Dixon of Dock Green Got Shot!
Policing Identity Work and Organisational Change

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Introduction

The analyses, understandings and prescriptions on organisational change have a long pedigree in management and organisational theory. Yet, despite the considerable amount of research that has been devoted to the topic of ‘change management’, both theoretical and practical insights, from a range of theoretical perspectives, are increasingly being viewed as inadequate (Collins and Rainwater 2005; Grant et al 2005; Sorge and van Witteloostuijn 2004; Collins 2003; Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Marshak 2002; Pettigrew et al 2001; Clegg and Hardy 1996). A focus of much of the contemporary critique by both academics and practitioners is the ‘business advice’ industry on change management, accused of being philosophically vacuous, decontextualised, with narrow, simplistic and myopic prescriptions, grounded in assumptions of rational and logical progress and promoting conservative agendas (Jackson 2001; Sturdy 2004). More rigorous research on change and the management of change has also faced considerable critique for its functionalist framing of change as rational, objectivist and technicist. Change is assumed to be something that is brought in to a rational and ordered setting, whereupon movement takes place (the Change) and subsequently the new way is realised and stabilised. These ‘synoptic accounts’ of change (Tsoukas and Chia 2002:570), are grounded in an understanding of organisations as stable and ordered arenas. Furthermore, given the managerialist slant of most of the change writing, the experiences and consequences of such prescriptions for many organisational members, ‘customers’ and wider society are ignored and unheard (Alvesson and Willmott 1992; Collins 2003; Sennett 1998; Ehrenreich 2002; Toynbee 2003).

However, even the more sophisticated organisational change analysis, that emphasises the importance of context and processes of change (Pettigrew et al 2001; Dawson 1994; Pettigrew and Whipp 1991) still fail to deal with the ambiguities, complexities, polyvocality as well as particularity of context. Furthermore, locked within realist (and largely technicist) framings, such approaches fail to recognise the negotiated and constructed nature of meanings of change both within the organisation as well as in the generation of knowledge about and of change by practitioners, academics and consultants (Ref). In sum, theorising on change fails to capture the “distinguishing features of change – its fluidity, pervasiveness, open-endedness and indivisibility” (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: 570). By focusing on specific change initiatives, there is a tendency therefore to ignore the change as norm that takes place at the microprocessual level through ‘situated human agency unfolding in time’ (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: 572). What is needed, therefore, are approaches to understanding change that can accommodate routine change as a condition of possibility for organisation at the ontological level as well as an ability to analyse the introduction of new discourses into organisation and the discursive effects they engender. Therefore, our interest here lies in the call to re-imagine change (Collins 2005), drawing on process philosophers, notably Bergson (1946), where it is argued that
organisational change should be deprivileged as a momentous, abnormal and reified object and instead understood as the norm of everyday human existence (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). This calls for an ‘ontological reordering’ of organisation where “change is constitutive of reality” (2002: 567) and organisation is an “emergent property of change” (2002:570).

In light of the limitations of positivist approaches to understanding change and reflecting the increased interest in social constructionist (Schwandt 2000) understandings of organisation, discursive approaches to understanding change in organisations are increasingly viewed as better able to deal with the complexities of change and more open to reflexivity and the politics of knowledge creation (words). Discursive approaches are concerned with the construction of meanings and identities, located in particular contexts. Their advantages are that they are seen as being better able to offer an understanding of how various social relations (re)produce organisations; how dominant discourses play out in organisations; and how certain texts are imbued with agency and certain actors have sufficient agency to author, appropriate, re-inscribe and challenge certain ways of knowing and being (Hardy 2004). This shifts the focus to explaining how new meanings enter the organisation and how they gain legitimacy and engender new ways of understanding, new ways of being and action. As Tsoukas (2005: 98) suggests, the empirical question in discursive approaches becomes how is discourse legitimated? And through what discursive strategies will new discourses resonate with individuals?

Focusing on the discursive level has a number of implications for understanding organisational change. Firstly, it calls for a shift in focus from the macro to the micro-processes of organisational lived experience, focusing on the construction of reality as an ongoing process as new discourses enter the arena and as social relations and critical reflection take place. This shifts the research focus from the grand schemas of planned change, senior management visions and strategic change to the micro-discursive nature of everyday lived experiences. The advantages of such an approach is that it enables us to understand better the dynamics of how change as a new ‘discursive template’ (Tsoukas and Chia 2002) enters the organisation and how it is ‘received’ by organisational members, who, in their everyday activities are engaged in mundane acts of change. Change therefore is defined as the “reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action as a result of new experiences obtained through interactions” (570). Planned change programmes can be understood as the introduction of new discursive templates into the organisation which may reinforce certain ways of being and knowing (as a discursive resource) as well as establishing new meanings, subjectivities and action. Such meanings, subjectivities and action may never become institutionalised, however.

Secondly, performative approaches have significant methodological implications. Studies in change tend to focus on the organisation that emerges from change. No matter how sophisticated and contextualised studies are, what is examined
and constructed are the stages of change, the freeze-frames of continuous change into a cognitive structure. This presents change in a format similar to early flick-book ‘filoscopes’ so popular in drawing room entertainments of the late 19th century. Thus change is conceptualised as a set of stages, which is not the same as focusing on the movement – the performing of change. This calls for more ethnographic studies that focus on the dynamic and contextualised lived experiences in organisations. Significantly for this study, performative approaches to change offer significant promise in terms of reconciling the linguistic with the behavioural through its advocacy of ethnographic methods that focus on the processes of change in specific contexts and situations.

A particular contribution that discursive approaches can make, therefore, is in understanding how and in what ways new discourses that enter organisations may affect individual subjectivity and localised meanings. There are now an increasing number of studies that have begun to focus on the construction and impact of categories of identity (Alvesson and Willmott 2002), the processes of identification (Albert and Whetten 1985; Ashforth and Mael 1989; Dutton et al 1994; Elsbach 1999; Gioia et al 2000), and ‘identity work’ (Watson 1994; Thomas and Linstead 2002; Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Thomas and Davies 2005) in the context of different organisational arrangements. This research takes as its starting point the premise that an appreciation of the contested and negotiated terrain of meanings and identities is fundamental to understanding change. Focusing on meanings and identities draws attention to how change can arise through a challenge to the ways in which individuals are defined, labelled and classified. There has been an under appreciation of the extent to which change initiatives are targeted at redefining individual attitudes, values, priorities and self understandings (Halford and Leonard 1999). In particular, the importance of self-identity both as a target for discourses of change as well as a source of resistance to that change has been neglected in the change management literature. As Tsoukas and Chia (2002: 580) observe, there is a need to understand organisations: “both as quasi-stable structures (i.e. sets of institutionalised categories) and as sites of human action in which, through the ongoing agency of organizational members, organization emerges”. There is a need to recognise the complex and negotiated nature of change and changing within organisations, rather than viewing change as something introduced by management on employees (as something separate) and in response to which, there is acceptance or resistance. Earlier work by the authors that examined the introduction of the discourse of New Public Management in the public service organisation, illustrated how such discourses are adapted, subverted and resisted in the process of critical reflection and in doing so subtly pervert and re-inscribe meanings. New Public Management was not viewed as a coherent discourse imposed on hapless and passive public service professionals whose only response is to accept or resist. However, the extent to which new meanings, beliefs and actions become institutionalised requires empirical research and greater theoretical development.
Policing Change

The police service offers considerable potential for studying change as situated human agency in context. Firstly, as with other public service reforms of recent years, the changes directed at the service are specifically targeted at changing identities (du Gay 1996; Alvesson and Willmott 2002). Secondly, the police service provides a timely case study for exploring the dynamic relationships between individual agency and organisational change.

The public view of, and confidence in, the police in the UK has been in decline since its peak in the 1950s, increasingly criticised over the past three decades over the excess use of force, sexism, racism and homophobia. Government criticism during the 1980s focused on the poor value for money from the police service and of its remoteness and unaccountability to the communities that it serves (Nash and Savage 1994; Macpherson Report 1999, Chan 1997; Holdaway 1997; Holdaway and Barron 1997). The UK government, similar to governments in other countries, have taken a great deal of interest in the control and delivery of police services in recent years (Fleming 2004), and the development of a more service oriented and community or neighbourhood focused approach is a persistent theme (Davies and Thomas 2003). Attempts to bring in major policing reforms that reorient the priorities and nature of British policing from a control function to a reassurance one, can be traced back over two decades. Police reform is top of the UK Government’s modernisation agenda, fundamental to which is the loosening of organisational and professional boundaries to take on a ‘shared ethos of service’ (OPSR 2002: 28) in service provision. In 2005, this pressure for institutional change can be seen to be driven by the current government under the banner of ‘Neighbourhood Policing’, where the government has set out its plans to deliver Neighbourhood policing teams to every community by 2008.

However the nature of police reforms and the difficulties of changing the police and policing cultures and identities has been a subject of much debate (Stephens and Becker 1994; Chan 1996; Miller 1999). Consequently, instances of ‘planned change’ must be viewed against a backdrop of a persistent concern about the poor, even hostile relationship between the police and the communities that they serve, particularly ethnic minority communities (Scarman Report 1981; Macpherson Report 1999, Chan 1997; Holdaway 1997; Holdaway and Barron 1997). Reports by the Home Office (2002) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE 2005), both emphasise the need to reconfigure policing occupational identities in a radical manner, to emphasise more caring and service oriented activities. The CRE report drew attention to the ‘ice in the heart of the police service’ as regards race issues and the police service ‘must change from within’. However, the difficulty in embedding this new discursive template into the beliefs and habits of individual officers has been as persistent a theme as the demands for radical change.
Research in the USA, Australia and the UK suggest that this difficulty is largely due to resistance by rank and file officers (McConville and Shepherd 1992; Graef 1989; Winfree and Newbold 1999). The macho informal ‘cop culture’ of the police, particularly among the lower ranks, does not promote or legitimise a public service or ‘caring image’ and while the service functions of the police form a major part of their work and take up a significant amount of their time, the identity of the ‘thief-taker’ and crime fighting activities seem to fit much more closely with the policing occupational identity than that of a social-worker. Individuals may strongly identify with certain corporate values, especially if these coincide with other forms of identity formation or affirmation. The strong occupational culture within the police promotes a policing identity that corresponds with forms of macho masculinity, identification with which confirms oneself not only as a legitimate and effective officer but also as a successful man, or as a woman able to ‘hack it’ in a man’s world. In sum, the cop culture, where ‘acting tough’ and telling stories of ‘fighting and violence, sexual conquests and drinking’ enhances ones reputation as a ‘good officer’, has therefore been identified as a major obstacle to police reform and the development of a more service oriented policing philosophy (Holdaway 1983; Manning 1989). It has also been charged with contributing to the continuing problems of sexual and racial discrimination and the under representation of women and officers from other minority groups in managerial posts (Heidensohn 1992; Gaston and Alexander 1997; Brown and Heidensohn 2000; Holdaway 1996). Therefore despite persistent initiatives for reform, the identities of individual front line police officers are still very much constructed in control terms. As Stephens and Becker (1994) argue: “Serious questions have to be asked whether control can give way to care and service as a dominant working philosophy”.

This paper explores the experiences and identity constructions of police officers within one constabulary in the UK and the attempts made by this organisation to introduce community policing, presenting findings from a pilot study stage of a three-year study. The paper focuses on officers’ understandings of their sense of self and sense-making around community policing, how individual police officers define themselves as policing professionals, the forms this identity takes, and the tensions these constructions of the self might present for other elements competing for identity make-up.

**Methodology**

The paper draws from a wider study that explores the constructions of, and struggles with, different types of policing occupational identities, examining in detail processes of identification and dynamic relations of micro-processual change, organisational identities and external image. The research aims to describe, theorise and analyse connections between individual ‘identity work’ and these different forms of control and governance, both endogenous and
exogenous to the organisation. The study will focus on efforts to effect change at the level of institutionalised ways of being and action as well as focusing on the ongoing agency of individual officers in constructing their organisational lives.

This paper is based on the pilot study of the larger project on policing identities and police reform. The pilot study, conducted in 2004, involves analysis of one police organisation (pseudonym Southern Constabulary), focusing on the implementation of community policing. The focus was on an appraisal of police reform within Southern Constabulary and of the Home Office reforms and change initiatives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three senior male managers/policing professionals. Further individual interviews were also carried out with a range of officers from different policing specialisms and from different ranks, within one division of the constabulary. The following people were interviewed: one superintendent who was the Divisional commander, one inspector, two sergeants, one detective constable and two community officers at constable rank. Of these interviewees three were female. In addition, two focus groups were also conducted, consisting of sergeants and constables involved in ‘Community First teams’ within Southern Constabulary. One focus group consisted of eight officers, whilst in the other group there were five participants. In each group, one participant was female. The pilot work has also contributed to building trust relationships between the academic researchers and the policing professionals and establishing access for future in-depth ethnographic work in the main study.

A qualitative, social constructionist approach is adopted, focusing on the construction and negotiation of meanings and identities by individual policing professionals and other key stakeholders within the research engagement. The research process itself is also viewed as an identity-constituting event and thus an empirical situation in itself as much as a medium for collecting information beyond the research process. The material constructed is not presented in its written form as a fact but as a ‘living social text’ (Alvesson and Deetz 2000), open to construction and reconstruction by all of its ‘consumers’. This therefore recognises the situated and shared nature of knowledge (and identity) construction, coloured by the actors involved in the research engagement.

**Bringing Back Dixon: Changing Policing Identities**

'It’s time to bring back Dixon’, says Met. "People want to see street patrols, lots of them, real community based policing where locals needs are addressed" (Sir John Stevens, Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Guardian, February 2005).

PC George Dixon is a fictional character and the hero of the longest running police series on British television, shown for over 21 years from the mid 1950s.
For more than two decades he was the most well known and well loved ‘bobby’ in Britain, championing moral values, reliable, trustworthy and a helpful ‘community copper. These were the halcyon days of policing, where villains were bad or naughty and would worry about upsetting their mothers. The East End of London, where Dixon pounded his beat, upholding the law with friendly chat, a few wise words and the odd ‘clip around the ear’ was, even in the 50s a naive portrayal of East End life and one that increasingly lost favour through the 1970s. However, ‘you can’t keep a good copper down’ and half a century since its TV launch, this police series is currently back on air on UK radio. The discourse of community police is once again ‘back on the agenda’ in the talk of the media, government officials and senior officers within UK police constabularies. However, understandings of community policing are contested and ambiguous. The pilot study suggests that community policing as it is promoted in the directive discourse from the government, clashes against other strongly held understandings over policing and police work. Thus the identity of the community officer is both contentious and ambiguous, complicating and problematising processes of police reform. This is not a case of a single change initiative being resisted by a univocal rank and file group of police offices. At a micropolitical level, individuals construct understandings of self and social situation and in the process subtly subvert, re-label, or reinforce the declarative discourse of community policing. Actors construct different meanings and interpretations of the community police officer and we see how discursive strategies are used to legitimise, re-label as well as subvert the community discourse. In particular, the texts in the pilot study suggest a reworking of community policing by those involved to fit with other institutionalised discourses of ‘real policing’ and masculinity. Alternatively, some officers draw on the new discursive template as a discursive resource to legitimate their occupational (and gender) identity which may run counter to prevailing positions offered within existing institutionalised discourses. The following texts illustrate our arguments, commencing with details of this new discursive template of community policing.

New Discursive Template of Community Policing

The pressures for paradigmatic change in the priorities and nature of British policing, from emphasising control to reassurance and care has a long history. For over two decades, government officials and senior police managers have talked of the importance of moving towards (or back to) community policing. Various initiatives can be noted over this period, starting in the 1980s with an expansion in the number of police community liaison departments as well as the number of officers allocated to community liaison duties (Phillips and Cochrane 1988). In 1990 the Association of Chief Police Officers’ (ACPO) Strategic Policy Document recommended that attention should be focused on the needs of individual communities and that policing should reflect public concerns and priorities. In a national survey of that year, over a quarter of the forces that responded operated some kind of geographic or sector policing (Bennett and
Lupton 1990). In 2005, again, we see ‘real’ policing emphasising the importance of care and service orientation, promoted by the current government under the banner of neighbourhood policing. This is aimed at providing high visibility reassurance policing, utilizing local knowledge and intelligence from local people to target crime hotspots and the disorder issues causing most concern to local communities. The Home Secretary, in defining neighbourhood policing, is keen to move away from the cosy and tame Dixon and Dock Green image so beloved of the media, legitimating the discourse with much tougher and professional symbolic language:

‘Neighbourhood policing is not a soft option – it is a hard edge strategy that recognises the importance of visible, accessible, responsive and intelligence-led policing to combat all crime, from nuisance neighbours to drug dealers...Neighbourhood policing is about moving from policing by consent to policing with cooperation – actively engaging local needs, winning their hearts and minds and responding to their needs and concerns.’

Within Southern Constabulary there have been continual directives over recent years to operate a community-based policing style. The strategic vision, laid down in the Annual Policing and Performance Plan for 2004/5 states that the role of Southern is ‘to deliver professional policing that helps build safer communities’, with four strategic priorities being set out, relating to leadership, community involvement, partnership working and change management. The text contains clear declarations for ‘a community based, intelligence led policing style and through using a problem-solving approach aims to tackle the causes of crime rather than the symptoms of crime’. The quoted aim is:

Providing a citizen focused service to the public, especially victims and witnesses, which responds to the needs of individuals and communities and inspires confidence in the police, particularly amongst minority ethnic communities.

The plan further states that it is only through visible policing and deploying frontline staff to patrol within the community that they can gather the intelligence to inform this method of policing.

In operationalising this strategic vision, Southern established seven dedicated community teams in the most deprived areas of each BCU in 2002. Named ‘Community First Teams’ and comprising 5 officers, (1 sergeant and 4 constables), a further 7 teams have been introduced in 2004/5, with the stated aim of ‘community liaison, public reassurance and work with partners and other agencies on tackling anti-social behaviour and other crimes’. Special payments have been attached to officers taking up Community First positions to encourage officers to apply for them and to indicate the value placed upon them by the constabulary’s chief officers. The current annual plan also refers to the employment of Police Community Support Officer (PCSOs) in providing an enhanced visible presence that deters criminals and reassures the public. The
aim is that these officers will be at the heart of the communities and report back on issues that demoralise the communities, such as graffiti, anti-social behaviour and abandoned cars.

Therefore, through various texts (written and spoken), there is a clear message that community policing is integral and fundamental to policing in Southern Constabulary. Formal documentation within the force, echoing a myriad of government and media pronouncements provides a key reference point to suggest that community policing is legitimate, valued, is viewed as priority and is the ‘natural’ and normal way for individual police officers to understand their occupational identities. This message is reinforced by senior management within Southern. In interviews with three senior managers/policing professionals, the firm commitment to the importance of community policing, its vital role for the future effectiveness of the police service and the need for a community and customer philosophy to be an integral part of every front line officers’ role can be seen. As Pete, the superintendent in charge of Community Safety asserts:

The intention is that we get every member of the organisation, so that it is clear to them and simple to them, an understanding of what community policing is about and what customer focus should be about. I think then I try to get the message over that every response officer is a community officer [Superintendent Pete].

Similarly, the Assistant Chief Constable interviewed, commented:

To be good at their job, they need to be able to show that they can talk to the community. And that’s what I will try and do is challenge their professionalism [ACC Ed].

Thus we see a clear message that community policing should operate as a policing philosophy rather than merely a role undertaken by a few specialist departments, teams and officers. With ACC Ed’s comments, there is a clear statement of community policing forming a core in the construction of professional knowledge and skill, framing what an effective policing professional should do. However, when it comes to how community policing is to be understood, and how it fits with and contributes to a policing identity, there are efforts by senior officers to distance it from the pejorative identity of Dixon of Dock Green.

‘Dixon of Dock Green - with Attitude’
Senior managers’ texts suggest that community policing needs to be ‘sold’ to officers and to be legitimised within modern policing. It is apparent that considerable negotiation around the meanings of community policing is taking place in an attempt to combine a caring and community image with a more controlling one. By distancing community policing from the Dixon image, there is an attempt to promote a modern, professional and intelligence-led approach, reconstructing community policing around images of service provision and customer orientation. As Ed states: ‘it’s not just about kissing babies and visiting
schools where, at the end of the day, the officer has had a very nice time but what have they contributed?"

Martin, a divisional commander, tells of how the softer community aspects of policing are closely integrated with a modern progressive policing style that is much more professional and much more about fighting crime. The new community officer is someone who is:

Highly motivated, self motivated, a problem solver, certain amount of resilience, must be thief takers and focused on local crimes – know the criminals and must be professional – it’s not about kissing babies and all of that [Martin]

What is interesting, therefore, is the way in which these senior officers attempt to segue community policing discourse into other dominant understandings already legitimised within the police. This suggests an awareness of the intertextuality of context. Thus there is a suggestion that community policing is being reinterpreted to conform to what might be a more acceptable approach to policing for rank and file officers; one that is more closely aligned with traditional ideals of ‘real’ policing, corresponding with a set of masculine values of acting with force. Martin proposes that this new policing identity is about being a ‘problem-solver’ and a ‘thief-taker’, a type of ‘Dixon of Dock Green with attitude’ he says.

The importance attached to community policing is reinforced with the establishment of the Community First teams. Attaching extra money to these roles can be viewed as an attempt to define such officers as an elite and an embodiment of all that is viewed as progressive and professional within the force. Thus there is a suggestion that the Community First teams act as a reference point in identity control, defining the characteristics and expectations of the new police officer. Both Ed and Pete argue that the success of these teams results from the way that they have successfully combined ‘control’ and ‘care’ aspects in performing their role. Community First officers are reported as having earned the respect of their colleagues because of their construction as ‘crime fighters’ not as ‘care workers’. As Ed comments:

What the Community First teams have had is an effect on how the response officer views community policing. They have gone from a view of “you’ve got a cushy number, haven’t you” to actually seeing that these are very proactive police officers that one morning will be knocking doors down and arresting drug dealers or criminals and three hours later will be walking around the community talking to children [ACC Ed]

There is also an emphasis on the collaborative role of community policing. Pete argues that Community First teams represent the purest form of community policing. He describes these teams as ‘old style of policing with modern concepts of partnership and community regeneration’. He argues that back in the days of Dixon of Dock Green there wouldn’t have been discussions around social
regeneration and for him policing identities with these teams are (re)constructed as ‘agents of social change’.

However, the task of controlling and (re)constructing policing identities along community policing lines is not unproblematic, with problems centring on the difficulties in persuading the more ‘forceful’ community officers, as Martin puts it, to perform the ‘softer’ aspects of their role. It was felt that community policing remained somewhat ambiguous and that there were mixed messages over its role and how it fitted in. As Ed comments:

> Each BCU commander will have a different view of what community policing is, the community beat officers will have a different view and standards which stands in the way of improving community policing [ACC Ed].

Part of this problem was attributed to the need for a more definite structure for community policing to aid its overall integration, particularly in terms of performance measurement and education and training. Ed states that ‘in large areas we’re paying lip service to community policing’, with problems created by the performance culture and its emphasis on a narrow mandate of increasing arrest rates and reducing particular forms of crime. This, he argued, was a distraction from building a community focus and redefining policing roles. He spoke of the need to measure community involvement and link it to professionalism. He continued by saying:

> What we’re not being challenged on or threatened on is “how are you interfacing with your community?”; “how are you problem solving with your community?” “What difference have you made in your community”? At its simplest, what gets measured with the right threats gets done, but that is in no way reflecting the policing activity that is needed if you want to sustain and improve on what we say is valuable [ACC Ed]

However, the main barrier to integration of community policing lay in the difficulties in re-crafting policing identities and legitimising the discourse. Martin, for example, suggests that there is a need to re-educate response officers on the value of a community oriented policing style as ‘the quality of a good community officer meeting public needs is not in their hearts’. The problem is that the image of policing, especially in the mind of young response officers does not fit easily with community policing. Response officers (who more often than not have less than five years’ experience) join the police because they are attracted by fast cars and flashing lights, influenced by the media and TV images of the policing role. As Pete observes:

> What I would really like to achieve is by making the young response officers understand that whilst the sexy bit might be the blue lights and being accredited as a level 1 investigator, unless that can show that they can talk to the community and bring community intelligence back, they’re not very good police officers [Pete].
Thus, he argues, embedding community policing into the hearts and minds of response officers is the greatest challenge.

Fitting community policing with policing occupational identities is a fundamental problem. The suggestion by senior officers’ texts is that it may be easier to manipulate the meanings surrounding community policing, distancing it from the ‘other’ of Dixon of Dock Green and legitimizing it by drawing on more acceptable discourses of professionalism and customer service. Therefore, constructing policing identities as “problem solvers” and a “thief takers” is perhaps an easier route, as Martin argues, than to make officers identify with the “softer” and “caring” images of the job. As Martin wryly observes: Dixon of Dock Green got shot!

Ultimately, the texts suggest that to understand the relationship between community policing initiatives and implementation, there is a need to appreciate how community policing interfaces with constructions of policing identities and other forms of identification such as gender and professionalism. This is apparent when examining the texts of rank and file officers, to which we now turn.

**Contested Terrains of ‘Real Police Work’**

For the community police officers interviewed, community policing is seen as ‘as the real thing’, ‘proper police work’ and what policing should be about. These officers constructed highly positive and effective policing identities and were confident of their contribution both to a narrowly defined policing task of catching and controlling criminals but also to what they saw as a much broader and more valuable policing role. However, within this group and other specialist police officers we find different meanings and interpretations of what community policing is and who community police are. We see how officers draw on a set of different subject positions promoted within the discourse, which correspond with their own interests and self-understandings. Police officers’ agency (Shearing and Ericson 1991; Chan 1996) is at issue here, in their resistance in taking on aspects of community policing that are less appealing to their sense of self. The texts suggest a contest of meanings around community policing. In relation to this contestation and looseness around community policing, we see an assertion of the legitimacy of community policing by distancing it from feminised images of empathy, sympathy and reassuring the public (the tea with old ladies image) and drawing on the assertive and controlling traditional subject position of macho policing. A contrasting set of meanings draws on these caring and welfare qualities, corresponding to a more nostalgic presentation of community policing as being the Dixon of Dock Green’ style of officer who knows – and is known by – her or his community. Another set of meanings depicts community policing as a problem solving approach, dealing with long-term social problems, social regeneration and inter-agency collaboration. Finally we see how the discourse is undermined by discursive strategies that emphasise what community policing is
not and the difference between community policing and the ‘real’ job of policing ‘that takes place elsewhere.’ Community policing is defined in negative and patronising language as unexciting, "pink and fluffy" and a ‘cushy number’ for those waiting to retire.

**Community policing as ‘thief taking’**

The texts of many community officers and Community First officers spoke of their level of comfort and fit with the traditional image of ‘real’ policing as crime-fighting, justifying and legitimising their contribution to the policing task using traditional quantitative performance measures such as ‘how often they are in the custody suite’ or ‘how often they lock up their villains’ [Les, Community First officer]. These officers believed that they could perform ‘real’ policing tasks as good as any other officer, and being community officers often meant they could perform these tasks even more effectively. As Wayne, a community officer commented: ‘community policing is probably the most important thing in the force to be honest with you’. Wayne is keen to emphasise that community policing is not a ‘soft’ option and distances himself from a ‘pink and fluffy’ image by asserting arrest rates and a more macho controlling identity. He states that as old community officers have retired there has been a new emphasis to ‘come up here and kick doors down and do warrants’.

Wayne asserts a positive sense of self identity, as a community police officer, emphasising how he loves locking people up:

> I enjoy locking people up – I have got quite good results in relation to locking people up, which never used to be the role of the community officer. Five years ago, the community officer would be briefed that it was not about locking people up but community policing is now far more proactive and there’s nothing better than locking up the bad guys.

The texts of the Community First officers within the focus groups also suggest how many had raised their ‘prestige’ in their divisions by addressing the ‘hard’ measures of police effectiveness. As, Margaret, stated: ‘always being in the custody suite, dealing with people and getting the regular offenders in and doing the hard type of policing’. Another Community First officer, Dave, emphasized how they need to be able to frighten and threaten criminals as well as being able to talk to the old ladies. He stated: ‘We are very nice to the nice people and very nasty to the nasty people’.

Therefore a number of these officers constructed what they saw as a more legitimate face of community policing which is closely aligned with traditional ideas of real policing and acting with force. The subject position of a thief-taker was very prominent in their talk and great emphasis was placed on satisfying quantifiable performance measures that they felt would improve their profile and status within the constabulary. Community police officers in quasi-military organisations where the skills of caring are not highly valued may feel pressures to undergo active and extended identity work in managing their masculinity.
(Fielding 1994). The discursive template of community policing is redefined and relabelled by drawing on existing discursive practices prioritising force and control within the police service (Tietze 2005; Tsoukas 2005).

Community Policing as Welfare Work
The text of the community officers also suggest a more welfare oriented identity, distanced from quantitative indictors that prioritise arrest rates and crime reduction. Even officers who in the process of identity construction drew on a more masculine forceful subject position also recognized other influences in their identity makeup. We see in the text of Wayne how he also draws on a moral and caring subject position in his construction of self. He talks of how as a community police officer he contributes to the social glue of the neighbourhood, dealing with the few ‘bad eggs’ but also providing an important ‘welfare’ role:

You just got to get involved with people from all backgrounds, all walks of life…[...]Well, you’re not just a police officer, you’re a welfare officer as well – and you need to be able to point people in the right direction, be approachable. You get much more of a connection with the people – even the petty criminals – I get to meet the parents you know, whereas the shift just process them, charge them, lock them up.

Likewise, PC Jayne talks of providing ‘added value’ by being much more accessible and integrated with the community, rather than being hermetically sealed in the panda car: ‘they don their flack jacket and out they go and fight the war, she observes. There are strong themes in several of the interviews of boundaries, with community officers constructing themselves as being part of the community while other non-community officers demonstrating a much clearer ‘them and us’ attitude between the police and public.

Pitching themselves in sharp contrast to the ‘thief taker’ identity, these officers were drawing on community policing as a discursive resource to assert a less aggressive and controlling identity. Again Jayne comments:

You can only do so much of hard at it, barriers down front line aggressive style policing. There comes a time when you think there has got to be a different way of doing this. This is what attracts them [community officers] and if this means they are softer… [PC Jayne]

Jane emphasizes her total immersion in her community; children know her, councillors know her, parents know her. She is always available and people know how to contact her. In many ways she exemplifies the more traditional conception of a community police officer and one that would resonate with the public view.

It’s more like your Dixon of Dock Green style policing. You’re far more visible, you’re out and about… It’s far more on the ground, at the roots. Its far more old fashioned policing, basically, which I think is very important [PC Jayne].
Community Policing as Social Change Partner

Drawing on progressive problem solving elements of the discursive template, there was also the construction of the police officer as a social change partner, working in partnership with other agencies and getting involved in social regeneration initiatives. Community First officers in the focus groups spoke of the importance of 'looking outside the box', engaging in a multi-agency, problem solving approach and dealing with 'quality of life issues'. These officers emphasized that the Community First teams were proactive teams, solving problems rather than waiting for problems to happen and then responding to them. As Sergeant Jim stated:

_Historically we would respond to an incident or call and view it in isolation. Our role is to stand back and look at the underlying cause of a problem, and come up with responses to that, and it is not only police responses but could involve other public agencies and private voluntary organisations._ [Sergeant Jim].

PC Jayne also emphasises wanting to make a difference in the community, on not only being a nurse or a teacher type but also on being a politician. Many of her views correspond with the policy-based ideals on intelligence led community policing. Her emphasis is on the more qualitative nature of policing and she suggests that there is a tendency in policing to concentrate on what is measurable at the expense of the more meaningful aspects of the job. Being a community officer for her means being part of the community where she works and knowing about and responding to local issues and concerns. During the interview engagement she talked enthusiastically about a regeneration scheme she has been working on, in partnership with a number of agencies, to improve the problem of youth annoyance. She emphasises the proactive aspects of community policing and draws a positive sense of identity from being a public servant and an agent of social change in her community.

_I go to a lot of council meetings. That is a skill that I have developed over the last 5 years…they’ve got to know me. I don’t leave it to the council meeting for them to throw problems at me. I speak to them frequently…It’s worked really well…but it’s being prepared to put yourself out that little bit more._ [PC Jayne].

Swanning around having cups of tea: An institutionalized negative discourse of community policing

Many community officers were reflexively aware that their identities and the meanings they attached to community policing approach was not widely shared by officers from other specialist areas or by front line response officers. PC Jayne, for example, felt that the value of her role and the benefits of her close community liaison work are not fully appreciated within the constabulary. The approach that is favoured, she believes, is much more hands off – hiding in their Panda cars – and not getting 'contaminated' with the public.
There are some who think it is a complete waste of time. Kick down doors, lock people up and that is the only way that policing should be done. Going into schools, talking to kids, it’s you know, “we’re not paid to do that”. Until that top level thinking goes and everyone thinks it’s worthwhile. I think it is very important. But it might take a few years before more senior people - who may think it’s pink and fluffy - to go. [PC Jayne].

Jayne commented that the lack of clear measurable aspects of performance was also viewed as a major problem for the credibility of community policing: ‘The perception is that we don’t do anything’:

I think the shifts think we don’t do anything because it is not measurable. There is no league table produced to say that we’ve done this much this month. They know they’ve arrested X number of people and they’ve done these many warrants. But what have the community officers done? They’re just swanning around having cups of tea [PC Jayne].

Within one of the focus groups, Jim, a Community First Sergeant, spoke of the resistance of middle managers to community policing, commenting on how they are ‘are performance driven…and can’t see long term. He recounted one incident where the response from his senior officer over the work he had undertaken in arranging a trip for local underprivileged youths was: I don’t want any of this pink and fluffy crap. Get on with real policing!

Many officers within the focus groups spoke of the need to change the whole organization into the philosophy of community policing and argued for greater integration between community policing, response officers and other policing specialist areas if the image of community policing is to be improved. These officers recognized how the label ‘community’ discouraged a number of police officers from applying for positions in the Community First teams. As one of these officers, PC Adrian stated:

‘Many officers were saying that they did not want to be part of the community team – to coin a phrase, that is quite often used in one division by certain senior officers – pink and fluffy policing’ [PC Adrian].

The text of the non-community officers in the research confirmed this highly negative view of community policing, constructed in various ways as: a PR exercise and an exercise of public reassurance, putting Bobbies on the beat and a ‘cushy number’ for those waiting to retire. The talk is of community policing being different and not real policing. This negative image of the community policing role is prevalent within the literature. Work by Chan (1996) on the police in New South Wales in Australia concluded that community policing was interpreted in a superficial way and was mainly seen as a public relations exercise. Similarly, Miller’s (1999) work on the Australian police also showed how there was scepticism and limited interest in neighbourhood policing and how those officers who sought the neighbourhood positions face stigmatisation, ostracism and lack of support from patrol officers. In our study a detective
sergeant, Spike, referred to the community officer as a ‘Dixon of Dock Green type of character, prepared to spend time with people, dealing with issues relating to the non-sexy side of policing. He argued that this was the antithesis of ‘what I’m about’, that it was not the job for him and not exciting enough: ‘It doesn’t blow my skirt up as a police officer’. Detective constable Sam also points out that what attracted her to policing was the chance to do ‘exciting’ work. This she contrasts with community policing and shift work:

I like dealing with offenders rather than victims. I like being more proactive than reactive. And I am not, I am not a pink and fluffy person. Which is why I wouldn’t go back to the community because it’s not my strong point I know that. And it comes back to that they think because I’m a girl I must be pink and fluffy. You know, “c’mon, you’re bound to have some sympathy” and it’s “no, really, I don’t want to do it” [DC Sam].

Sam was keen to distance herself from community work and, in doing so, from what she sees as a feminised policing role. She emphasises that it is ‘not in her’ to ‘do the sympathy thing’.

These texts revealed how many of these officers either lacked understanding and knowledge of community policing and felt it had nothing to do with then or were negative concerning its contribution to the task of ‘real’ policing. A common perception was of community officers having ‘an easy time’ or it being a ‘cushy number’. Spike, the detective sergeant questioned what measures of success are used for community officers and although admitting ‘I don’t know what work they do’ this didn’t prevent him from questioning the value of their contribution and using in this judgement a set of narrow quantitative criteria:

Community officer is a place where people go for a quiet time… I don’t see them in the custody suite very often and that is a measure of success that I use [DS Spike].

For this officer, like many others, ‘real’ policing is very task oriented. It’s about: ‘detecting a crime, finding, arresting and charging the criminal – and putting in a few hours overtime!’

Discussion

A strong criticism of and within the change literature has been in considering how we might more adequately appreciate the movement aspect of change, rather than the freeze-frame portrayals that make up change models and other heuristic devices. Those considering processual change can be broadly split along ontological–epistemological lines. While on the one hand a considerable amount of work has been done by change theorists concerned with contextualising change and considering the processes of change, coming from a pluralist, realist approach (Pettigrew and Whipp 1991; Dawson 1994), more recently attention has been directed towards on-going processes of change that continually construct and re-construct organization. As Beech and Johnson (2005: 31) argue
change situations are not populated by fixed identities operating according to fixed routines but are on-going processes in which actors’ beliefs collide, new experiences are encountered and have to be accounted for in the sense-making of actors. The focus of the research programme on which this paper is based is on understanding the processual dynamics of a change situation and of introducing a new discursive template within a context that in itself is in a continual process of ‘becoming’.

We are therefore interested in these two very different conceptualisations of change and how different ‘processes’ of change combine and collide in the context of specific change initiatives or change events in organisations. The introduction of a new discursive template, intentionally directed towards changing meanings and identities, is embedded within a discursive space that is open to continual contestation and reconstruction. The issue is the extent to which a new discursive template becomes institutionalised, ‘constructing and sharing new meanings and interpretations of organisational activities’ (Tsoukas 2005: 98). This paper explores the introduction of Community Policing into one police constabulary and taking a pilot study sample of organisational actors, explores the contested terrain of meanings and identities that surround notions of ‘real’ policing.

The achievement of a police ‘service’ closely aligned with its community requires police officers to be engaged in close, collaborative, as well as regular, contact with different stakeholders in the community. However, in research on innovative forms of policing, there is an under-appreciation of the importance of individual sense-making of such change and of how change affects and is affected by individuals’ self-identities. The texts presented in this paper draw attention to different meanings given to community policing and the different positions constructed within it. Research by Thomas and Davies (2005) has highlighted the importance of understanding the many complex and creative ways that individuals respond to discourses of change within organisations and of the importance of micro-political negotiations of meanings and subjectivities. Policing occupational identities and discourses of ‘real’ and community policing combine in a dynamic and complex relationship and appreciating the meanings presented in this interaction is of crucial importance to understanding change within policing organisations and the lived experiences of police officers. It can also provide crucial insights into the nature of the police as a service and the relationship with the communities that the police serve.

The pilot study illustrates how meanings surrounding community policing are contested and re-invented by different police officers. Senior officers as well as officers employed in community police work and other specialised areas are re-crafting the directive discourse on community policing to be more closely aligned with personal interests, sectional interests, and their different understandings of occupation identities (Weedon 1987). Some officers employed in community work took on a ‘welfare’ and ‘feminized’ understanding, constructing a caring,
empathetic community *serving* identity. PC Jayne typified this identity regarding her closeness to her community and her obligation to them as a source of strength as well as a key resource in her own identity construction. However, she was aware that this role and identity was undervalued, even dismissed, by other officers who did not regard it as ‘real policing’, as women’s work perhaps and not for ‘real men’. Gendered understandings of skill have devalued the work traditionally performed by women, viewing women’s work as natural and therefore by implication not as highly skilled or attractive (James 1989; Steinberg 1990).

Dixon of Dock Green is used as a discursive resource to resist the legitimacy of community work for the task of ‘real policing’. Community policing continues to be undermined in texts of officers, mainly employed outside of the community specialism, with cynical references to ‘pink and fluffy’ policing and time spent having ‘tea with old ladies’. The community subject positions constructed by these officers drew on an archaic stereotype of the slow-witted ‘PC Plod’ character or the ‘tea and sympathy’ welfare worker; unexciting and definitely not for them. Community policing was not viewed as an integral part of policing identity and most saw it as representing a separate and mainly superficial PR function detached from the real work of policing and not radically influencing it or them.

For some, community policing was viewed as being plagued by a media-fed stereotype of the ‘local bobby’ image which probably never existed but which the media constantly champions as the solution to British policing. The Dixon of Dock Green character is used therefore as a discursive ‘other’ to distance community police work from a preferred more macho masculine ‘real policing’ subjectivity. Thus we see community policing being legitimated within the organisation through an assertion of a results-focused and macho subjectivity: *Dixon of Dock Green with Attitude*, to quote Martin, the Divisional Commander. This ‘thief-taker’ subjectivity emphasises an aggressive macho identity, measured by ‘kicking down doors’, having high arrest rates and having a regular presence in the custody suite. Taking up this subject position means ‘proving yourself’ as a ‘real’ police officer and distancing yourself from the ‘pink and fluffy’ more feminised image of community work that is a source of ridicule by some in the Constabulary. By drawing on macho masculine meanings in constructing their occupational identities, community officers were seen to legitimise their position not only as ‘real police officers’ in their constabulary but also as ‘real men’ and therefore fitting in with the hegemonic masculinity upon which policing culture is constructed (Silvestri 2003).

We see, therefore, community policing being crafted around established and accepted discourses of professionalism and gender (Tietze 2005). For example, the construction of community policing as the backbone of interorganisational collaboration provides legitimation through emphasising the importance of a highly skilled, professional, problem solving position. Here community policing...
represents a movement away from the traditional authoritarian style of policing to a more open, democratic and intelligence-led approach. The emphasis here is on long-term partnership with the community and other public sector organisations and by drawing on these meanings, community officers present a highly positive self-identity that is focused on the ‘big’ issues of societal change and social regeneration, and again far removed from the caring and trusting image of the ‘Dixon of Dock Green’ image of community policing.

This research is concerned with better understanding how the introduction of directive discourses from external to the organisational setting (in this instance, from the government and indirectly shaped by the media, sections of society and law and order and welfare-related agencies) influences and contributes to the ongoing shaping of organisational, occupational and individual self-understandings. In other words, how a planned change initiative meets with a complex, multilayered and continually evolving context at a particular time and how, with whom, in what ways and why new discursive templates resonate, are appropriated, or adapted, or re-written or resisted. It is important therefore to appreciate what Hardy (2004) refers to as the “scaling up” of analysis, to understand how particular localised texts and discourses become more dominant and institutionalised symbolic systems. This requires the development of theoretical and empirical understandings that can illustrate the dynamic relationship between microprocessual negotiations of self and meanings within change initiatives and the wider social, institutionalised relations and organisational practices that they (might) engender. This requires a focus on situated human agency within organisations and through which organisation emerges.

A frequent espoused objective amongst critical management writers on change – notably those from the poststructuralist persuasion – is the need to appreciate the lived experiences, i.e. the negotiated terrain of meanings, within and of organisation. Such exhortations are peppered with demands to better understand change as: process; contextualised; ambiguous; complex; non-linear, non-rational and non-logical; multifaceted and multilayered. However, there are concomitant pressures to produce neat and tidy, univocal accounts of change (research ‘results’) for feedback to managers, fundholders, practitioners and for publication (Buchanan 2003). Demands for answers, solutions and actionable theories are particularly strong in studies around change (answers, solutions and actions, it goes without saying, oriented towards maintaining and reinforcing existing power relations in organisations and psychologizing or silencing those who run counter to such “official narratives”). In this way, the researcher reinforces and further legitimises dominant ideology in organisational analysis. We believe that there is much to commend moves towards re-crafting policing organisational and occupational identities in ways that will enable better representation of and better responsiveness to the communities served. In this sense, this research is concerned with ‘real’ change outcomes without engaging in a realist research ontology. It certainly would not subscribe to the narrow
conservative functionalist orientations so dominant in the change literature, that are focused on maintaining existing power relations within organisations. A number of writers have focused on presenting more polyvocal and polysemic understandings of the lived experience of change (Badham and Garrety 2003; Currie and Brown 2003; Buchanan 2003; Thomas and Davies 2005). Such research offers much richer accounts of change within specific settings and a more complex appreciation of individual agency. The research offers its contribution therefore not in presenting neat theories, models and prescriptions and checklists on change but in offering more ‘realistic’ understandings of the dynamic and ever-mutating character of everyday organisational existence (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: 577) which may be used as discursive resources for managers and academics for greater innovation and reflexive learning (Gabriel 2000; Cunliffe 2003).

In conclusion, this paper has argued that an appreciation of the role of policing identities, how identities affect individual experience and how police officers deal with identity uncertainties, conflicts and ambiguities, is of fundamental importance in the adoption and implementation of new change initiatives, such as community policing. Despite attempts over the last two decades to reconstruct policing priorities, roles and culture, the cult of masculinity and heroic self-perceptions still underpin what it means to be an effective police officer. Community policing continues to be dismissed as ‘pink and fluffy’, ‘tea with old ladies’, ‘non sexy’, ‘not exciting’, and ‘a cushy number where people go for a quiet time’. For many, it remains the antithesis to police officers’ self-understandings of what they do and who they are. The problem for those championing various approaches to community policing lies within these alternative policing identities and agendas. As Martin, the divisional commander interviewed in the study observes:

There is no doubt that community policing is what the government and public want – the challenge is to maintain the internal culture so that it’s what the police officers themselves want.

Afterword

Prior to becoming the longest running TV police character and the media-fed icon of community policing, Dixon of Dock Green was first encountered in the 1948 film “the Blue Lamp”, where he was fatally shot. Many police officers would argue that he should have remained dead and buried.
Whereas traditionally an individual’s identity was conceived of as an essence - internal, unitary and ‘given’ - we view identities as being crafted as a reflexively organized narrative, in a continuous process, through discourse(s). Individuals are ‘made up’ through discourses and their disciplinary practices. Individuals are, through the act of critical reflection, complicit in this construction process in the act of seeking a degree of existential sense, security and continuity (Giddens 1991). An individual’s identity can therefore be viewed as a mobile site of contradiction and disunity, made up of ‘nodes’ where various salient discourses temporarily intersect in particular ways (Kondo 1990; Mouffe 1992).

By discussing micro and macro change here, we do not wish to imply neat categorisation nor give the impression of rationality to socially constructed concepts. However, for our purposes, it is useful, as when talking about ‘organisation’ to assign cognitive structures to enable analysis.
References


