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# Intelligence-led Policing

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*This paper is timely, given that policing is currently going through a period of significant change in both operational tactics and organisational structures. New ideas in crime reduction and changes to short- and long-term policing strategies are underway. Intelligence-led policing represents a recent approach and is one of the more prevalent of the current "shifts in crime control philosophy and policing practice" (Maguire 2000).*

*Surprisingly, given the wide distribution of the term "intelligence-led policing", considerable confusion remains in regard to its actual meaning to both front-line officers and police management. This paper provides an introduction to intelligence-led policing and discusses some of the related limitations and opportunities.*

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Since the 1990s, "intelligence-led policing" (also known as "intelligence-driven policing") has entered the lexicon of modern policing, especially in the UK and more recently Australia. Yet even with the ability of new ideas and innovation to spread throughout the policing world at the click of a mouse, there is still a lack of clarity among many in law enforcement as to what intelligence-led policing is, what it aims to achieve, and how it is supposed to operate. This can be seen in recent inspection reports of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in the UK (HMIC 2001, 2002), and in the lack of clarity regarding intelligence-led policing in the United States. A recent summit in March 2002 of over 120 criminal intelligence experts from across the US, funded by the US government and organised by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, may become a turning point in policing within the US. The participants called for a National Intelligence Plan, with one of the core recommendations being to "promote intelligence-led policing through a common understanding of criminal intelligence and its usefulness" (IACP 2002, p. v). The aspirations of the summit are considerable, but what is unclear from the summit report is a sound understanding of the aims of intelligence-led policing and its relationship to crime reduction.

As intelligence-led policing is now a term in common usage within Australian law enforcement (a search of web pages and media releases found the term "intelligence-led" in all Australian police sites and the web site of the new Australian Crime Commission), it is timely to consider the origins of intelligence-led policing, the crime reduction levers it aims to pull, and the limitations and possibilities for this type of operational practice.

## Origins of Intelligence-led Policing

Intelligence-led policing entered the police lexicon at some time around the early 1990s. As Gill (1998) has noted, the origins of intelligence-led policing are a little indistinct, but the earliest references to it originate in the UK where a seemingly inexorable

rise in crime during the late 1980s and early 1990s coincided with increasing calls for police to be more effective and to be more cost-efficient. The driving forces for this move to a new strategy were both external and internal to policing.

External drivers included an inability of the traditional, reactive model of policing to cope with the rapid changes in globalisation which have increased opportunities for transnational organised crime and removed physical and technological barriers across the policing domain. In the new "risk society" (Ericson & Haggerty 1997) the police were seen as the source of risk management data for a range of external institutions. With such an influence beyond the boundaries of law enforcement, it was never going to be long before the "new public management" drive to increase efficiency in public agencies reached the police.

At the same time there was an internal recognition that changes were taking place in the dynamic relationship between the private security industry and the public police. The police were losing the battle on the streets, and public confidence with it. The rapid growth of private sector security saw police marginalised in some areas of public safety.

The search for a new strategy was helped by the 1993 Audit Commission report into police effectiveness (Audit Commission 1993). This "landmark report" (Heaton 2000, p. 337) was the first foray of the Audit Commission (an independent body with responsibility for the economic and effective use of public money) into the machinations of operational policing. There were three central tenets to "helping

with enquiries—tackling crime effectively":

- existing roles and the level of accountability lacked integration and efficiency;
- the police were failing to make the best use of resources; and
- greater emphasis on tackling criminals would be more effective than focusing on crimes.

This report was followed up fairly quickly by further official publications that provided a road map to intelligence-led policing, including an HMIC publication *Policing With Intelligence* (1997) and a Home Office report on the integration of different intelligence sources, complete with case studies (Maguire & John 1995).

Intelligence-led policing was beginning to appear in Australia in the late 1990s, driven by a number of police commissioners. The local adoption included new accountability structures at a local level, a greater integration of intelligence and investigation, and improved targeting of daily police efforts through intelligence dissemination. Performance outcome reviews including more dynamic features were incorporated in a number of Australian jurisdictions in various formats, such as the Operations and Crime Reviews (OCRs) conducted in New South Wales and modelled on the successful CompStat process of the New York City Police Department. OCRs were found to be instrumental as a mechanism in driving police-centred crime reduction (Chilvers & Weatherburn 2001).

While there are always problems implementing change in police services, there is general support for the explicit crime reduction focus of intelligence-led policing: crime reduction and especially crime

prevention have been the mainstay and core business of policing since the formation of the Metropolitan Police in the UK in 1829. So what is intelligence-led policing?

## Definition of Intelligence-led Policing

Although there is a growing literature on intelligence-led policing (see the reference list of this paper as a starting point) it has been generally assumed that the term speaks for itself, and definitions are rare.

The aim of intelligence-led policing can be interpreted from the tactical tasking priorities of the UK National Intelligence Model, as disseminated by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS). The four elements concentrate on:

- targeting offenders (especially the targeting of active criminals through overt and covert means);
- the management of crime and disorder hotspots;
- the investigation of linked series of crimes and incidents; and
- the application of preventative measures, including working with local partnerships to reduce crime and disorder (NCIS 2000).

This focus within the UK National Intelligence Model emphsises that crime is not randomly distributed, with the corollary that identification of hotspots of criminal activity is a worthwhile pursuit. It recognises the importance of working with partnerships to achieve crime prevention, and finally that there should be a spotlight on targeting the criminal and not a focus on the crime. This latter principle is, to a large extent, based on research that shows a small percentage of active and repeat offenders (recidivists) commit a

disproportionately large amount of crime (Audit Commission 1993).

While the National Intelligence Model provides one definition of intelligence-led policing, this paper will explore the process of crime reduction through intelligence-led policing. Good intelligence analysis is vital, but research is also essential to identify crime reduction strategies that actually work and have solid evidential support. For the purposes of this paper, the following definition is employed:

> Intelligence-led policing is the application of criminal intelligence analysis as an objective decision-making tool in order to facilitate crime reduction and prevention through effective policing strategies and external partnership projects drawn from an evidential base.

## How Should it Work?

As Pawson and Tilley (1997) have pointed out, it is important to be clear on the "mechanism" for any crime reduction or prevention initiative, as this helps to understand why it works. Figure 1 shows a model for crime reduction through an intelligence-led process.

In this intelligence-led policing model, we shall assume that the criminal environment is a permanent feature of the operating environment for police services. Although it is dynamic and fluid, constantly changing in shape, composition and size, it remains a reality that there will always be a criminal environment that the police will need to understand for subsequent operations to be effective.

To be truly intelligence-led, the first stage of the model is to be able to *interpret* the criminal environment. This is usually performed by an intelligence

**Figure 1:** *An intelligence-led policing and crime reduction process*
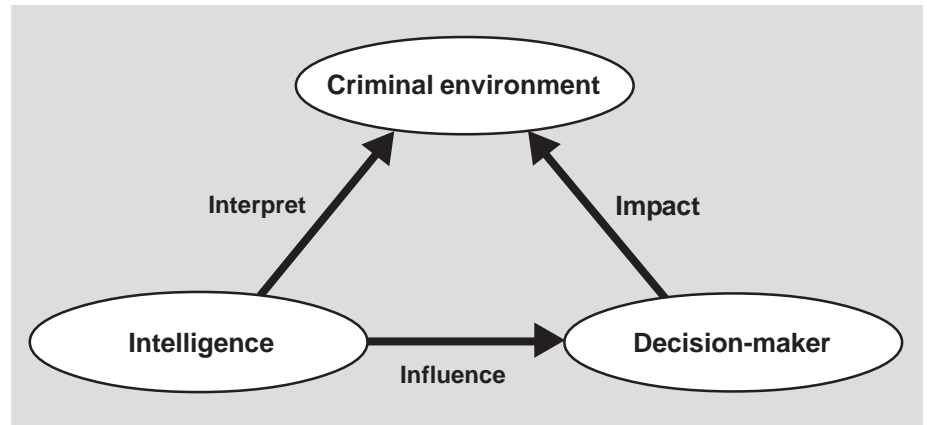


section or unit, and relies on a range of information sources both within and external to the police service. The information that this unit obtains should, in an intelligence-led environment, be passed as some form of intelligence to people who can actually impact in a positive manner on the criminal environment (stage 2 of the model).

This second stage requires the intelligence structure to be able to identify and *influence* the decision-makers. It should be noted that this requires both an ability to identify the decision-makers, as well as to influence their thinking regarding the types of reduction strategies that are implemented.

Finally, the model requires the decision-makers to have the enthusiasm and skills to explore ways to reduce crime and to have a positive *impact* on the criminal environment. The model therefore has three structures, and three processes, each of which are discussed in turn below.

### The Criminal Environment

For different levels of policing, the criminal environment to be studied may be different. For example, a local rural police station will have a different criminal environment to compete with compared to a

national strategic drugs unit. However the principle remains the same: although there are significant differences (but also some overlaps) in the type of criminal environment to be understood, each level is faced with a challenging criminal situation that is dynamic, has different memberships and structures, and it is hoped can be changed and influenced by police strategies.

### Intelligence

Intelligence can be defined as "a value-added product, derived from the collection and processing of all relevant information relating to client needs, which is immediately or potentially significant to client decision-making" (ACS 2000).

A broader view of intelligence could incorporate the view that intelligence is a structure, a process and a product. In most police services, the intelligence unit or section is a recognised internal organisation with people, skills, methods and an organisational structure.

Intelligence is also a process, incorporating a continuous cycle of tasking, data collection, collation, analysis, dissemination and feedback, prior to the next or a refined task. This continuous process is responsible for the generation of

an intelligence product, which is designed to shape the thinking of decision-makers.

Within the model shown at Figure 1, intelligence therefore requires a number of organisational structures to work effectively in both the interpretation of the criminal environment and the dissemination of a product that can shape the thinking of decision-makers.

### Interpreting the Criminal Environment

How capable are the systems, people, analytical tools and collective understanding to be able to interpret the criminal environment? An effective system requires investment in people, tools and systems, but also an understanding of the functions and limitations of an intelligence system.

This is especially the case with a policing style that emphasises the *criminal* and not the *crime* as the focal point for intelligence. Often unrealistic expectations can dampen enthusiasm for intelligence-led operations when, for example, an intelligence analyst is unable to precisely predict the next date, time and place of a burglary. In a recent review of Northamptonshire Police in the UK, HMIC found that the National Intelligence Model definition of intelligence-led policing was not widely known amongst intelligence staff (HMIC 2001, p. 9). When the people that are tasked with being the hub of intelligence-led policing are not familiar with what intelligence-led policing is, it draws into question the value that they can add to information they receive. Even when clear direction is given, this component of the model requires coordination of sources, data storage and retrieval, analytical tools and training to enable the maximum benefit to be derived.

At more strategic levels this also requires the ability of staff to have systems in place to share intelligence within and outside of the force, a notable problem in the United States (IACP 2002).

### The Decision-makers

All operational and leadership ranks have the capability to impact on the criminal environment. Commanders control resources, but the newest probationers often spend the most time on the streets in an operational capacity. Accurate targeting of police activities to the "hot spots" and "hot times" of crime has substantial support as a crime reduction technique (Sherman et al. 1998), but it requires the necessary intelligence (in this example, the hot places and hot times) to find its way to the decision-makers and for those decision-makers to properly understand and respond to the information.

### Influencing the Decision-makers

As the Australian Customs Service's definition shows, "intelligence" is a product that is "immediately or potentially significant to client decision-making" (ACS 2000). Dissemination is the method of informing the client, yet conveying the significance of even the most stimulating intelligence is a fine art. It is probably impossible to count the number of intelligence failures that have occurred due to an inability of the intelligence organisation to "sell" its product, or the failing of the decision-maker (the intelligence client) to recognise the value of the product.

Intelligence also has to compete with other pressures on the decision-maker. For example, a police commander may have an objective intelligence product that recommends targeting a particular group of criminals but

may be constrained by the covert nature of the group or by competing demands, such as a possible adverse community reaction, pressures from the media, or financial constraints. Even good intelligence has to compete to influence decision-makers.

The model in Figure 1 is described as a policing *and crime reduction* process, because it is not necessarily the case that a decision-maker works for the police. Increasingly, through local partnerships, it is being recognised that decision-makers for crime reduction also exist outside of the police service. A comprehensive intelligence system can recognise this and influence a broad range of internal and external decision-makers.

### Impacting on the Criminal Environment

The whole process has little value if at the last stage the decision-maker, be they commissioner or probationer, cannot influence the criminal environment and effect crime reduction.

There are limitations to the ability of police to significantly change crime rates, but this does not mean that the police cannot achieve any reductions, and that they cannot achieve maximum efficiency in the process. A number of policing-focused tactics have been positively evaluated as having recognised crime prevention benefits, including increased directed patrols in street-corner hot spots of crime and the proactive arrest of serious repeat offenders (Sherman et al. 1998).

There is a tendency, however, for what really works in policing to be overshadowed by schemes that have significant public appeal, but for which the crime reduction evidence is disputed. These schemes include Neighbourhood Watch, DARE

(Drug Abuse Resistance Education), and community policing that has no clear crime risk-factor focus—all of which have been evaluated overseas as not appearing to significantly reduce crime (Sherman et al. 1998).

## Integration of Intelligence-led Policing into the Policing Paradigm

Intelligence-led policing can be closely associated with problem-oriented policing (Goldstein 1990) in that they are both tactics that can support a broader policing paradigm such as community policing. Some intelligence units use a problem-solving methodology, such as SARA—scan, analyse, respond and assess (Eck & Spelman 1987)—as the framework for prioritisation. An evidential base is therefore significant to both problem-oriented policing in the analysis and response stage, and to intelligence-led policing in the selection of crime reduction plans. Problem-oriented policing and SARA provide a case management orientated focus for intelligence-led targeting, where the "case" may be an individual, organised crime group, or high crime location. This compartmentalisation of problems into manageable "chunks" is more in line with the case orientation of other professions, and potentially provides for greater managerial accountability.

The broader policing philosophy, such as community policing, will be important in providing the "context" (Laycock 2001) for the success or failure of the intelligence-led policing mechanism. This is an important point, because while the mechanism for intelligence-led policing may be sound, it can be introduced to situations where the context is not appropriate for that style of policing. For example, a community policing objective may be to reduce fear of crime. As such, a Neighbourhood Watch arrangement may succeed in the chosen objective, but might not be selected from an intelligence-led policing regime that strives for an actual reduction in crime.

## Threats and Opportunities

A review of a burglary reduction program in the ACT (Ratcliffe 2001, 2002a) found strong evidence for an intelligence-driven short-term policy; a more thorough evaluation of the long-term impact is planned. Generally, however, there is a paucity of explicit evaluations of intelligence-led policing (Heaton 2000). As time passes the new strategy should receive more attention from evaluators, if they can avoid the tendency to concentrate on the policing approach on the street, rather than the managerial systems that create, fuel and drive the approach.

Intelligence-led policing strives for greater efficiency in policing, but it has also been accompanied by other efficiency methods, some of which conflict with intelligence-led policing. There is a performance culture in many police services which strives to measure everything possible, and it is a concern that the benefits of intelligence-led policing will be lost in a quagmire of operational statistics and micro-management. As Albert Einstein said, "not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted". A case in point is response times. Many police services now record the response time of officers getting to priority and routine calls for service, and they build improvements of response time into performance agreements for management and front-line officers. Unfortunately the research evidence is fairly conclusive: improving response times to calls for service does not reduce crime (Sherman et al. 1998).

The expansion of a performance culture can drive police from the hard-to-quantify areas such as community policing and crime prevention to simply concentrate on whatever they are being measured against. Scott (1998) expressed these concerns when she recognised the impact of the performance culture on two police divisions in London, finding that the mechanisms of the new public management were focusing policing objectives on the measurable and the quantifiable, and as a result were driving a return to reactive policing.

Another potential problem is the use of a strategy that emphasises the deployment of tactics once reserved for serious "high impact, low volume" criminals against high volume, more mundane, offenders. This "principle of proportionality" is an area that will have to be managed to maintain public confidence in police tactics that are more focused and targeted, but also potentially more invasive (Ratcliffe 2002b). Concerns have been raised regarding both the financial benefits, and the implications for police legitimacy with a strategy that includes increasing the use of criminal informants (Dunnighan & Norris 1999; Ratcliffe 2002b). All of this said, there is a real opportunity to engage the public and gather their support for a policing practice that is objective,

focused and cost-effective. It is difficult to argue against efficiency and value-for-money, as these factors were the driving forces behind intelligence-led policing in the first place.

The drive towards intelligence-led policing has to be tempered by realistic expectations. A review of the literature indicates that the ability of the police to impact on the level of crime in society is limited, though there are indications that some gains in crime reduction can be made (Heaton 2000, p. 344). This may sound like back-peddling, but an examination of the broad swathe of potential causes of crime (for an excellent review see Weatherburn 2001) would suggest that there are a very restricted number of these causal factors that are within the power of the police to influence. However, more of the causal mechanisms for crime in society can be influenced by the police through collaboration with outside agencies. There is a growing recognition within policing that external agencies may hold the key to long-term crime reduction. These agencies, such as local councils, housing authorities, and health and education departments, have a greater potential to impact on a wider range of causal factors, and the police are well placed as the "gatekeepers" to much crime information (Ericson & Haggerty 1997). Increased sharing of intelligence beyond the limits of law enforcement may see a more substantial reduction in crime. If employed in this more effective manner, intelligence-led policing is really a misnomer: a better term would be "intelligence-led crime reduction".

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