Geller and Swanger, 1995, pp. 8-9). More recently, police are expected to better help redress and prevent crime, disorder and fear of crime through multifaceted approaches, including the building of trust between officers and citizens. These changes warrant an intellectual curiosity, analytical ability and capacity to interpret social, political and historical contexts, which is arguably best derived from higher education (Kakar, 1998, pp. 632-3). The function of higher education is to liberate the mind, to incline persons towards a habitual reliance on powers of reasoning in order that they function adequately in a world where knowledge and intelligence are important (Bittner, 1990, p. 194; Kakar, 1998, p. 633). This is an important point as one reflects upon the importance of preparation for police in all aspects of their work – especially management. An organisational ideology that emphasises training (rather than education and learning) is clear in the USA. Continual reference to “police training”, especially the need for more “hands-on” training at the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (Marion, 1998, pp. 54-6), vivifies the global nature of this myopic approach to learning. Even the recognition of “knowledge learning”, where a growing emphasis is placed on academic areas, tends to be done within the context of training courses (Marion, 1998, p. 60).
The resistant anti-intellectual subculture in Australian police organisations (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 250; Bolen, 1997, p. 72) remains problematic for many police managers, for police organisations and for the communities they serve. Again, this problem is evident internationally. Commentary from Belfast in Northern Ireland emphasises the conservative nature of police organisations, specifically that they are not routinely regarded as being at the cutting edge of organisational innovation (Bryett, 1999, p. 30). Similarly, in the USA, “old age” managerial skills, which include the setting of goals, establishing procedures, organising and controlling, mark the traditional management focus in many police organisations (Geller and Swanger, 1995, p. 9). There is no doubt that educational standards are improving around the world. In Australia this is being achieved through various educational programs, for example, Whitrod’s reform agenda in the 1970s (Bolen, 1997, p. 49). However, it is argued that some of the skills gained at university may be lost as recruits, in particular, become “enculturated”, drawing on the cultural beliefs, rules and values to form their intentions and enact their projects (Fay, 1996, p. 57) as they progress through the organisation. Some police need a deeper appreciation of social, psychological and legal issues; they may need better preparation to cope with the traumas of police work; they may also need to be better educated to encourage more tolerance and less authoritarianism (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 250). Police need to be taught how and when to use discretionary powers (Whitrod, 1974, p. 14; Bolen, 1997, p. 49). This is especially important when one considers that police also have coercive powers, including the power to use deadly force, and the power to detain and search individuals (Fitzgerald, 1989, pp. 176-7). Much of police life is arguably characterised by brutal problems – impossible problems (Glidewell and Hargrove, 1990) – with no easy solution and which are not easily solved administratively or technically (Denhardt, 1981, p. 65). It may be that “solutions” are not readily available (Silverman, 1972, p. 26). Police management has been described as an “impossible job” striving to balance the mythical long-term goals and pragmatic reality (Glidewell and Hargrove, 1990, p. 28) and police officers (including management) must often make snap decisions and justify their behaviour (Coulson, 1993, p. 15) whilst recognising the constant tensions associated with the need to cope with multiple and conflicting constituencies (Glidewell and Hargrove, 1990, p. 31). With the vast array of conundrums facing police officers in the work, there is, surely, a requirement for police management (and their educators) to widen, not limit, their focus (Vickers and Kouzmin, 1998, p. 23).

One can intuitively recognise why police organisations may have evolved along the lines they have. There are facets of the police culture that may serve to suppress intellectualism but which also serve to protect members from the rigours they face, for example, solidarity; secrecy; cynicism; isolation from the wider community; and difficulty admitting weakness (Bolen, 1990, pp. 133-4). It is a distinct possibility that the questioning of ideas has not been the way of learning or operating (Bolen, 1997, p. 76). However, it is recognised that there have been some that have been quietly supporting the ideas suggested here –
that of increased learning through reflection and critique (for example, Whitrod, 1974; Bolen, 1997). They are, hopefully, supported by this contribution.

Police management education: an over-emphasis on the practical?
It has been recognised that police organisations have been increasingly turned in on themselves (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 210). Officers themselves tend to rank technical efficiency more highly than ethical conduct (Shernock, 1992, p. 85) and it has been argued that the use of performance measures in police organisations tends to focus on skills learned from training received (technical skills) rather than abilities developed through higher education (Shernock, 1992, p. 75). The passage set out below has been selected, not for its value, but as an example of the kind of literature that may be espoused as valuable in police management educational institutions. One may argue that it is an emphasis on this kind of literature which may intensify a myopic, anti-intellectual educational stance. Bourne (1991) writes of police management education in the UK and the importance of practical experience for management education. He argues, through example, that:

Any poor, benighted hospital patient gently sinking into the warm release of the pre-med injection, who heard the porter pushing the trolley comment “You know, this is the surgeon’s very first operation — but he is awfully well educated. He has read lots of books on surgery and attended lots of lectures,” might be forgiven for leaping off the trolley and heading for the nearest exit route … we suspect that the patient could rapidly work out that “well educated” does not mean the same as “highly skilled” (Bourne, 1991, p. 258).

It is passages like this one that mirror the views held by many police. The popular wisdom among professionals (police being no exception) is that the knowledge they acquire from practice is far more useful than what they acquire from more formal and abstract types of education (Cervero, 1992, p. 91). Indeed, Bourne (1991) holds the passage above as an exemplar to illustrate the current problems with police management training — namely the need for more “practical” experience — without recognising some fundamental flaws in his logic.

First, there is the traditional shying away from university (abstract, theoretical) education indicated by Bourne’s reference to reading and lectures. What police managers apparently need is “hands-on experience” (presumably at the expense of all other learning) to become highly skilled. However, it is inappropriate to use a model of learning from practice in all situations (Cervero, 1992, p. 98). Bourne conveniently forgets that without university education there would be no hospital or surgeon (of any skill level) equipped to perform this surgery in relative safety and with a relatively high percentage chance of success. Further, the simplistic example portrayed conveniently ignores the medical science educational model: students do not go directly from the lecture theatre and library to the operating theatre, unassisted, without many, many years of intervening, supervised, practical work. Further, the medical profession continues to engage in research as an intricate component of education about healing others. There is a constant testing and weaving of new
procedures and constant references to new ways of thinking and doing (Krimmel, 1996, p. 87). Whilst it has been acknowledged that there has been growth in the collaboration between police research and practice (Bittner, 1990, p. 189), considerably more is needed.

Second, Bourne suggests that well educated should be juxtaposed against (rather than supportive of) experienced. Both are recognised here as being different to highly skilled. Skill needs both declarative and procedural knowledge (Cervero, 1992, p. 94). Third, much of the action-oriented, pragmatic emphasis proposed by Bourne would appear to be much more highly relevant to, say, training a police officer in the use of firearms (an example that Bourne (1991, p. 259) himself points to). However, one can hardly compare the complexities involved in police management with the practicalities of learning how to accurately discharge a firearm. Indeed, Bourne acknowledges that police management comprises a series of value judgements and that police behaviour and attitudes are a highly complex output of an even more complex set of inputs (Bourne, 1991, p. 263). Given these admissions, experiential learning alone is recognised as being a hazardous path to knowledge if travelled in isolation.

Further, one needs to guard against a pathological embrace of rationalism in police organisations, although it is easy to see why many police may be oriented in this direction. Years of being required to give “objective” evidence, understand legal issues and the need to adhere to legislative requirements would naturally draw many along this rationalist trajectory. Being rational means that plans are made, goals are set, means are defined and evaluated against rational and efficiency-based criteria, and the actors within the organisation respond to a system of rationally structured incentives for inducing the desired behaviour (McSwite, 1998, p. 26). Anything beyond these parameters may be regarded as irrational. However, familiar stories from the “real-world” (McSwite, 1998, p. 25) continue to confirm that whilst the official image of formal organisations, including the idea of how they are structured, how the actors within them behave and how the work processes unfold, is completely alien to what one lives and hears about organisational life (McSwite, 1998, p. 26). Police organisations might do well to re-consider how “rational” their organisations are and consider the acceptance of a non-rationalist viewfinder in seeking alternative views to complex problems (Vickers and Kouzmin, 1998, p. 25). Unfortunately, the traditional police educative process has judged those who uncritically accept regulations and directions to be superior to those demonstrating strong intellectual aspirations, analytical tendencies, and the pursuit of knowledge (Bittner, 1990, p. 192).

One must remember the police officer’s everyday proximity to the (often non-rational) effects of violence, crime, grief, death – scenes often shielded from others (Woodcock, 1992, p. 1929). Many important situations of professional practice are characterised by uniqueness, uncertainty and conflicting values (Cervero, 1992, p. 96) and professionals’ actions are recognised as never being value-neutral. Police managers, as do most professionals, require judgements
that are eclectic, jumbled and oriented to the problem. There is a continual need for police to use their discretionary powers (Bolen, 1997, p. 49). One must recognise that individual professionals may have different, if not conflicting, values about what constitutes wise action (Cervero, 1992, p. 93). One professional’s solution may be the next professional’s disaster. Thus, to improve practice, a professional’s ability to make the best judgements must be enabled and developed (Cervero, 1988; 1992, p. 92) – that is, to think critically in response to the vicissitudes of police work. “Good cops” are, after all, those who can take care of themselves out there (Bittner, 1990, p. 193).

Critical thinking as educative essential
Bourne’s (1991, pp. 260-2) simplistic solution to the problem of management training is in “reality anchoring”, where the trainer is required to be able to work out “real issues” with real, live managers (p. 262). Bourne suggests that it is unlikely that the trainer who has not actually “been out there and done it” will survive this “test”. It is unlikely that any trainer will have the ability to present all the answers to all the real world issues that routinely (and uncommonly) face police managers. Further, the model of the teacher “teaching” and providing a list of “recipes” designed to overcome problems (Ramsden, 1992, pp. 158-9) may not be one which encourages the student to think critically – to think for themselves – and which should be implicit in all higher education (Ramsden, 1992, pp. 18-19).

The rationalist emphasis currently characterising Australian police jurisdictions ignores and inhibits the recognition of the emotional content of decision making. Further, without sufficient access to critical thinking skills, police organisations miss out on numerous opportunities: to identify and challenge unexamined assumptions; to imagine and explore useful and previously unacknowledged alternatives; and to challenge and understand the importance of context in any situation (and its surrounding values and judgements). In short, they are unable to participate in reflective scepticism (Brookfield, 1987, pp. 7-9). Critical thinking has been described as “emancipatory learning” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 12) and police practitioners, ideally, should be regarded as critical thinkers recognising and responding to contextual complexity, ambiguity and change (Brookfield, 1987, p. 140).

Critical thinking is not (as the uninformed may incorrectly assume) a bitter and disgruntled mocking of current thought, nor is it intended as being harmful through destroying others’ motivation or damaging their self-esteem. The capacity for critical reflection is an adult activity which allows one to identify discrepancies between ideals and reality; between what is presented and what is (Brookfield, 1987). Paradoxically, much of police work – the detection of criminals and solving of crime – involves critical reflection. Police management, similarly, requires lateral and critical thought. In addition to excelling in the traditional areas of police management and supervision, there is the requirement for managers to be capable of assessing which of the traditional functions of management should be retained. Further, police
Managers need to be able to determine which functions should be widened to provide the necessary institutional leadership of police organisations, as well as a useful infrastructure for community problem solving (Geller and Swanger, 1995, p. 9). Any form of problem-oriented policing also does not seek to solve the underlying causes of crime, but should concern itself with the numerous mediating factors that can be controlled, for example, via the rearrangement of traffic or of public space. This requires an ability to recognise the problem, study, analyse and plan a strategy of response, including the ability to secure suitable resources including the trust and support of affected communities (Bittner, 1990, p. 191).

Further, critical thinking would assist the police manager in developing strategies and means to solve community problems, as well as enable the most effective approach to policy and constituency conundrums that police continually face in their “impossible jobs”. Many scholars have noted that police officers now have to broaden their role and focus to quality-of-life matters, as defined by citizens. Proponents of higher education (and its emphasis on learning to think), suggest that appropriately educated police may be more likely to appreciate the role of police in a democratic society, to be more tolerant of a diverse clientele, be capable to building trust and be able to improve community relationships (Kakar, 1998, p. 634). A college education has also been linked to lower absenteeism, fewer disciplinary actions, fewer civilian complaints, fewer injuries, shorter response time and faster career advancement (Shernock, 1992, pp. 73-4). Such an education would not only purportedly improve professional behaviour and increase the effectiveness of police officers, but would upgrade the occupation in the eyes of the community (Shernock, 1992, p. 72).

Higher education, as is proposed in this article, can engender the ability to handle difficult or ambiguous situations with greater creativity or innovation (Krimmel, 1996, p. 86; Kakar, 1998, p. 634) as well as pointing to an ability to adapt to change more readily (Kakar, 1998, p. 634). It has also been linked to an increased problem solving ability, better record keeping, and a tendency to be less authoritarian and less cynical (Shernock, 1992; Kakar, 1998, p. 635). Critical thinking, which should be an axiomatic inclusion in higher education, encourages one to resist notions of black and white perceptions about the world, so vital to proactive and positive police leadership. Critical thinking is a productive and positive process which lends itself to both negative and positive situations. Most importantly, it should be recognised as being emotive as well as rational (Brookfield, 1987, pp. 5-7). It is about identifying and challenging assumptions and context, and being imaginative (Brookfield, 1987, pp. 7-9).

Australian police organisations continually exhort the need to be flexible, imaginative and able to embrace change, especially in the wake of allegations of corruption (for example, Fitzgerald, 1989). All these requirements support the need for critical analysis in the management education process.
The valuable input of theory
I recall teaching a class in qualitative research methods to middle and senior executive police in Australia. In an effort to expose the importance and usefulness of theory I asked the students to review an article by Craib (1992, pp. 3-14). Craib gives an interesting discussion about theory, that I felt especially helpful in debunking some of its myths. On the one hand, Craib recognises that the word “theory” is scary. He mentions that much modern social theory is unintelligible, banal and pointless. He suggests that the language surrounding theory is hard to understand and he also cautions that theory development and utilisation requires a lot of hard work, in a culture that does not easily accept theory in its more elaborate form (Craib, 1992, p. 4). This would certainly be the case for police organisations.

However, Craib also reasons that theory exists, and that there must be some reason for people to persist with it. Craib introduces the reader to “theoretical thinking”, which he likens to learning a language, solving problems, understanding confusing situations and relationships – a means of trying to find some explanation for what is going on around us. He argues, quite convincingly, that:

... as soon as we start thinking about and trying to explain something which happens to us, over which we have no control, we are beginning to think theoretically ... Theory is an attempt to explain our everyday experience of the world, our “closest” experience, in terms of something which is not so close whether it be other people’s actions, our past experience, our repressed emotions, or whatever ... theory really tells us something new about the world (Craib, 1992, pp. 6-7).

After the students read Craib’s essay, I asked them: What is wrong with theory? Unfortunately, I was inundated with the same tired old responses. It is too theoretical (!). It has no place in the real world. It is no use in police work. It is only relevant for “ivory tower” academics. None of Craib’s arguments were mentioned. When I asked, How might theory help in police work? There was no response. I also sensed a barely veiled hostility. I plunged on, regardless, to explain.

Police management education requires a strong theoretical base from which to operate. It is, simply, not sufficient to rely on one (or several) persons’ experiences to guide one through the complexities of managerial dichotomies and ambiguities. Some of the recognised problems with the utilisation of critical theories for the uninitiated include: the uncommonness of the terminology; the habitual and uncritical ways that the organisation traditionally approaches problem solving; and the difficulty of relating theory to praxis (Jun, 1997, p. 151). Some police are suspicious of theory. This may be exacerbated by the use of jargon that surrounds theory (Craib, 1992, p. 3). Many may have learned to distrust theory or, perhaps, think theory is beyond their intellectual ability because of the language that is used. Social theory is especially susceptible to criticism, as it is not linked to the natural sciences (Craib, 1992, p. 4). One of the main problems students have in relating to theory may lie with theory frequently making propositions which are counter to their
immediate experiences and beliefs (Craib, 1992, p. 9). This is, of course, why one learns from theory (as opposed to focusing purely on practice) and why theory is such a vital component of the educational experience. The use of specialised terminology or the creation of new metaphors is necessary in order to break away from the current impasse in thinking (Jun, 1997, p. 151) that may characterise police organisations. Thus, by examining theory, one is looking to the experiences, thoughts and analyses of those that have gone before for guidance. The difficulties of maintaining a solely “pragmatic” stance in police management education are vivified: there is insufficient “new” thought and reflexivity and, thus, a reduction in learning. This becomes a notable difficulty when the expectant public lens continues to focus on police organisational practice.

The “real world” educational philosophy
The police management educational philosophy is increasingly being influenced by the tenor and direction of the institutional providers. Australian universities are, increasingly, leaning towards the utilitarian and pragmatic in a shift away from the humanities and social sciences. Aristotle is claimed to have said that it is ethics and politics that determine what is to be studied, by whom, and to what extent – not epistemology (Frankena, 1970, p. 20). Advocates of “learning by doing” embrace an analytical philosophy of education that is concerned with distinguishing teaching from indoctrination and of relating teaching to learning. Police organisations need to re-examine their normative philosophy of education, that is, to reconsider their normative statements about what education, educators and educational establishments should or should not do, and what the aims, content and methods of that education should or should not be (Frankena, 1970, p. 15).

For the better part of this century, Western society has legitimated knowledge that is formal, abstract and general, whilst devaluing knowledge that is local, specific and based purely on practice. The debate is widened and made more interesting when the practical model of learning is juxtaposed against other models of learning in the fight for the hearts, minds and dollars of those who control professional education programs (Cervero, 1992, pp. 91-2). However, the decision ultimately becomes a political choice about how the mind should be cultivated and to what end (Cervero, 1992, p. 92). Power shapes what knowledge is valued as legitimate and what is valued in learning and teaching (Sinclair, 1997, p. 314).

Economic rationalism invokes the belief that the economy’s performance can be enhanced by exposing as much of it as possible to market forces. It is a doctrine that is consistent with various initiatives and priorities. One such Australian priority is an educational reform focus aimed at enhancing skills for the market place – a more instrumental, vocational orientation as emphasised by increasing enrolments in such priority disciplines as engineering, information technology, business administration and Asian studies (Karmel, 1995, pp. 43-4). Police organisations should be cautious about adopting
educational philosophies and outcomes that are purely instrumental. Whilst it has been recognised that the instrumental thesis (an extrinsic justification) justifies educational goals in terms of expected or actual contributions to desired ends (that is, beyond the educational event itself), it has similarly been recognised that the non-instrumental thesis justifies educational goals in terms of their perceived values as ends in themselves (an intrinsic justification) (Gunn, 1996). Police organisations may benefit from relishing the benefits of both, where appropriate, in their educational vision.

The ongoing debate about the future of university education also contributes to the problematic and uncritical reliance on “real world” examples as the only way to convey knowledge to students. The Queensland University of Technology, for example, markets itself as the “university for the real world”. All university faculties are being urged to become more oriented to the needs of the “real world”, especially the real world of the corporation, even though the “real world” is never defined (Rowland, 1996, p. 47). The increasing cleavage between the instrumental and the intrinsic in management education may also stem from the antithetical conceptions of “realness” that exist. One suggests that realness is equated to power – the bourgeois temperament. The other insists that realness constitutes a relationship with the essence of being – the erotic pursuit of transcendental ideals of beauty, truth and goodness (Rowland, 1996, p. 47). Unfortunately, police management education may also tend towards the bolshevisation and instrumentalisation of the view of human (police) work. “Good” police management education, therefore, recognises the need to become aware of the needs of the “real world” of policing, whilst the pursuit of truth (familiar to the more traditional universities) is shunned as being academic and irrelevant. The intrinsic and transcendental are increasingly shunned in an anti-intellectual environment in favour of the instrumental and rational. Further, the “corporate university” is being increasingly “captured” by corporate stakeholders (Gettler, 1998, p. 14). The increasingly corporate focus on education marries comfortably with the increasingly vogue managerialist emphasis in police organisations fostered by public sector reform surrounding new public management (Vickers and Kouzmin, 1998).

The recent managerialist enterprise, underpinned by new public management’s ideological commitment, asserts the superiority of the market over the state “private is good; public is bad” (Cope et al., 1997, p. 449) – and insists that there is an answer to all police management problems. However, the managerialist ideology fails to address the problem of making simplistic, rationally prescribed decisions, relating to indefinable, often insoluble, problems. The “moral fiction” is that many of the claims of managerialism are a fiction (Rees, 1995, pp. 23-4). There is a preoccupation with management panaceas (Rees, 1995, p. 24), fads of management (Hilmer and Donaldson, 1995, p. 21), management recipes (Kouzmin et al., 1997, p. 20), and kits for better management (Uhr, 1989, p. 160). Unfortunately, it is inconceivable to many that some of these “recipes” may be inappropriate (Kouzmin et al., 1997, p. 30).
Research constraints: unacknowledged positivism

Shifting one’s focus away from education and into the related area of research, one is reminded, once again, of Plato’s cave – where this discussion began. It is argued that much of police research is positivist research and, whilst it is happily acknowledged that much positivist research is extremely valuable, it is underscored that one must choose one’s research paradigm for a reason. When one researches solely and uncritically from the positivist paradigm, much may be lost. Many traditional and parochial approaches to public administration lack intellectual substance (Jun, 1997, p. 151). It is not to say that there is not validity with positivistic enquiry nor of research that deals with the immediate concerns of efficiency, productivity, policy analysis, performance measurement and actor behaviour. However, more responsible research is more curious, concerned with critique of numerous ideas and devoting much energy to painstaking exploration of alternative perspectives (Jun, 1997, p. 152). The positivist paradigm, thus, becomes the police researcher’s “psychic prison” where the organisation is ultimately created and sustained by conscious and unconscious process, with members becoming imprisoned in the images, ideas, thoughts and actions to which these processes give rise (Morgan, 1997, p. 215).

Goffman’s (1974) *Frame Analysis* and, more recently, the work of Goodman *et al.* (1990, p. 72), proposed that how one frames events affects one’s responses to them, including the methods used, the results arrived at and the conclusions drawn (Goodman *et al.*, 1990, p. 72). The “trap of favoured ways of thinking” (Morgan, 1997, p. 216) is not recognised, with strong corporate cultures (like the police) providing sometimes pathological blind spots, where “ways of seeing become ways of not seeing” (Morgan, 1997, p. 217).

The research methodology should suit the problem. That some organisational problems do not have solutions – “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 160; Harmon and Mayer, 1986, p. 9) – increases the need to look beyond the tame, rationalist, prescriptive solutions that are so routinely and uncritically proffered. The world is often illogical, irrational and incoherent. It would be unreasonable to assume, then, that the theory serving to explain or understand it should necessarily be logical, rational and coherent. Confusion is, sometimes, a necessary prerequisite for understanding and analysis. Qualitative research conducted from an interpretive or critical paradigm offers insights that are different from the positivist school: subjectivity, groundedness, richness and serendipity are valued, having much to offer organisational analysis (Vickers, 1999) – especially police organisations.

Positivist research is one of the corollaries of the modernist project. Modernity, as the outcome of modernisation, has been premised on an increasingly functional differentiation of phenomena and consists of devices and practices for managing the key process of differentiation (Clegg, 1990, p. 11). Modernity may be taken to refer to the age of Enlightenment (towards the end of the eighteenth century) that coincided with the rise of secularisation of societies and of the rise of scientific and philosophical rationalism. Modernity and modernism are thought of as coinciding with philosophical commitments
to “truth”, “rationality”, “rationalisation” and “progress”. For example, “real” research has been described in Australian police organisations as “objective”, “measurable” and “practical” (National Police Research Unit, 1998). It has been observed that little value is attributed to the subjective, the earthy and the serendipitous in police research.

Again, I return to my experiences in the classroom to illustrate. Specifically I recall endeavours to introduce senior police management to what I perceived to be the delights of qualitative research. The same class that read Craib (1992) were subsequently exposed to the various research paradigms – broadly, the positivist, interpretivist and critical perspectives. From there, various qualitative research methodologies were explored: ethnography, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, grounded theory, and case-study research. Research methods of interviews, questionnaires, observation, participant observation, focus groups and sociometry were also canvassed. The students were divided into small groups, each planning to deal with a “practical police problem”. With much discussion and suggestions as to how each group might approach their chosen problem, I could see the students’ interest rise as they could connect in their minds the theoretical, philosophical and methodological options with their problems at hand. I recall that one group wanted to investigate the impact of “community policing” in their particular jurisdiction. Another wanted to study the problems of race relations between police officers and community members within a localised Vietnamese immigrant community. Still another wanted to explore the culture of the police department where they were working, especially in relation to race discrimination. The projects were developed over the intensive seminar series, and students made contact with me at regular intervals after the seminars ended to discuss issues as they arose.

Unfortunately, in addition to their positivist research leanings, police organisations can also be authoritarian and secretive. It is not surprising that an organisation which retains such formidable power over organisational members through coercive and alienative structures (Etzioni, 1961), should be guided by the formidable scientific “metanarratives” and the “pragmatics of scientific knowledge” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 23) of a modernist, capitalist culture. “Normal science” has been conceived of as a cognitive pathology (Gouldner, 1976, p. 48) where objectivism is a cognitive “deviance” produced and reproduced by an effort to conform with that rationality’s requirement of self-groundedness. Objectivism and the critique of objectivism, then, are both produced by the grammar of modern rationality, and are symptomatic of its internal contradictions (Gouldner, 1976, p. 50). Positivism, functionalism, reductionism and Protestant-grounded rationalist ideology accompany and, to a large extent, justify the power monopoly pervading organisations (Kouzmin, 1980; 1983) – especially in policing organisations which are coercive instruments manipulating power with alienating involvement (Etzioni, 1961). Internal control is the major preoccupation of police organisations – “commonweal organisations” (Blau and Scott, 1963/1969, p. 43). Control may be
sought internally through maintaining continuous levels of anxiety (Gabriel, 1998, p. 307). This, unfortunately, encourages a “stunted reflexivity” (Gouldner, 1976, p. 48) where “objectivism is that pathology of cognition that entails silence about the speaker, about his interests and his desires, and how these are socially situated and structurally maintained” (Gouldner, 1976, p. 50).

The important postscript to this classroom case study is that the students who participated in the subject I taught were to be evaluated by their senior colleagues at the conclusion of their projects. Student research projects were to be presented by the groups to senior police management. These senior police were likely to bring with them their previously articulated expectations for “positive” research outcomes – that is, research that was objective and measurable and, importantly, that depicted the organisation in a positive light. The organisational assessment, given by senior colleagues of these students, of their performance in this executive management course contributed partially to indicators of their overall performance within the organisation, thus potentially having a material impact on their chances for promotion and career advancement. Many of the students had been required to report to their superior officers as their projects unfolded, to report what they were doing and why. Finally, I heard (informally) that many students had made significant changes to their research designs before the completion of their projects (but well after the seminars had concluded) as a result of these enquiries. I was not invited to return to see their final presentations.

Police researchers must leave the cave. Those in senior positions must also allow more junior researchers to leave the cave. Alternatives to the positivist paradigm do exist and it should be recognised that the positivist paradigm may not always be appropriate to police organisations because of the positivist’s clear separation between science and non-science, and with scientific knowledge being perceived as “better” than the “inferior” ways of gaining knowledge which may include religion, astrology, personal experience and tradition (Neuman, 1997, p. 65). Police researchers should remind themselves that if they choose to adhere unquestioningly to the positivist approaches currently revered in police research organisations (that is, to remain in Plato’s cave), they resign themselves to knowledge that is, at best, a shadowy incomplete representation of reality. One might note that other strictly positivist schools are increasingly supplementing their “science” with more behavioural and social educative processes. For example, medical schools are increasingly equipping medical students with counselling and interpersonal communication skills to provide students with a more rounded education.

What is sought here is a re-examination of standard practice that may promote a reflexive analysis and the questioning of previously unchallenged dogma (Kouzmin, 1980, p. 131). It is hoped that it may shift the focus of attention – a form of collective and professional reflexivity (Gouldner, 1976). Reflexivity is a crucial concern (Steier, 1991, p. 5). The notion of reflexivity as a circular process (Steier, 1991, p. 2), as “self-awareness”, is critical to recognise the rules to which one submits and by which one is bound (Gouldner, 1976, p. 55).
A need for “voice”
Like all public organisations, police work is characterised by irrationality, serendipity and emotionality. Police organisations may find that the encouragement of “voice” from members invaluable. “Voice” provides organisations with an important feedback loop to allow for critical self-analysis and response (Hirschman, 1970). In comparison to the exit option, voice is costly and conditioned on the influence and bargaining power that members have within the organisation to which they belong (Hirschman, 1970, p. 40). One speaks here of an ability of the organisation (through research) to hear what members need to say. Police organisations should be reminded, though, that the effort an interested party makes to put their case will be in proportion to the perceived advantage to be gained from a favourable outcome multiplied by the probability of influencing the decision (Hirschman, 1970, p. 39).

Authoritarian organisations tend not to encourage voice, especially dissenting voice. Therefore, there may be a sustained avoidance of the “heartbreak of voice” (Hirschman, 1970, p. 107) and a marked preference for silence through acquiescence or indifference (Hirschman, 1970, p. 31). Some police members may try to preserve a sense of self by limiting their emotional offerings to surface displays of the “right” feeling whilst, concurrently, feeling a sense of being false or mechanical (Hochschild, 1983, p. x). They may also feel that their right to anger has withered on the vine (Hochschild, 1983, p. 26). Resulting alienation may be felt through powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation from the organisation and self-estrangement (Blauner, 1964, pp. 1-4) – none of which help the organisation to learn. Unfortunately, Kakar’s (1998) findings also suggest that many officers with higher education do not feel their education is appreciated, suggesting the need for policy makers and administrators to be more concerned with recognising and responding to this situation. Organisations should be wary of the pathological case where an organisation is, in effect, equipped with a reaction mechanism to which it is not responsive (Hirschman, 1970, p. 122). Organisationally based loyalty may operate to silence police officers – loyalty to their colleagues may be unconscious. Fitzgerald (1989, p. 209) wrote of the alienation of the police force being aggravated by unacceptable aspects of police culture and negative community attitudes. Senior officers that have not experienced organisational life beyond policing may be loyal to and silent on behalf of colleagues when external scrutiny is perceived (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 210). Members loyal to the organisation will only invoke the sometimes painful and difficult option of voice if they estimate that they have some ability to influence the organisation (Hirschman, 1970, p. 77). Independent research that values the “voice” of police officers – that protects them and hears them – should be invoked to assist the organisation to learn.

Conclusion: the way ahead?
For police management education
Police organisations are urged to transcend Weber’s (1976) “iron cage” of functional or instrumental rationality, especially when considering their
educational philosophy. As discussed above, organisations are not the rational, objective places that some might want them to be or believe them to be. Reviewing the police literature demonstrates numerous difficult organisational problems, personal and organisational crises – difficulties that may have commenced through ambiguity, misunderstanding, serendipity. Unfortunately, these “wicked” problems are frequently answered with “tame” solutions (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 160; Harmon and Mayer, 1986, p. 9); solutions that are prescriptive, rational and structured. Naive, elementary guidelines of “how to” and “what should be done” are routinely proffered in answer to hugely complex, difficult situations, with the underlying notion that if the parties involved simply did what they “should” the problem would evaporate. The problems of some police trying to solve management pathologies, ethical conundrums and organisationally structural inadequacies with tame, rational, prescriptive solutions have been explored. What is suggested here is that a more holistic, critical, theoretically based approach to education preserves the structure and focuses on the whole in relation to its parts, rather than taking an atomistic approach which is inclined to distort the structure, focusing on the parts as segments of the whole (Ramsden, 1992, p. 43). Deep learning is to be encouraged.

There is a perceived need for police organisations to embrace and encourage critical thinking and reflexivity, to value theory and to return to an intrinsic educational focus. This would serve to balance and support a vocational, pragmatic and rational educational program. Police management educators, whilst recognising the value of theoretical and historical guidelines in education should, concurrently, take great care not to uncritically advance the numerous management “fads” as the solution to their problems. The “management theory industry” (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996, p. 49) is a multi-million dollar industry with bewildering power (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996, p. 9). Police organisations should be wary of its breathtaking (and sometimes inappropriate) influence in the educational arena. They should also de-emphasise a focus on credentialism that supports this trend. Education must not be associated simply with expectations for career advancement and opportunities (Shernock, 1992, p. 88).

Students of police management need to have the best possible opportunity to understand management: its historical and theoretical origins, and the influences of other schools of thought, for example, sociology, anthropology, psychology, organisation theory, organisational behaviour, economics and philosophy. Students of management need to be exposed to the discourse surrounding the broader dimensions and assumptions of organisational activities with respect to concerns of humanism, learning, changing, cultural diversity and sustainable organisational development (Jun, 1997, p. 151). Only with a more holistic approach may students more fully appreciate what management is (and what it is not), and how they may be best equipped to deal with (and minimalise) the problems they face.
For police research

The perceived lack of humanism in some police management research is consistent with the view that actors are living in a psychological “ice age” (Wilmot, 1975, p. 3) facing the exigencies of the human costs of new public management (Rees and Rodley, 1995). The balance can be restored by revaluing tacit organisational qualities (Kouzmin et al., 1996); right-brain qualities and values (Goossens, 1990, p. 116) with the embrace of qualitative approaches that value the rich, the grounded and the subjective. Interpretive and critical qualitative approaches such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (including any unique and appropriate combination) may be appropriate to elicit authentic responses to police management conundrums — what “works”, what does not and how one might “do it” better.

But how might one do it better? Scientific management tells us to judge by the size of the gap and reduce it; rational management tells one to judge whether you are following the rules of logic and try to follow perfect logic; more recently, interpretive management, emphasises participation and judges your performance by what the culture expects you to do (Hummel, 1997, p. 196). Perhaps one should pay more attention to the ontological assumptions of the police officer and manager, and to explore openly the stories of police. How it is for police to Be in their working lives should be of vital interest to police managers at all levels in the organisation.

Methodological vehicles of exploration which synthesise more effectively the philosophy and the epistemology of the research question must be employed (Vickers, 1997). The choice of methodology should be influenced by the appropriateness of the method for the theoretical goals, the adequacy of the method regarding the research object and the realisation of methodological rules which determine the structure, possibilities and limitations of the research (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 106). Vital organisational elements of people, structure, operating procedures, politics and culture require qualitative, reflexive studies. There is a dearth of subjective, qualitative police research addressing the fascinating experiences and the daily conundrums facing police members. Statistics do not expose the pain of the unacknowledged, the coerced or the alienated in police organisations. Qualitative methodologies are ontological, accepting the conflictful and ambiguous nature of the social world. It is these methodologies which reject the rationalist and objectivist in favour of the subjective and ontological (Vickers, 1998, p. 198) that have much to offer police organisational analysis.

References


National Police Research Unit (NPRU) (1998), presentation to the PRIMA Conference held at the Australian Institute of Police Management, Manly, February.


