Police commanders' education:
a continuous process

Sérgio Felgueiras
Lúcia G. Pais
Portugal

Abstract

A permanent environmental reconfiguration introduces new educational needs for police commanders to have new integral knowledge tools which allow them to be ready for new societal challenges. Centred on the student, as part of the preparation for a long-term career, police commanders' education is a knowledge-transfer process which means they comprehend the police environment and organisation, behaviour, law enforcement, strategic, tactical and technical options and, furthermore, leadership, management and command competencies. In the 21st century police commanders must be able to understand social phenomena and reinvent police processes to cope with those societal challenges. Observing the reality, acting with criticism and in a considered manner, in routine or crisis situations, and considering the uncertainty that characterise contemporary societies imply: the permanent tracking of theoretical, methodological and technological developments of the scientific disciplines that build the police sciences; working on the behavioural dimension; and juridical preparation with relevance for the performance of the senior police officers in a democratic rule of law. Despite the fact that a police commander could perform his job on several levels, an integral education process is the only option that prepares a future senior police officer for a real police career. The preparation of a study plan must take into consideration several issues, such as: bringing teaching and training together with reality; linking research with the problems presented by the police forces on the ground; contributing to the scientifically supported definition of security policies; and not disregarding the humanist and ethical dimensions.

Keywords: police higher education; police commander; teaching; learning.

Introduction

The highly mutable and volatile environment one faces today implies understanding and accompanying the changes and rapidly adapting and responding to them. Parallel to the societal demands, profound changes are occurring in the police organisation and the individuals. With its culture of command, control and 'worse-case' scenario instruction, and taken as a force instead of a service, the presupposed authority of the police is now subject to question and challenged (Cox, 2011; Cowper, 2000; Neyroud, 2009). Within democratic countries, the issue of police legitimacy is crucial, and the more the public trusts 'their' police the more they accept police actions. External evaluation confronts the organisational status quo, putting pressure on police governance. Public and media scrutiny, scandals and new security requirements also have the power to introduce some political reforms in the police organisation. Furthermore, internal strains have the capability to transform the police institution, for instance promotions, corruption, police brutality, accountability and so on. These are some examples of issues that 'propel police education' (Wimshurst and Ransley, 2007). This permanent reconfiguration introduc-

es new educational demands for police commanders to have new integral knowledge tools, allowing them to be ready for the new societal challenges and thus transforming policing (Bayley, 2016; Cox, 2011; Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011; White and Escobar, 2008).

Contemporary society also demands continual learning and searching for knowledge by security promoters and managers. It is important to maximise the relationship between the learning and training process and reality, considering not only the scientific dimension but also the human and ethical dimensions linked with the 'self' (to be), the 'should be' and the 'should make' (do).

Regarding management and leadership, police forces are a very demanding business for all senior officers in general and commanders in particular, considering the organisation complexity and the mutability of the societal environment, mainly with regard to law and order policies (Casey and Mitchell, 2007; Felgueiras, 2011; Findlay, 2004). Police officers usually embrace a very long and demanding career with ups and downs, which means each promotion is a real test for officers and a huge challenge for new police commanders. A new position represents a new job description demanding different competencies and capabilities. Casey and Mitchell (2007) consider that:

> 'each level of promotion provides new challenges for frontline officers moving into management roles as they begin to deal with more complex responsibilities, greater ambiguities, and the increased public exposure that goes with senior management and leadership in police organisations.' (p. 4)

All this considered:

> 'given the changing realm of policing and public security, [learning and] training should be understood as both a strategic mechanism by which to pursue organisational performance and a core business tool for the delivery of efficient and effective public security. Officers who retain knowledge or skills and bring them back to their jobs can use them to enhance their performance, provide better service to the community, and do it in a safe and efficient manner.' (Haberfeld, 2012, p. 1)

Education is the obvious solution to overcome this permanent need to adapt to environmental chang-

es; sometimes it is waved as a magic wand — 'educational-reform-as-antidote' (Wimshurst and Ransley, 2007) — to deal with what may be a crisis in the police organisation. However, in realistic terms, what kind of education should police commanders have? Knowing that police commanders' educational context is so diverse, it is hard to accomplish a programme which equips each one to perform a huge variety of tasks, with a need to fulfil a collective and cultural pattern. Wimshurst and Ransley (2007) raise some questions about the model of education, the type of curriculum or who is in the best position to teach and train police commanders' courses.

The request for scientific-based police practice is now on everybody's mind. 'Higher education is seen as an essential requisite for professional standing in the community, and for police officers to be able to comprehend and cope effectively with the complex demands of contemporary law enforcement' (Wimshurst and Ransley, 2007, p. 107). In fact, police education 'adds value to police training by enabling senior police officers to make sense of developments in transnational crime, social exclusion, terrorism, public demand for transparency and a shift to proactive intelligence-led policing supported by an international research agenda' (Paterson, 2011, p. 290). Nevertheless, contemporary societal problems demand multitasking performance and knowledge, asking for different job descriptions and police profiles, which represent a huge challenge for police forces and police education (Roberts et al., 2016). It is mandatory for police commanders to have a forward-looking attitude, instead of a reactive one, and thus the capacity to adapt to and fine tune these diverse influences and pressures, being able to modify their policing strategy whenever new situations emerge. All this is of paramount importance when multilevel adaptive responses are needed, involving a sound organisation, different agencies and the communities — interoperability.

The only way to accomplish all these goals seems to be the adoption of a programme of integral education centred on the personal development of the police commander. A (the) primary task is to enhance their abilities to embrace a highly demanding career which will ask for enormous potential for transformation and adaptation to new emerging situations.

Considering the Portuguese university landscape, the specificity of police education must be stressed.

The Higher Institute of Police Sciences and Internal Security (located in Lisbon, Portugal) is the only Portuguese public institution entitled to organise and implement university studies and courses in the vast spectrum of internal security and police sciences, in agreement with the Bologna Declaration. It has, as its first mission, to give basic and advanced training to Portuguese senior police officers and to those from Portuguese-speaking African countries. The institute delivers an integrated master's course on police sciences, a course on police command and management, and a course on police command and strategy. In addition, the institute also delivers academic and technical/professional training for civilians and directors of many security-related organisations, local police forces and other companies within the spectrum of internal security. To do so the institute acknowledges developments in the police sciences by being aware of the need to link scientific knowledge and police practices, considering the increasing diversity and sophistication of the security problems posed nowadays. The close relationship with what is being done across Europe, and the international cooperation with the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), Ameripol and the United Nations institutes and offices, have also put the institute in a position to take advantage of new scientific findings and advances.

Bearing all this in mind, teaching in the area of police sciences — and considering it an applied science — must take into account the police organisation, police activities, social sciences and the law.

On the other hand, it is supposed to work with the particular abilities (skills) freshmen students have, training them into capacities, and adequately combine them into practice considering the specific competencies needed to perform each task. By doing so it will be possible to promote personal development to achieve increasing autonomy, which is mandatory for an extended command career, while acknowledging the different profiles as providing rich potential to respond to various challenges (functional diversity).

Approach

Considering the different career functions senior police officers will perform, the lifelong learning strategy must be drawn up based on professional and personal competencies, and on knowledge about the police organisation, policing and its theoretical foundations. The police education continuum must follow a mul-

tilevel approach, which should combine the type of police units involved, the specific contexts and scenarios within which they will perform (local, regional, national, international), the profiles required for police commanders and the different scientific disciplines. To better understand contexts and behaviours, police commanders should rely on social sciences, the law and police sciences to adequately choose among police strategies, tactics and techniques.

Problem

'The added value of higher education involvement lies within the role of designing and implementing a learning strategy that is underpinned by a clear evidence-base to meet identified targets' (Paterson, 2011, p. 295).

The permanent transformation of society and human relations and the urgent need for answers in the face of new problems compel police education institutions to question the traditional ways of conveying knowledge. Thus, a major problem arises: how can police commanders' education be adjusted in the face of permanent societal reconfiguration? Or, in other words: what kind of knowledge should we talk about?

Method (for diagnosis)

It was necessary to get better knowledge of police commanders' competencies regarding the contemporary functional requirements. Commanders' profiles were set up, taking into account organisational needs and strategic objectives, and job descriptions. Senior police officers responsible for learning and training policies were listened to. Also, a survey was done to collect evidence from commanders on the job (58.98 % response rate in a population of 512 senior police officers) to grasp the real needs, regarding knowledge, they actually consider beneficial and necessary to adequately perform their tasks. Subjects like specific needs, gaps and suggestions were asked for to improve the study programme, considering the demands they are confronted with on a daily basis, as well as the idea they have about the competencies they think are essential to a senior police officer. Parallel to this, some discussions took place (in small groups) on the topic of police sciences, and an international seminar was held to deepen the theoretical conceptualisation of police sciences.

Outcomes

A learning programme scheme was the product of all the abovementioned efforts. It involves the concept of police sciences, contributions from other scientific areas, the competencies at stake and the professional experience of senior police officers. Therefore, the learning programme is oriented towards general, special, operational and academic competencies.

Learning programme scheme

The future senior police officers must be prepared for their mission on several levels: local, district, regional, national and international. Taking into consideration the length of the career and the need for lifelong education and training, three main courses are mandatory: the first to enter the career; the second to be promoted to a new level at which district functions will be performed; the third to be promoted to higher-ranking positions where knowledge about top management and police strategy is essential to assume the leadership, management and command of police departments while coping with political powers. Also, in these last positions, senior police officers may take part in international missions with command functions (see Figure 1).
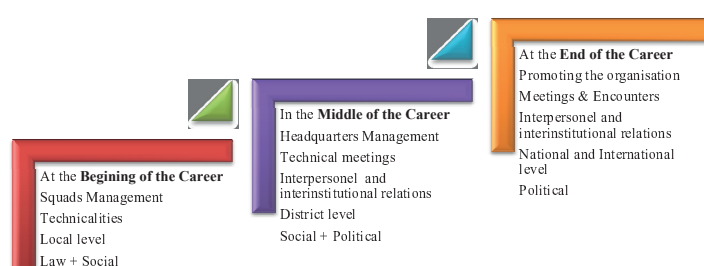

At the **Begining of the Career**
Squads Management
Technicalities
Local level
Law + Social

In the **Middle of the Career**
Headquarters Management
Technical meetings
Interpersonel and interinstitutional relations
District level
Social + Political

At the **End of the Career**
Promoting the organisation
Meetings & Encounters
Interpersonel and interinstitutional relations
National and International level
Political

Figure 1: Learning programme scheme

The master's course in police sciences — EQF 7 in the European Qualifications Framework — is the mandatory course for those who want to become senior police officers. After making their application, first-year students must be successful in several physical and psychological tests and a vocational interview. The course will provide the essentials for starting the career at the local level. In addition, it acknowledges the fact that it has to prepare senior police officers for a reality that is still to come (Roberts et al., 2016). The course plan will be discussed in the next section.

The command and police administration course (curso de comando e direção policial — CCDP) provides information that will allow organisational processes to be improved in several areas, for example operational planning, budgetary administration, human resources management, command and leadership.

The top management and police strategy course (curso de direção e estratégia policial — CDEP) is designed to give a global view of the law enforcement agencies and their strategic role in society, considering the contemporary societal demands and challenges. The crucial areas (e.g. public management, leadership and communication, prospective policing) address subjects with a wider perspective, relating them to each other and stimulating organisational change to reshape and better place the police organisation within society.

Main guidelines

Let us see in more detail the study programme that qualifies people to enter the career, the master's course in police sciences, which deserves particular attention as it is supposed to provide basic knowledge to those who have completed the selection process and want to become senior police officers.

It is centred on the students, considering them not only as a recipient of knowledge but also as a big driver for new approaches, due to the intellectual plasticity and scientific curiosity they may reveal. Besides, 'we know that learning (the ultimate goal of any teaching process) is determined more by what the student does than by what the professor does …' (Almeida, 2005, p. 17). Also, the diversity of students is important because it brings creativity to the teaching and learning process. This creativity must be acknowledged by a learning programme scheme that does not castrate idiosyncrasies but instead takes them as important inputs for the problem-solving tasks the career demands. At times, some inspiring — though apparently unorthodox — individuals emerge, showing their

potential to contribute to the evolving organisational process while being cultivated into its structures and culture (Macvean and Cox, 2012). This approach allows for greater adaptability and changeability in a world full of uncertainties. In this sense, embracing the positive and creative deviance can translate into clear and open progress for the whole police organisation and the society.

Furthermore, theoretical, methodological and technological developments are taken into consideration, along with the juridical framework and behavioural training, all of this tending to prepare the future senior police officers for their mission.

These changes, however, and following the spirit of the Bologna Declaration, put teachers up against a major challenge, i.e. the need to modify their way of 'giving classes'. In fact, 'students' learning is more decisive than teachers' teaching' (Almeida, 2005, p. 18). Rather than 'giving' classes and 'ready-made' knowledge, they should create a setting in which students can adopt an exploratory attitude towards knowledge, face problems and experiment with solutions, while being adequately supervised.

To some extent, the discussion by Jaschke et al. (2007) was considered to fit with the general principles that underline the master's course programme. It was developed on the basis of three main axes, in accordance with the different levels of intervention that are intended to be improved through the educational process: individual, organisation and context.

Axis (a) — the self: the policeman as an individual (man or woman); the policeman of individuals (the police officer); the 'regular' citizen and the potential offender or victim.

Axis (b) — the integration of the self (in the organisation): focus is put on interpersonal relations, teamwork, problem analysis, project management, time management, accountability, assessment and evaluation.

Axis (c) — the macroscopic perspective: the societal structure is brought to the scene, ultimately considering the problems raised by the particular social and political arrangements. This approach implies gaining knowledge ranging from the street to the world (the street, the city, the country, the world).

Implementation

First of all, built upon the three axes mentioned above, the course curriculum was shorter than the previous one. Also, an effort was made not to confuse the curriculum with the syllabus. Learning how to use weapons or how to drive in extreme or dangerous circumstances does not mean the learner understands their 'value or the social responsibilities they implied. The concept of "curriculum" when distinguished from "syllabus" makes problematic the relationship between teaching and learning' (White, 2006, p. 387).

The curricular units' (CU) syllabuses are based on both theoretical and empirical research, and on the teachers and trainers' professional experience. The CUs' syllabuses bring together content anchored and derived from the three axes (above) and also from those related to the specific domains which are considered to be fundamental for the learning and training of the future senior police officers. The CUs have broad general objectives to avoid closing knowledge off within sealed modules, and therefore closing it off to the incorporation of scientific novelties, the crossover of information from different scientific perspectives and the diversity of problems that real life may pose.

The length of the learning and training programme must deliver an experience that begins with the subjectivation of the police sciences concept, which progressively transforms into an increased capacity for critical thinking and reasoning, and decision-making autonomy regarding police problem-solving (White and Escobar, 2008).

Knowledge acquisition and integration are encouraged, therefore developing critical thinking, teamwork, research on topics related to police and societal demands, and problem-solving.

Conclusions

Police commanders perform their tasks better if they can observe the reality and act in a critical and considered way, in ordinary or crisis situations, bearing in mind the uncertainty that characterises contemporary society. This requires the constant following-up of theoretical, methodological and technological developments derived from the different scientific areas on which police sciences are based on, in addition to the proper technical-juridical preparation to deal with specific situations. To achieve all this, the link between learning, training and research is of fundamental importance, allowing for adequate responses to the problems faced on the field, and also for a scientifically sustained definition of security/safety policies (White and Heslop, 2012).

During their long-lasting careers, and being professionals who are always expected to perform highly relevant duties in the society (as commanders, leaders, and managers), new senior police officers must embrace ways of working based on respect for citizens' fundamental rights, always considering the legal, political, social and cultural dimensions, during the planning and implementation of police interventions. To do so they must be open-minded and prepared to question the reality by creating and feeding a network of credible partners (coming from different areas and having different competencies) that can be of assistance in complex decision-making situations, when accountability will (for sure) be at stake. Meanwhile, they must also be available to keep searching for further knowledge, understanding the need for learning and training throughout their career.

To sum up, future commanders must be able to:

- give the proper legal framework to specific situations, enabling police interventions with legal sustainability;

- put problems into context by understanding and analysing them adequately;

- instead of controlling individual behaviours while being an authoritarian leader, support team building, inspire and promote positive changes, communication, self-criticism and personal engagement;

- make decisions, command and use the management cycle to improve police activities;

- reshape their role throughout their career, every time they are promoted or allocated to a new mission.

Final remarks

The entire programme presented above implies a learning organisation in which each police commander must know how to learn by themselves. Van Beek et al. (2005, p. 5) state that 'police officers must be responsible for their learning during their whole career'. Therefore, the organisational infrastructure must provide an adequate learning environment, where up-to-date police practices, fed by scientific knowledge and professional experience, take place. Also, the organisation should provide a self-service learning system, along with a quality-assessment system. As Senge (1990, p. 3) has stated, a learning organisation is the one 'where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.'

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