

# Community Policing—Success or Failure? Exploring Different Models of Evaluation

---

Rick Sarre  
Head, Law School  
South Australian College of Advanced Education

---

## Reforms as Social Experimentation

**I**n Donald Campbell's now famous article 'Reforms as Experiments', he wrote that modern nations ought to 'be ready for an experimental approach to social reform, an approach in which we try out new programs designed to cure specific social problems, in which we learn whether or not these programs are effective, and in which we retain, imitate, modify, or discard them on the basis of apparent effectiveness' (Campbell 1969, p. 409).

The experience of the last twenty years has demonstrated, however, that meaningful experiments in the 'social' laboratory proved harder to implement and to evaluate than many had expected. A key set-back in the development of social policy experimentation was Martinson asking, 'What works?' in his review of correctional programs in the United States (Martinson 1974). Although his work was widely misunderstood—indeed often misquoted as 'nothing works'—his inherent assumption was that, in so far as social scientists were in the business of providing policy-makers with options and solutions, no one program could be shown to have made any marked improvement upon the status quo. There followed a flood of misgivings and consequent polarisation. As a result, funds for criminal justice and other social welfare programs were curtailed in many jurisdictions, further alienating the policy-maker from social scientist. The dialogue between them became scant as their roles became confused and their widely divergent ideological positions became evident.

In the two decades since Campbell's work, these wounds have largely healed and policy-makers are now some distance further along the road of discovering what experimental programs can and cannot accomplish. Some theorists have called for a new regime of social experiments (Berk et al. 1985, p. 389) although commentators have been cautious and have noted that policy experiments are only one type of evaluation study (Chelimsky 1985, p. 435). Whatever the nomenclature, it is clear that some form of evaluation is required in the criminal justice policy-making process. What is becoming more apparent with the process, however, is how difficult it is to engage in meaningful evaluation that actually reveals something worthwhile.

## Evaluation Studies: Community Policing

It is essential that the experimenting society knows whether or not what has been planned has occurred in fact. Evaluation studies are the means by which this is accomplished. Evaluation is the assessment of the effectiveness of programs that were designed as tentative solutions to existing problems.

This paper is concerned with the extent to which (if any) the phenomenon known as 'community policing' has undergone systematic evaluation. An examination of the literature in Australia indicates that there have been no serious evaluative studies conducted here. The only systematic studies that appear to have been conducted have concerned Neighbourhood Watch (Mukherjee & Wilson 1987).

Why have no serious evaluative studies been conducted? There exists a large volume of literature on evaluation methodology. There are consistent calls for evaluations to be carried out and for governments to be accountable financially. There are substantial amounts of public moneys being spent on policing programs launched on the basis of anecdotal evidence and faith alone. Given that commentators note the distinct theoretical difficulty with the notion of community policing in the Australian policing climate (Chappell 1984, p. 118; Stenning 1984, p. 87), evaluations to ensure that these moneys were not misspent ought to be on the top of the criminal justice agenda. Indeed, who would have thought that any social policy experiment, especially one so widely hailed as the strategy for the future, would continue without the fiat of evaluators? Bayley puts the issue succinctly:

[Community policing] ... represents a new way of more effectively achieving traditional goals. Unless this point is accepted, and the demonstration carried out, community policing should not be touted as the wave of the future (Bayley 1989, p. 81).

## Why does Evaluation not Occur?

There may be a number of reasons why so little energy appears to be devoted, however, to evaluative studies.

There are firstly difficulties in knowing exactly what community policing is, but assuming that it is possible to delimit the subject area there are other obstacles. It is commonplace to relegate such evaluations into the 'too hard' basket, simply because of problems with definitions, and the lack of objectives. Problems with methodology regularly surface. Evaluators consistently find that it is well-nigh impossible to control scientifically for all variables. Evaluators often find that the terminology has changed (Skolnick & Bayley 1986, p. 116) or that there is no data available from before the change in strategy for the purpose of post-strategy comparison. There are, further, difficulties with the expectations arising from the evaluative studies, and the extrapolation that may follow. Most 'one-off' evaluations are necessarily going to be so specific to the time, the culture and the environment in which they were carried out that their external validity will be questionable.

Furthermore, evaluators are often met with problems of limited funding and limited resources, and there are resultant pressures from their political masters to get results within certain time frames. Other issues concerned with time also become immediately obvious. Neither the public interest nor the interests of government are eternal truths. These interests change from week to week. An evaluation commissioned one year might be presented to a government with a different agenda a year later. In that environment, it is possible that research becomes subservient to short-term administrative and political concerns (Clarke & Cornish 1983, p. 5). Perhaps the results of the evaluation will be juxtaposed with a media, political or industrial issue. These trends may preclude a hearing for potentially significant research. For example, when the public was clamouring for harsher treatment of offenders

and determinate sentencing was gaining popularity, the few studies that predicted the incredible rise in prison populations were given short shrift' (Petersilia 1987, p. 107).

One of the most common points of contention is whether, in the evaluative process, the evaluators have been too subjective. There is no doubt that evaluation can never be value-free, and, since evaluators may so easily become advocates of their own cause, their results may be merely justifications for the status quo rather than useful and objective appraisals (Petersilia 1987, p. 102; Sarre, forthcoming). Finally, there is the ever-present fear of failure and fear that the weaknesses of the theory and/or the implementors may be exposed. Thus it is probably not surprising that evaluations are not easily conducted nor are their results readily forthcoming.

### **An Emerging Role for Evaluation Studies: Seeing the Task in Different Terms**

There may be an emerging role for evaluation studies, explored to only a minor extent in Australia, which may, to a large extent, overcome a number of the difficulties raised in the preceding discussion. Rather than merely being a study to determine whether certain specific criteria were met, the evaluation process could be seen also as an area of activity devoted to collecting, analysing, and interpreting information on the way in which, and by whom, the ideas of community policing are implemented and controlled. Through this process it would be possible to expand the range of standards by which a judgment of success or failure can be made. As Goldstein foreshadowed, 'a fully developed concept of what we now allude to by 'community policing' could be constructed' (1987, p. 8). In other words, evaluators can play a greater role than has formerly been witnessed if they see their role as assisting in the process of the development of the implementation of the reform itself, and assisting the process towards a better understanding of the milieu in which the reform is introduced.

In the past we have considered that a single study which looks for a certain outcome—namely, whether certain goals had been reached—has been the ideal form of evaluation. This is known as 'accountability evaluation' (Browne & Wildavsky 1984, p. 255). This form of analysis is based upon an erroneous assumption, namely that the policy-makers, before they act, identify goals and specify different ways of achieving them, assess the alternatives and then select the best option. The assumption is erroneous because in fact what happens is usually the direct opposite—policy-makers tend to act first and think about the analysis of what they have done some time later. This, evaluations based upon this 'rational' model of policy design would seem to be inappropriate.

Furthermore, such evaluations would too easily seek support for action already taken, and seek evidence that serves the interests of the policy-making community (Palumbo & Nachmias 1983, p. 67). While it is never possible for any evaluation process to be completely value-free, 'accountability evaluation' too easily falls into the trap of being too narrow, self-serving and overly subjective. Furthermore, 'accountability evaluation' pays scant heed to the implementors themselves—in our case, the police administrators and officers charged with the responsibility of plotting the ideas into practice. Where in the standard evaluations, for example, of Neighbourhood Watch, do we find amongst the details of the dipping burglary rates, some analysis of the enthusiasm or otherwise of the officers to whom the task has been assigned, their fears, their workloads, their sense of control, or their relationship with their community?

According to Browne and Wildavsky, evaluation that is insensitive to the problems of transforming policy-makers' ideas into implementors' action' . . . leaves the best bits behind

unexamined' (1984, p. 255). The argument for a 'new look' evaluative process is based upon the view that evaluation is an exploration from which we can learn about implementation. This evaluation style is termed 'learning evaluation'. The evaluation should not be made in light of prospectively stated objectives alone (assuming there were any) but in light of the discoveries that emerged during the implementation process. In the context of the evaluation of community policing, evaluators will be searching for information about the police and the police processes in bringing about changes to their duties and responsibilities.

It is possible that an evaluation study may enable policy-makers to discover weaknesses in implementation. There may be an inherent flaw in the theory of the concept. But there may also be institutional constraints which were unanticipated, or there may be resistance by any of the players in the implementation process for any one of a number of reasons. To meet these wider concerns, our understanding of what we mean by evaluation will have to change. Evaluation must come to mean a vehicle by which we generate hypotheses in a larger evolutionary process. Such evaluation thus prizes ubiquity and diversity. It does not merely compare outcomes with expectations. Rather, the criteria are fluid, dynamic and open-ended. If there have been baseline objectives set, they may have to be redefined along the way. 'Learning evaluation strives to unearth faulty assumptions, reshape misshapen policy designs, and continuously redefine goals in light of new information derived during implementation' (Browne & Wildavsky 1984, pp. 255-6).

Evaluation in these terms will cause evaluators to draw a distinction between seeing the world in what have been referred to as 'programmed' or 'adaptive' terms. Under the 'programmed' approach (Hope 1985, p. 39), policy objectives are constructed on a cost/benefit analysis. Any implementation program is devised to activate the objectives in the most efficient manner. According to this approach, if something frustrates the implementation phase, it is a problem of control. If, for example, there is an initiative to put more police officers on the streets for longer periods in a push towards more pedestrian 'beats', and something goes awry (for example, the officers become involved in corruption bred from familiarity), then the problem is with the lack of control by police administrators over the street officers. An evaluator viewing the world in 'programmed' terms might come to the conclusion that implementation of the policy will be improved by increasing control, and improving the communication of policy objectives.

Contrast the 'adaptive' view. Instead of viewing implementors as inefficient, uncoordinated or even subversive, evaluators adopting an 'adaptive approach' see all participants in the implementation process as acting quite rationally, but acting also with a view to achieving personal and organisational goals, notwithstanding that these may often be quite different from the aims and objectives of the policy to be implemented. This approach, too, contains a prescription for improvement. According to this view, if the policy is seen not as a set of objectives to be achieved but as a process where broad intentions gradually evolve into practice, the possibility of ultimate failure will be reduced. In other words, policy implementation is the process of exploring and testing hypotheses.

Any political body that argues otherwise mistakenly regards itself as omniscient and omnipotent . . . [T]here is no amount of statutory specificity and top-down control that will prevent an implementation process from becoming a test of its own efficacy . . . What an organisation devoted to learning can do about implementation failure is to utilise it as a route to implementation success—successful exploration. Rather than seeking to make tractable eternally intractable social problems, or designing detailed problem-solving policies, a learning organisation must avoid an unquestioning, uninquiring myopic stance. It must analyse its policies, not against prospectively stated objectives alone, but in light of discoveries made during implementation . . . The learning society views the implementer as a source of new information. On this basis, a case can be made for the reconceptualising of implementation as an exploratory rather than an unquestioning, instrumental, and even subservient type of behaviour (sic)(Browne & Wildavsky 1984, pp. 254-6).

## Examples of 'Adaptive' Evaluations

It could be useful and instructive to put the above discussion into the context of evaluations from different jurisdictions. These following examples indicate that a great deal can be learned about the nature of police and their role, the power structures in society, and the role of implementors and evaluators by viewing the world in 'adaptive' terms.

The British Home Office conducted evaluation studies of their practical crime prevention measures (Gladstone 1980; Home Office 1983; Hope 1985, p. 39). The results revealed a great deal about the implementation of these measures. The most recent of these studies found that the focus of attention for the failure of programs usually fell upon the agencies who were expected to put the policy into effect. Within these agencies, had anyone bothered to look, there was evidence that designers of implementation strategies ensured that their plans had provided for a scapegoat in the event of inevitable failure. Hope cited other studies which reached similar conclusions (Wallis & Ford 1980; Greene 1981). He formed the conclusion that the organisational context in which new initiatives are to be implemented was therefore a crucial determinant of the outcome. Organisational resistance against change is very powerful, particularly where there are interagency struggles over territorial 'domain'. In other words there is always an organisational bias in favour of the status quo (Hope 1985, p. 40).

Weisburd et al. (1988, p. 31) focused their analysis of policing styles on the apparent contradiction between the bureaucratic, para-military model of police organisation and the professed aims of the community policing model which encourages initiative and flexibility. They identified this as a potential barrier to the success of community policing initiatives in Canada also (Murphy & Muir 1985). Weisburd et al. conducted a pilot project evaluation of the Community Patrol Officer Program in New York City in 1984. They found that the new roles assigned to the CPOs in New York were indeed a fundamental challenge to the military model. As a result of their findings, they suggested sifting the supervisory strategy away from a preponderant concern with controlling misbehaviour and focussing rather on the adequacy of the officer's community involvements (1988, p. 45).

Carriere and Ericson made a study of the Canadian community policing initiative known as 'Crime Stoppers', moving away from the standard 'accountability'-style evaluations undertaken by Rosenbaum and Lurigio (1985) and Rosenbaum and Lavrakas (1985). Their case study was focused upon the political context that flows from the organisations and institutions associated with Crime Stoppers, particularly the media, and 'how the ingredients of their collective recipe gives them the upper hand in hegemonic processes, helping them to sustain their preferred visions of social order' (1989, p. 8). Carriere and Ericson's theme had been explored previously by Ericson in his Ontario case studies of the way in which police inflect a dominant positional advantage over the community and yet make it appear that they merely reflect the sentiments, priorities and interests of the community at large (Ericson 1981, 1982). In other words, such an evaluative exercise may assist in the identification of overriding police industrial concerns and the extent to which their policing methods are influenced by the media and other social forces.

## Future Directions

What can we learn from the adaptive style of evaluative study? The thrust of the argument is that it is somewhat trite to suggest that the success or failure of the notion of 'community policing' somehow rises or falls on whether or not a Neighbourhood Watch scheme reduces burglaries, or that a community liaison scheme doubles the assault clear-up rate or reduces fear. What we can achieve from the process of 'adaptive' approach to the study of implementation in practice by the 'learning' evaluation is a greater insight into the workings of

the implementors whose task it is to put the ideas into practice and a better understanding of the nature and practice of policing in an Australian setting.

## Conclusion

If anything has been learnt in the past two decades of so called 'implementation research' it is the wisdom of seeing the world in 'adaptive' rather than 'programmed' terms. Such an evaluative analysis of the notion of community policing could prove invaluable in assisting to determine how and where we need to make the cultural and social adjustments required to bring about better societies. At the moment, it seems, we are only dabbling with evaluative studies which measure merely pedestrian matters such as apprehension rates. A new structure of policing and social control theory may be required. Existing studies are thus bound to prove not only inadequate but disappointing. To halt the momentum of an accepted idea and to re-examine assumptions is a disturbing process. The learning that will result in undertaking this task, however, could be immensely rewarding.

## References

- Bayley, D. H. 1989, in *Australian Policing: Contemporary Issues*, eds D. Chappell & P. Wilson, North Ryde: Butterworths, Chapter 4 as reprinted from 'Community Policing in Australia: an appraisal' *National Police Research Unit Review* 22, pp. 5-18, 1986.
- Berk, R. A., Boruch, R., Chambers, D., Rossi, P. & Witte, A. 1985, 'Social Policy Experimentation: A Position Paper', *Evaluation Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, August, pp. 385-429.
- Browne, A. & Wildavsky, A. 1984, 'What should Evaluation Mean to Implementation?', 'Implementation as Adaption' and 'Implementation as Exploration', Chapters 9, 10 and 11 in *Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland: or why it's amazing that federal programs work at all, this being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by two sympathetic observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes*, eds J. L. Pressman & A. Wildavsky, 3rd edition, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Campbell, D. T. 1969, 'Reforms as Experiments', *American Psychologist* 24, p. 409, reprinted in C. H. Weiss ed 1972, *Evaluating Action Programs in Social Action and Education*, Allyn and Bacon Inc., Boston.
- Carriere, K. & Ericson, R. 1989, *Crime Stoppers: A Study in the Organisation of Community Policing*, Research Report of the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto.
- Chappell, D. 1984, 'Implications for Community Policing in Australia' in *Community Policing*, ed. J. Morgan, Seminar Proceedings No. 4, 2-3 August, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- Chelimsky, E. 1985 'Comments on 'Social Policy Experimentation: A Position Paper'', *Evaluation Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, August, pp. 431-6.
- Clarke, R. V. & Cornish, D. (eds) 1983, *Crime Control in Britain: A Review of Policy Research*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY.
- Ericson, R. 1981, *Making Crime: A Study of Detective Work*, Butterworths, Toronto.
- 1982, *Reproducing Order: A Study of Police Patrol Work*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Gladstone, F. J. 1980, 'Co-ordinating Crime Prevention Efforts', *Home Office Research Study No. 62*, Crime Policy Planning Unit Report, HMSO, London.
- Goldstein, H. 1987, 'Toward Community-Oriented Policing: Potential, Basic Requirements, and Threshold Questions.' *Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 6-30.

- Greene, J. 1981, 'Organisational Change in Law Enforcement', *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 9, pp. 79-91.
- Home Office 1983, *Crime Prevention: A Coordinated Approach*, Home Office Research and Planning Unit Report, HMSO, London.
- Hope, T. 1985, *Implementing Crime Prevention Measures*, A Home Office Research and Planning Unit Report Home Office, HMSO, London.
- Martinson, R. 1974, 'What Works?—Questions And Answers About Prison Reforms', *The Public Interest* vol. 35, pp. 22-54.
- Mukherjee, S. & Wilson, P. 1987, 'Neighbourhood Watch: Issues and policy implications' in *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 8, November, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- Murphy, C. & Muir, G. 1985, *Community-based Policing: A Review of the Critical Issues*, Communications Group of the Solicitor-General, Ottawa.
- Palumbo, D. & Nachmias, D. 1983, 'The Pre-Conditions for Successful Evaluation: Is There an Ideal Type?' *Policy Sciences*, vol. 16, pp. 67-79.
- Petersilia, J. 1987, *The Influence of Criminal Justice Research*, Monograph prepared for the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica.
- Rosenbaum, D. P. & Lurigio, A. J. 1985, 'Crime Stoppers: Paying the Price', *Psychology Today*, vol. 196, pp. 56-61.
- Rosenbaum, D. P. & Lavrakas, P. J. 1985, *The National Evaluation of Crime Stoppers: A Synopsis of Major Findings*, Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston.
- Skolnick, J.R. & Bayley, D.H. 1986, *The New Blue Line: Police Innovation in Six American Cities*, Free Press, New York.
- Sarre, R. 1991, 'Political Pragmatism versus Informed Policy—Issues in the design, implementation and evaluation of anti-violence research and programs' in *Australian Violence: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds D. Chappell, P. Grabosky & H. Strang, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra..
- Stenning, P. C. 1984, 'Community Policing, Who's in Control?' in *Community Policing*, ed. J. Morgan, Seminar Proceedings No. 4, 2-3 August, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 81. Reprinted in part only in *The Queensland Police Union Journal*, April, May, June 1986.
- Wallis, A. & Ford, D. (eds) 1980, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: the School Demonstration in Broward County, Florida*, US Department of Justice, Washington DC.
- Weisburd, D., McElroy, J. & Hardyman, P. 1988, 'Challenges To Supervision In Community Policing: Observations On A Pilot Project' *American Journal Of Police*, vol. VII, no. 2.