

Change or be changed: Diagnosing the readiness to change in the Canadian police sector

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Abstract

Concerns have emerged over the readiness of police agencies to adapt to change. To better understand why this might be the case, we used Lewin's theory of change and an emic methodology to investigate the internal and external forces for and against change within this sector. Using a qualitative methodology we analysed the data from 103 interviews with key police and community stakeholders to identify the drivers and barriers to planned change. Examination of the resulting force field diagram revealed that: (1) community stakeholders feel the forces for change exceed the barriers, while police stakeholders perceive the reverse, (2) strong drivers of change are largely external to the police service, (3) key barriers to change were internal to the police service, and (4) police culture is a strong barrier to change. We end by offering suggestions on how this information can be used to manage change in this sector better.

Keywords

Policing, police sustainability, change management, force field analysis

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Over the past several years, serious concern has emerged in many Western economies over the future and sustainability of public policing. As Hoggett *et al.* note: 'It would be hard to find a police service anywhere in the world today that is not alive to the imperative of change' (2013: 7). Canada is no different. Key stakeholders in the Canadian policing community – including police leaders (Gruson, 2011), police associations (CPA, 2012), police governance bodies, governments (FCM, 2012a, 2012b), external think tanks (CCA, 2014) and the public – have expressed serious concern about the sustainability of policing in general, with a significant emphasis being given to the economics of policing (Fantino, 2011). Data, which show that police budgets are growing at a faster rate than total public expenditures and GDP (Fantino, 2011; FCM, 2012a; 2012b), have been used by policy-makers and the public to inform the debate and push for change. Others (e.g., CCA, 2014) have supplemented this discussion by identifying a range of internal and external forces which, they claim, require Canadian police services to change their structures and practices so as to better align with these new realities.

Internal drivers of change that have been noted in the literature (CPA, 2012; CCA, 2014; Gruson, 2011) include: high rates of retirement resulting in the loss of experience and corporate memory; reduction in the average level of experience among operational officers; increased time and costs spent on the recruitment, retention, training and evaluation of officers; operating below mandated complements with little likelihood of correction; under-representation of women and minorities; technology; and increased costs/decreased efficiencies due to increases in absenteeism, stress and work-life conflict and decreased staff morale. Pressures for change are also arising from external sources as police agencies need new skills and resources to respond to issues related to national security and international terrorism (FCM, 2012a); cyber bullying, internet fraud, identity theft, child pornography and credit card fraud (Stephens, 2005); public unrest and riots; organised crime; the needs of marginalised populations, including the elderly, Aboriginal people, the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill and the chronically unemployed or unemployable; changes in the law; and demands for greater cost-effectiveness by police service boards (CCA, 2014).

While many Canadian police services have made efforts to adapt to their evolving context, the inventory of pressures described above requires that they undertake change of a more transformational nature to deal effectively with these shifting operational and organisational demands (CCA, 2014). While change in this sector is necessary, urgent and imminent, implementing planned change within the Canadian police context will be challenging as there is little agreement between key stakeholders on who will have to change and how, and which actors should be driving this process. Nor could we find any evidence that the necessary change diagnostics had been undertaken at a national level to inform this issue. This is unfortunate given research showing that sound diagnostics are critical to successful change as they contribute to problem solving and action (Burke, 2011; Burnes, 2004; Phillips, 2013). These concerns, along with the fact that there does not currently appear to be a process or route to follow to address them, provide the impetus for our study, which seeks to identify the key drivers and barriers to planned change within the Canadian police sector from a multi-stakeholder perspective. The results from this study are likely to be of interest to police agencies and governments

who are implementing change either within their service or their jurisdiction, as well as academics working in the area of planned change.

The paper proceeds as follows. We begin with a brief overview of the theoretical framework used to ground our research. We then provide a short review of the empirical and theoretical papers from the criminal justice and police management literatures that informed our study and outline the methodology employed in this paper. Key findings are then discussed and interpreted. We end the paper by articulating the key contributions of this study for both research and practice.

Literature review

Lewin's model of planned change

Lewin (1947) makes the case that for planned change to succeed one must understand the system and how to destabilise it to increase readiness for change. According to Lewin (1947, 1951), organisations need a compelling reason to change. He argued that most organisations and people are frozen in terms of openness or readiness to change and theorised that all permanent change progresses through three successive levels of change: (1) unfreezing the present level, (2) moving to the desired state and (3) refreezing the changed system with the new behaviours, procedures or habits in place of the old ones. Many regard Lewin's work on change as the foundation of change management and his research continues to influence change theory and practice to this day (Burnes, 2004; Cummings *et al.*, 2016; Phillips, 2013).

Lewin conceived of change as a modification of two sets of forces, which together act to keep a system's behaviour stable: those forces endeavouring to keep the system the way it is and those pushing for change. When both of these sets of forces are approximately equal, organisations or systems stay the way they are in what Lewin (1947, 1951) termed 'quasi-stationary equilibrium'.

According to Lewin (1947), to change a system one begins by mapping out its 'field' – the totality and complexity of the active forces that at any given time produce the system's environment (Burnes, 2004; Phillips, 2013). Lewin (1946) defined two types of active forces: (1) driving forces of change, which he conceptualised as 'events, activities or behaviours that facilitate the implementation of change' (Whelan-Berry *et al.*, 2003: 100), and (2) restraining forces or barriers to change, which put pressure on the organisation not to change, thereby supporting the status quo. Lewin developed a diagnostic tool called a 'force field analysis model' to aid the 'field' mapping process. This tool can be used to create a visual display of the forces driving and restraining a planned change. Lewin used field theory to conceptualise how this field could be destabilised to unfreeze the system for change (Burnes, 2004). While Lewin (1947, 1951) identified three ways in which the system could be destabilised (i.e. increase drivers of change, decrease barriers of change, or both), he felt that modifying those forces maintaining the status quo (i.e., reduce barriers) produces less resistance to a planned change than does increasing forces for change and is, therefore, a more effective change strategy.

Lewin's (1947) work has been highly influential in the field of organisational change (Burnes, 2004; Burnes and Bargal, 2017; Cummings *et al.*, 2016) and force field analysis

has been used by researchers to identify driving and restraining forces to change in health care programmes, social work organisations, mental-health care and education (Phillips, 2013). Most recently this methodology been used to study change in police settings (Carter and Phillips, 2015; Phillips, 2013).

Transforming the police

The literature is replete with studies seeking to enhance our understanding of how police agencies can successfully implement change (Carter, 2016). Many authors have catalogued the ‘raft’ of policing reforms introduced over the past century (e.g., Bayley, 2008; Green, 2000; Hoggett *et al.*, 2013; Mastrofski and Willis, 2010). A number of conclusions can be drawn from this literature regarding planned change within the police sector. First, most police sector change efforts in this sector in North America (Bayley, 2008) and the UK have been ‘driven from the top-down and outside-in’ (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013: 8). Second, the pace of organisational change within policing appears to be ‘glacial—slow and at times torturous’ (Green, 2000: 309). Third, any change that has occurred has been small and modest (Maguire *et al.*, 2003; Mastrofski and Willis, 2010) and any significant attempt to reform the police has proved to be contentious and difficult (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013; Skogan, 2008). Finally, while generalisations are hazardous, our review of the literature suggests that police reform is difficult and risky, and that efforts to implement transformational change within police organisations are likely to either fall short of expectations or fail (Skogan, 2008).

What, then, is driving politicians, communities and police leaders to continue to try and transform the police? Despite substantial variation in how police services are structured and the types of communities served, the external pressures on the police to change seem to be ubiquitous, often revolving around a more efficient use of tax dollars to combat crime (Carter, 2016), pressures to provide a ‘better service for less’ (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013), institutional pressures (Carter, 2016) and an enhanced community focus on public safety (Green, 2000; Phillips, 2013). Other research shows that police agencies are more open to change when they are in crisis, exposed to strong external pressures to change, are blessed with a strong internal advocate for change and engage in constructive engagement with outsiders (Mastrofski and Willis, 2010; Sherman, 2015; Sklansky and Marks, 2008).

Given this compelling list of change drivers, one wonders why the likelihood of successful planned transformational change in this sector is small? Our review of the literature uncovered a number of reasons why, despite the many attempts to reform the police, things largely remain the same and efforts to introduce changes within the police sector has been described as ‘bending granite’ (Green, 2000: 332). Duncan *et al.* (2001) attributed the inability of the police to change to low urgency for change and a lack of ownership of the change. Green (2000) argues that the operational (rather than strategic) focus of most police organisations makes their response to change reactive and incremental rather than proactive and transformational. Others (Macquire *et al.*, 2003; Marks, 2000; Mastrofski and Willis, 2010) feel that police are too invested in their current structures and practices to make changes, even if the way they are doing things is ineffective. Mastrofski and Willis (2010) argue that police services are resistant to

pressures to change from both the public, who are 'viewed as largely clueless as to what constitutes good policing and how to get it', and from academic studies that are 'dis-trusted as invalid, too general to be of use in the field, or contrary to the interests of the rank and file' (2010: 98). Hoggett *et al.* (2013) note that those who should be leading organisational change (i.e., police senior management) are often viewed negatively by those whom they seek to change. Phillips (2013) argues that changes that threaten either worker expertise, the established power structure or normal resource allocation will be resisted by those within the service itself. Skogan (2008) identified 11 sources of internal resistance to change that are common in policing. Included on this list is a virtual who's who of police personnel, including mid-level and top officers, front-line supervisors, rank and file officers, special units and police unions. Finally, politicians and the public, who both want and don't want change, also make change in this sector difficult (Mastrofski and Willis, 2010).

On reading the above list of barriers to change, it is not surprising to find that police organisations have been described as inertial (Phillips, 2013). Inertia, defined as 'the strong persistence of existing form and function' (Rumelt, 1995: 2), becomes highly problematic when external environments are in flux, as is the case in policing. Sources of inertia within the police sector identified in the literature include: (1) distorted perceptions with respect to the need for change, (2) low motivation for change, (3) an inability to figure out how to change, (4) political deadlock, forces that prevent action, including indecisive leadership, embedded routines, and capability gaps (Rumelt, 1995).

Finally, when researchers talk about resistance to change within policing, they often identify organisational culture as a barrier to transformation (e.g., Green, 2000; Hoggett *et al.*, 2013; Marks, 2000; Mastrofski and Willis, 2010; O'Neill, 2016; Skolnick, 2008). Mastrofski and Willis (2010) define organisational culture as 'the set of understandings and interpretations that are shared by a group, that create meanings for the significant events and challenges the group experiences, that guide how members of the group deal with each other and those outside the group . . . that distinguish the group and its members from outsiders' (2010: 96). Academic research on police culture 'has a long and conflicting history with arguments being made both for and against the concept itself, its practical usefulness and also whether it is positive or negative for the police and the public they serve' (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013: 21). Others argue that 'existing conceptualizations of police culture are limited and under-theorized' (O'Neill, 2016: 476). Despite these challenges, many contemporary researchers claim that altering police culture is key to changing police practices and organisational performance (Marks, 2000; Mastrofski and Willis, 2010; O'Neill, 2016). This is unfortunate as 'there is no clear answer in terms of how to change police culture' (O'Neill, 2016: 479) and many police agencies appear either unwilling or unable to attempt such changes (Mastrofski and Willis, 2010).

Research questions

In this paper, we use Lewin's theory of change and force field analysis techniques (Burke, 2011; Burnes and Bargal, 2017) to examine the forces supporting and resisting the introduction of planned strategic change within Canada's police sector. Denison (1996) distinguishes between two different research approaches: emic research, which

focuses on the perspective of the subject, and etic research, where the perspective of the researcher is paramount. We take an emic approach in this research, meaning that our study is participant- (rather than researcher-) driven and our focus is on what a national sample of 103 'experts' on policing perceive to be the forces driving and resisting planned change within their sector (as opposed to what researchers see as the key, theoretically important drivers and barriers to change; i.e., an etic study). This emic approach allows us to utilise data from interviews with Canadian police officers and community members to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main internal and external drivers of and barriers to the introduction of planned strategic change in Canadian policing at this time?
2. To what extent do the drivers and barriers to planned strategic change identified by the police stakeholders in our sample overlap with those articulated by community stakeholders?

Answers to the above questions provide key information to policy-makers and police leaders who seek to implement strategic change in this sector. The resulting force field diagram should help researchers and change agents study and manage the change process within Canadian police services. This study also demonstrates the utility of the force field approach to planned change developed by Lewin almost 75 years ago to today's researchers and change practitioners.

Methodology

The force field analysis methodology used in this paper was derived from Lewin's (1947) three-step model of change and organises qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews into two categories: forces for change (i.e., drivers of change) and forces maintaining the status quo (i.e., barriers to change) (Carter and Phillips, 2015). In the section below, we describe the sample that participated in this study, the interview process, data analytic procedures and the technique we used to construct the force field diagram.

The sample

This paper uses qualitative data collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with a national sample of 103 'experts' on policing. All interview respondents were identified through their participation in a large national study focusing on the sustainability of public policing in Canada (i.e., 'National Study'). Ten of the interview respondents were members of the Research Advisory Board (RAB) that guided the National Study. These ten individuals represent a diversity of opinions on policing in Canada (i.e., government officials, the heads of two police associations, senior representatives from various community groups who interact with the police on a regular basis). The other 93 interview respondents live in the six communities who are participating in the ongoing National Study. All of these individuals are members of community/police advisory boards (CPAB), which were created to help us with the research being done in their community. The size of the CPABs ranged from 12 to 19 members and included police officers of all ranks as well as community members who worked closely with the police in their

community. The six communities and the police agencies who serve them are quite diverse and vary in size (two smaller services, two moderately sized services and two large services) and location (one in Atlantic Canada, two in Western Canada and three in Ontario).

Data collection

A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data focused on in this study. All interviews were conducted over the telephone by one of the five researchers who are involved in the National Study. To increase the generalisability of our findings we collected data from multiple stakeholders. Two thirds of our respondents ($n = 64$) were police officers while the others ($n = 39$) were community members who worked closely with the police. The police sample included front line officers, sergeants/staff sergeants, senior police officers and civilian members in approximately equal numbers. Community members either elected officials or worked in healthcare, education, the private sector or the transportation sectors.

The interviews were conducted using a script that included questions asking respondents their views on the sustainability of public policing in Canada. The data used in this paper comes from the portion of the interview designed to give us the information that we needed to undertake a force field analysis as described by Lewin (1947). We began our interview with the following preamble: 'As you know we have committed to working with six police services across Canada for the next three years. Our focus is on sustainable policing in Canada and our goal is develop an action oriented framework for managing change. The types of changes we are focusing on are strategic in nature – a change or changes to things such as resource deployments, objectives, scope of operations in response to threats or opportunities in the sector.' We then asked all respondents the following two questions: What do you see as the major (i.e., top five) drivers of change for police services in Canada at this time? What do you see as the major (i.e., top five) impediments or barriers to changing how policing is delivered in Canada at this time? The transcribed responses to these two questions from our 103 respondents yielded approximately 350 pages of text. The analysis then proceeded as follows.

First, we coded all interviews using the content coding techniques and steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Johnson and Christensen (2008). During the content coding process, the researcher collapses data into coding categories that are derived directly from the text. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe codes as abbreviations, or tags, for assigning concise meanings to a segment of descriptive data. To complete this step, we read all the interview transcripts (often multiple times) and identified a set of labels (i.e., codes) that described sets of words and/or phrases that contributed to a theme (Myers, 2009). Assigning codes in this way is consistent with our emic approach (i.e., using police officers' words to understand the phenomena) and facilitated the process of identifying and aggregating all data segments relevant to a particular theme or construct (i.e., force for change, barrier to change).

Once we had assigned codes to all responses, we used thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to inductively aggregate these codes into overarching

Table 1. Perceived drivers of change and barriers to change within the policing sector.

	Total		Police		Community	
	n (103)	%	n (64)	%	n (39)	%
Forces for change within the policing sector						
EXTERNAL DRIVERS OF CHANGE						
Funding limitations/lack of money	74	72	44	69	30	77
<i>Changing expectations: community</i>	56	54	32	50	24	62
The courts/changes to the law and the legislation	41	40	28	44	13	33
The changing nature of crime	35	34	23	36	12	31
Political cycles and politics (e.g., police boards)	30	29	19	30	11	28
New technology	29	28	18	28	11	28
<i>Demographic changes: community</i>	28	27	14	18	14	36
The media/social media	27	26	20	31	7	18
<i>Push for more oversight/push for transparency</i>	17	17	7	11	10	26
The downloading of responsibilities to municipal police	15	15	12	19	3	8
Other (community specific)	4	4	2	4	2	2
INTERNAL DRIVERS OF CHANGE						
Demographic changes: workforce	30	29	24	38	6	15
Police leadership	13	13	8	13	5	13
EXTERNAL BARRIERS TO CHANGE						
Resistance to change: the community (different stakeholders want different changes)	41	40	27	44	14	36
Resistance to change: Lack of political will	36	35	27	42	9	23
Public perceptions and expectations	28	27	19	29	9	23
Legislative changes are required for substantive change	26	25	20	31	6	15
Community beliefs make change more difficult	24	23	20	31	4	10
Other	4	4	2	4	2	4
INTERNAL BARRIERS OF CHANGE						
Resource limitations (e.g., people, money)	62	60	40	63	22	56
Organizational culture/inertia	51	50	35	55	16	41
Police services are resistant to change	37	36	26	41	11	28
Lack of leadership/resistance from police leadership	34	33	24	38	10	25
Police associations decrease flexibility to act	25	24	20	31	5	13
Other	6	6	3	6	3	6

Note: Between-group differences of >10% marked on table.

Italic rows indicate cases where community members were more likely to mention force.

Bold rows indicate cases where police officers were more likely to mention force.

themes that accurately depicted the meaning or ideas within the data. The thematic analysis process resulted in the identification of 13 drivers and 12 barriers to changing how policing is delivered in Canada at this time. These themes, along with the total number of respondents who mentioned the theme, are shown in Table 1 for the total sample, the police sample and the community sample. The focus in this paper is on themes (i.e., forces) that were identified by at least 10% of the sample. Other responses (generally mentioned by one or two individuals only) were grouped together into codes labelled either 'Other drivers of change' or 'Other barriers of change'.

Table 2. Summary: drivers of change and barriers to change within the policing sector.

Forces for change within the policing sector	Total	Police	Community
Drivers of change			
Number of respondents mentioning external drivers	356	209	147
Number of respondents mentioning internal drivers	43	27	16
Total number: drivers of change	399	241	148
Barriers to change			
Number of respondents mentioning external barriers	159	111	48
Number of respondents mentioning internal barriers	215	148	67
Total number: barriers to change	374	263	111

Force field analysis

We constructed a force field diagram using the procedures outlined by Carter and Phillips (2015). First, we drew a vertical line, representing equilibrium, down the middle of a page. Second, we classified the drivers and barriers of change identified during the data analysis process into four groups: barriers and drivers of change that are internal to the police, and barriers and drivers of change to the police that stem from the external environment. We then ranked all of the internal and external drivers and barriers of change in terms of their relative strength using the frequency with which each was identified as a proxy for strength. The more times a particular driver/barrier was mentioned (to a maximum of 103), the stronger the force for/or against change. We then listed the drivers of change to the left of the vertical line and the barriers to change to the right of the vertical line in descending order by strength (i.e., strongest driver/barrier listed first).

Each driver/barrier was represented by a horizontal arrow, the length of which pictorially represents the relative strength of the force (i.e., the longer the arrow, the stronger the force). In both cases, external forces were listed in the top half of the diagram and internal forces were shown in the bottom half. We then calculated a total force for change score by summing the strength scores for all forces for change listed on the left side of the diagram. A similar procedure was used to calculate the total barriers to change score. These calculations are summarised in Table 2 for the total sample, the police sample and the community sample. Finally, we examined the relative magnitude of the total perceived forces for change (i.e., drivers) and the total perceived forces against change (i.e., barriers) for the total, police and community samples to assess readiness to change. This assessment was grounded in the work of Lewin (1947), who argued that change is difficult (if not impossible) if the perceived driving forces for change are not greater than the perceived barriers to change.

Results

In the sections below, we present the results from our analysis of the data. We begin by providing a brief summary of the responses our informants gave to two interview questions included to give us some understanding of the context surrounding possible

changes to how policing is currently offered in Canada: ‘To what extent do you think policing has changed in Canada over the past decade?’ and ‘Do you think police services need to change?’ We then present and discuss our findings with respect to the perceived drivers of change, followed by the perceived barriers to change. In both cases, external forces are discussed first and internal forces second. In all cases we provide quotes from the interviews to illustrate the content codes used in this paper. Finally, we highlight the key similarities and differences in how those respondents in our police stakeholder sample view the drivers and barriers to strategic change versus those in our sample of community stakeholders. Consistent with our research approach (emic, qualitative), we focus on substantive between group differences (arbitrarily defined as a between-group difference of more than 10%) as opposed to statistical significance.

The context surrounding change

With the exception of three people, everyone we interviewed agreed that Canadian police services have been exposed to considerable change over the past several decades. Key changes noted by the majority of respondents (officers and community members alike) are consistent with those observed in the introduction/literature review and include: advances in technology have changed what the police do and how they do it; downloading of services onto the police (mental health in particular); social media (e.g., police always on camera); changes to the legal landscape (e.g., disclosure demands); demographic changes in the community; demographic changes within the police service; and the need to collaborate more with the community. It would appear from these data that Canadian police services have been exposed to excessive levels of change over the past several decades (Stensaker *et al.*, 2001). Stensaker *et al.* define excessive change as occurring when an organisation: (1) ‘pursues several, seemingly unrelated and sometimes conflicting changes at the same time’ and/or (2) ‘introduces new changes before the previous change is completed and evaluated’ (2001: 3). The recognition that police officers in Canada (and elsewhere) have been on the receiving end of excessive change is important, given the link between this phenomena and negative outcomes such as change fatigue and increased resistance to future change (Stensaker *et al.*, 2001).

Do police services need to change? On a positive note, virtually all our respondents (90%) felt that police services in Canada do in fact need to change. As one community member respondent put it:

Yes – The environment has changed at a greater rate than police forces have been able to change. They have a 19th century funding model, a 20th century legal framework, and 21st century problems.

More challenging are data showing a lack of consensus within our sample on what police need to change, why they need to change and how they should manage change. While these responses align with the political landscape around police reform in Canada at this time (CCA, 2014), they are likely to make it difficult to introduce planned transformational changes within the sector.

External drivers of change

Respondents identified 10 external drivers of change. Examination of the data (the top half of Table 1) shows relatively high levels of agreement within the sample on the external forces perceived to be driving change, with one force being cited by three quarters of the sample and an additional seven forces being identified by approximately 25% to 50% of the participants.

The driver of change mentioned most frequently (identified by 74 out of 103 of our respondents) was given the label 'Funding limitations/lack of money'. Respondents who mentioned this driver talked about how the lack of money to pay for police services and dissatisfaction with police funding models is driving the discussions on change within both police services and the communities they serve. As one community member stated:

Cost is a major driver. Cost can drive change because if the community says police are costing too much, they will have to change.

Police officers who talked about this force for change all expressed frustration with this focus on cost and money:

The bottom line is that money is tight and it makes it hard to maintain an acceptable level of service. How do we provide the Cadillac service with Wal-Mart prices?

My pet peeve is the argument that because crime rates are declining so should the costs of policing decline. But if you get down to ten officers, the crime rates will go way down – because there are less calls for service, not because there is less crime.

Just over half of our sample ($n = 56$) felt that change was being driven by the fact that the community expected different things from the police now than they had in the past (i.e., 'Changing expectations: community'). As one police officer noted:

Negative or positive public perception can drive change. Perception can change how the community feels. The Police respond to the needs of the community.

Another articulated the frustration of many within the police sample over this driver of change:

A tremendous amount of community pressure for change is coming from special interest groups. They have been effective in influencing politicians, the Police Services Board, and our Chief.

Community members, on the other hand, talked about how different demands stemming from the communities they served would ultimately require the police to change:

Police have increasing visibility and the public has increasing expectations. The community wants things like neighborhood watch, community policing, action on investigations, finding elderly parents who are missing . . .

Other respondents ($n = 41$) identified ‘the courts/changes to the law and the legislation’ as a strong driver for change. This view is typified by the following comment given by a police officer in our sample:

From the Charter to case law, when the law changes we have to change how we enforce it.

Approximately one in three respondents identified one or more of the following five external drivers of change as relevant to the police sector: ‘The changing nature of crime’ ($n = 35$); ‘Political cycles and politics’ ($n = 30$); ‘New technology’ ($n = 29$); ‘Demographic changes: community’ ($n = 28$); and ‘The media/social media’ ($n = 27$). When discussing the changing nature of crime, community members and police officers alike talked about how changes to both the type of crimes being committed (e.g., organised crime, terrorism, cybercrime) and the need to work across geographic boundaries when solving crime would force police to change what they did and how they did it. As one officer noted: ‘criminals are smarter now and they have better technology than we do.’

Thirty respondents felt that change in their sector was being driven by political cycles and politics. Virtually everyone who gave this response saw this driver for change in a negative light. Police officers talked about how:

Political correctness is interfering with effective policing.

while community stakeholders took a somewhat different view:

You would be naïve to think policing is impervious to political agendas. People can be replaced (Police Chief, Police Services Board) if they do not reflect these changes.

Virtually all of the officers and community members we talked to felt that political cycles and politics often resulted in changes to policing that were biased, ill-informed and/or temporary.

Not surprisingly, technology was also identified as a key driver of change within the police sector. This driver was seen both as a reality that had to be addressed (i.e., ‘the biggest societal change has been the shift in technology and keeping pace’ – Community stakeholder) and a challenge (‘While technology provides opportunities to find efficiencies it also creates challenges’ – Police stakeholder).

Other respondents identified a vast array of demographic changes at the level of the community (e.g., community now more multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-sexual and aging) that they felt were driving change in myriad different ways. One officer expressed it quite succinctly as follows:

In our community, 51% of the population is born outside of Canada . . . This diversity is pushing us to change the services we deliver and how we deliver them.

Many also noted how the media (traditional and social) was forcing change by driving the news cycle and making it impossible for police to control information flow. Both police and community stakeholders drew a link between social media and the perception

that the police were increasingly under scrutiny and ‘under siege’. Community members talked about how ‘police are on camera all the time’ while police officers talked they challenges they faced controlling information flows:

People are far more aware of things. You have instant information . . . if something happens you will hear about it right away . . . Increasingly, it is becoming more of a norm that people take photos . . .

The final two drivers of change noted by our informants, ‘Push for more oversight/ push for transparency’ ($n = 17$) and ‘The downloading of responsibilities to municipal police’ ($n = 15$) were each identified by approximately 15% of the sample. Analysis of the data show that police officers link the downloading issue to the issue of costs:

We are not allowed to say no to anything.

The police are one of the very few services left where you can call and have people come to your door without having a bill come in the mail later (fire, paramedics, etc. bill for their services). Not sure this can continue.

Internal drivers of change

While most respondents were readily able to identify external drivers for change, very few talked about ways in which police services themselves were driving planned change. In fact, only two internal drivers of change were mentioned by at least 10% of those we interviewed. The most frequently mentioned internal driver of change ($n = 30$) was given the label ‘Demographic changes: workforce’ as respondents who mentioned this force talked about how demographic changes within the force (i.e. police recruits today are older, have more formal education, have more life experiences and different expectations with respect to work-life issues, and place a higher emphasis on professionalism than police recruits in the past) were creating pressures on older officers to change. As one police participant noted:

Front line employees see things differently now – they have more experience than before . . . these officers will be drivers of change.

Many older officers did not see this driver of change in a positive light. For example:

The newer generation doesn’t see policing as a career; they see it as a job. They think the shift work sucks; they think that dealing with people that don’t like police officers sucks.

Regardless of whether demographic shifts were seen in a positive or negative light, all respondents that highlighted this driver agreed that change (for better or worse) would come when older officers retire.

As noted earlier, police agencies are more open to change when they are blessed with a strong internal advocate for transformation (Mastrofski and Willis, 2010; Sherman, 2015). The management literature on change also emphasises the importance of

leadership to successful change (Burke, 2011). Unfortunately, our results (only 13 of the 103 people in our sample mentioned 'Police leadership' as an internal driver of change) suggest that at this point in time this critical change success factor is missing in discussions on changing how policing is delivered in Canada.

Between-group differences in perceived drivers of change

The data in Table 1 show a relatively high level of agreement within our sample with respect to the key drivers of planned change within the police sector in Canada. That being said, it is important to note that the community stakeholders in our sample are substantially more likely to perceive that changing expectations from the community, demographic changes within the community and a push for transparency are key factors driving the police to change. Those in the police sample, on the other hand, are more likely to mention social media and demographic changes within the police workforce as forces for change.

External barriers to change

The bottom half of Table 1 lists five external barriers to change within the Canadian police sector that were identified by 10% or more of our respondents. There was a lot less agreement on the external factors that were stopping police from changing than there was on the environmental factors pushing change forward.

A number of our informants ($n = 41$) felt that when it came right down to it the community was resistant to any change in how policing is delivered that would directly impact them. We gave this barrier to change the label 'Resistance to change: the community (different stakeholders want different changes)' to reflect what we heard. From the point of view of the police, officers felt that change was futile due to 'community backlash – especially if you want to change the nature or level of service provided.' Both police and community stakeholders agreed that the lack of agreement among key community stakeholders on what needed to change acted as a barrier to police reform. As one police officer described it:

We have every layer of government with their 'fingers in the change' pie. Everyone wants to change the police . . . this lack of agreement is a barrier to change.

Along a similar vein, one of our community participants observed:

There are conflicting ideas among the community stakeholders . . . There is a lack of synergy on what needs to change.

The second most frequently mentioned external barrier to change, 'Resistance to change: Lack of political will' ($n = 36$), is closely aligned to the first. As noted earlier, research shows that effective leadership promotes successful police reform. We already spoke to the fact that this leadership is not perceived to be found within police services themselves. Unfortunately, as noted by our respondents, not only are politicians not taking a

leadership role with respect to this issue, one in three of the people we talked to felt that they are actually getting in the way of change. The following quotes from two of the police officers in our sample support this interpretation of the data:

There is just no political will to advance the public agenda. Everyone talks about cost, but politicians don't change legislation or the collective bargaining model.

Municipal politics . . . the politics of the day will often dictate our actions (e.g., you're not closing down that police station [for political reasons] even if not many people are attending those stations).

While public expectations were identified by 56 respondents as an external driver of change, many other respondents ($n = 28$) gave comments suggesting the reverse – that community expectations were a barrier to change. The following quote from a police officer in our sample illustrates this barrier, which we labelled 'Public perceptions and expectations':

Large sections of the public and partner agencies like the police to do certain things . . . but they don't want their taxes increased. The political system does not acknowledge this. People are screaming for budgetary controls but at the same time they want increased police services into different areas that are not the core.

One in four of our respondents ($n = 26$) felt that police required 'permission from the legislature' in order to change. This external barrier to change was given the label 'Legislative changes are required for substantive change' and was described by one of the officers as follows:

It is hard to download certain things to non-public policing organizations, especially when there is a need for civilian oversight, unless there is a change to legislation.

One in four of our informants identified the final external barrier to change highlighted in our study: 'Community beliefs make change more difficult'. This barrier again related to community expectations of the police. While the first community barrier related to a lack of agreement within the community on how the police should change and the second pertained to the perception that the community would fight any changes to core services, the third external barrier related to the belief on the part of many officers that the public did not understand what they did. They felt that this lack of understanding of the role of police in the community created a barrier to meaningful change:

When you deal with the public, there are so many different ideas of what the police are or should be and that is a barrier to change because not everyone is going to agree with proposed changes.

Internal barriers to change

Finally, as shown in Table 1, respondents identified five internal barriers to change. Almost two-thirds of the study participants ($n = 62$) talked about the challenges of

implementing change in an environment that has been and will continue to be ‘cut back’. This barrier was given the label ‘Resource limitations’ as both community and police stakeholders felt that an inability to devote people and money to making change happen was a major barrier to successful change in the policing sector. As one community member observed:

Money and budget are the biggest issue. Everything boils down to money.

Similarly, police respondents noted:

We do not have the financial resources or the staff to invest in change in a meaningful way.

Both the change management (Schein, 1999; Burke, 2011) and police (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013; O’Neill, 2016) literatures note that organisational culture can operate as either an enabler or a barrier of transformative change. Our study determined that within the policing sector, the organisational culture unequivocally makes the introduction of planned change more challenging. In fact, approximately half ($n = 51$) of our informants identified organisational culture as a key internal barrier to change within the sector. This internal barrier to change was given the label ‘Organizational culture/inertia’ to reflect what we heard. While there were many quotes that we could use to illustrate how culture was perceived to obstruct change, the following comment provided by one of the police officers in our sample is included as the most instructive, as it illustrates the socially isolating culture believed to characterise many police services (Mastrofski and Willis, 2010):

Organizational culture. There are two things cops hate – the way it is, and change. Police see themselves as a monopoly – but inaction is our competition; private security is our competition. We don’t often see people that are doing similar jobs as partners with us (e.g., transit security, campus security). That is wrong. The culture leads to ignorance to the competitive forces at play in public policing.

Earlier we noted that many informants identified resistance to change from politicians and the community as barriers to change. A similar percentage of our sample ($n = 37$) perceived that change in the sector would be slow (if it happened at all) because of resistance from within (‘Police services are resistant to change’). Many of the comments made by both police (‘Officers are entrenched in how it is currently done...’) and community (‘It is hard to convince police officers that someone else can do what they do more efficiently and effectively’) stakeholders that were included in this content code can be connected to the idea of an inertial police culture.

We noted earlier the small number of respondents who mentioned that police leaders were moving change forward in the sector. Analysis of the data showed that not only did our respondents not think that police leaders were driving change within the sector, one in three felt that police leaders were resistant to change. The comments we heard in this regard were labelled ‘Lack of leadership/resistance from police leadership’. How do

police leaders get in the way of change? Consider the following comments given by the police officers in our sample:

The leadership itself can be a barrier to effective change. The people that are running the police service are the people that were hired 30 years ago and times have changed. These leaders haven't necessarily changed with the times. There is a disconnect between leadership and the people they are leading . . . It's not that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but the old dogs can be quite stuck in their ways . . . There is a need for change at the top but not a new dinosaur for an old one.

We are set to a 30-year clock – people will have to work hard on a change that they will never benefit from . . . and leave a mess for the people that follow them – how do we motivate them?

The final internal barrier to change, which was mentioned by one in four ($n = 25$) of our respondents, was given the label 'Police associations decrease flexibility to act. How do police associations act as a barrier to change?' The following quote, provided by a police officer in the sample, speaks to this issue:

Police associations typically operate to protect existing employment levels.

Between-group differences in perceived barriers to change

While there were more similarities than differences in the drivers of change identified by the police officers and community members in our sample, the same can not be said when it comes to the identification of barriers to change. More specifically, the police officers in our sample were more likely than their community counterparts to identify seven of the ten barriers to change identified in this research (see Table 1). This suggests that insiders have more insights into the internal barriers to change within their sector than do those who seek to 'change them' from outside. This is unfortunate given the data discussed earlier showing that most attempts to change police services were externally driven.

Force field diagram

Figure 1 shows the force field diagram drawn from the data collected from our 103 interviews. Data summarising our estimates of the strength of the various forces supporting and hindering change are provided in Table 2. The following observations can be made using the findings obtained with the total sample. First, the sum of the forces driving change is only slightly larger than the sum of the forces restraining change (399 as compared to 374). Second, the drivers of change are largely external and in most cases (financial limitations, changing expectations from the community, changes in legislation) perceived to be very strong and very significant. Third, very few of our respondents talked about drivers of change that are internal to Canadian police services. Particularly noteworthy is the perceived lack of leadership from within pushing this

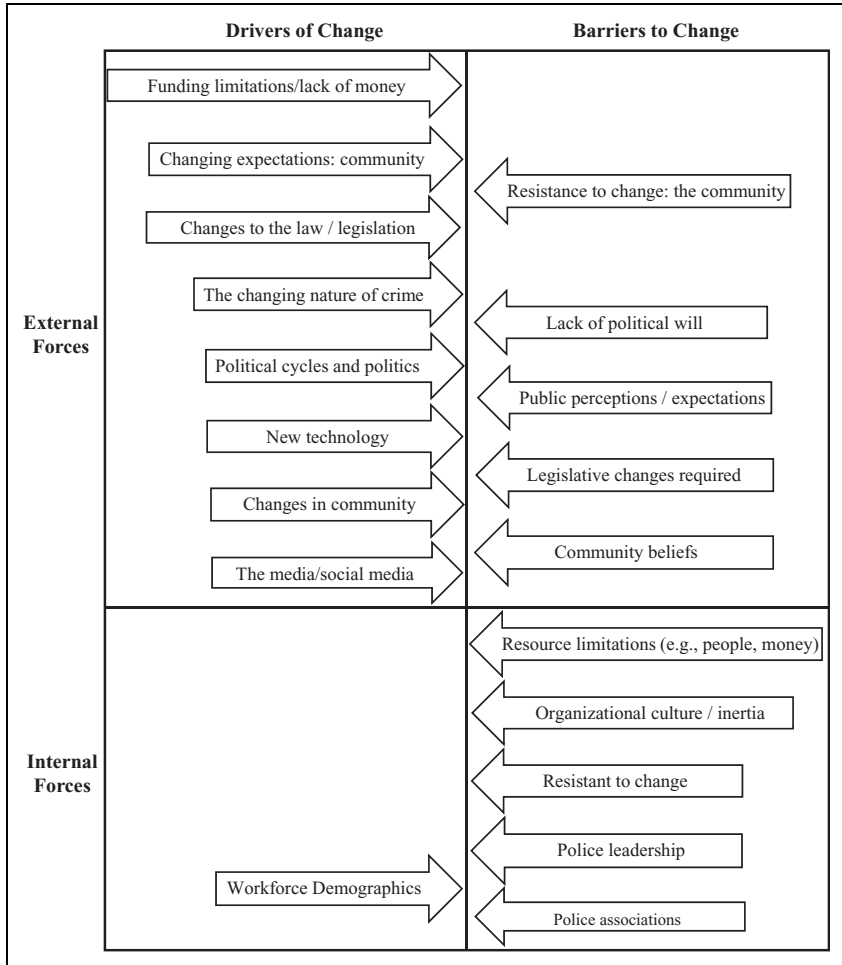


Figure 1. Force field analysis: change within policing sector (total sample).

Note: The length of the arrow represents the number of respondents mentioning this change driver or barrier to change. The longest arrows represent forces mentioned by at least 60 respondents; medium-length arrows represent forces mentioned by at least 40 but less than 60 respondents; short arrows represent forces mentioned by at least 20 but less than 40 respondents. Forces mentioned by less than 20 respondents are not included in the figure.

change forward. Fourth, the key barriers to change within the sector are, more often than not, internal to the organisation rather than external. Moreover, the internal barriers to change (financial resources, organisational culture, resistance from leadership) are strong and have all been identified in the management literature as key to any organisation’s ability to successfully implement change (Armenakis *et al.*, 1993). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the data in Table 2 show that, for the police sample, the barriers to change are stronger than the forces for change while the reverse is the case

for the community sample (i.e., forces for change are stronger than the barriers). This suggests that there may be a miscalculation on the part of external stakeholders of the appetite for (and perhaps the possibility of) substantive planned change within the police community in Canada.

Discussion

Our findings are consistent with what other researchers studying police reform have found – change in the police sector is externally driven and internally resisted. Our data does, however, suggest that it is not just the police who are resisting strategic change but also the very politicians and community members who are vocalising concerns about how policing is funded and delivered. Findings from this study also demonstrate that readiness to change is low within (at least some) Canadian police services at this time and that police services are likely to actively resist strategic change (especially change that is marketed as one that is financially driven) moving forward. This is unfortunate as research shows that high levels of change-readiness are required for successful implementation of transformational change (Armenakis *et al.*, 1993).

Given it is unlikely that the police will be unable to resist ‘legitimate’ public and political pressures to transform, how can interested police services and governments use the findings from this paper to increase organisational readiness to change within the police sector? While Lewin (1947) argues that readiness to change can be enhanced by either increasing drivers of change, decreasing barriers to change, or both, he recommends that change agents start by focusing their efforts on reducing the forces maintaining the status quo (i.e. barriers to change) as this strategy is less stressful and less likely to generate resistance than the alternatives. This would suggest that a continued emphasis on how much the police are costing communities (strong forces for change) will likely backfire and decrease readiness to change within the sector by: (1) increasing resistance to change to a higher level than it is already (Ford *et al.*, 2008), and (2) negatively impacting employee well-being.

Examination of the force field diagram does, however, provide us with some diagnostic information on barriers to change in this sector that we can use to manage the change process more effectively. It would appear that police services who want to have a say in the introduction of planned change in their sector need to determine how best to decrease the two strongest barriers to change within their own wheelhouse: a lack of leadership on this issue from within and an inertial police culture. While reducing these two barriers to change is likely to be extremely difficult (especially transforming the inertial culture), there is a vast amount written on these topics in both the academic (Burke, 2011; Schein, 1999) and practitioner (CAA, 2014) literatures to guide those committed to change.

This study makes several additional contributions to the field. First, it demonstrates the utility of using Lewin’s framework to diagnose readiness to change within police services in Canada and elsewhere. Lewin’s framework provides us with a tool that is fairly easy to use, facilitates a comprehensive diagnosis of the environment surrounding the change, gives researchers a visual model that facilitates effective communication between the

researcher and key stakeholders, and enables the researcher to offer suggestions on how change agents should move forward if they wish to implement significant change.

This study also demonstrates the advantages of using an emic approach to the study of police sector change. While other researchers (Carter and Phillips, 2015; Phillips, 2013) have used Lewin's framework to study police sector change, the approach taken in both cases was etic and quite different from that followed in this study. More specifically, these researchers identified what they thought were the relevant forces for and against change and used survey methodology to test their beliefs. They state in their paper (Carter and Phillips, 2015) that the use of an etically derived abridged set of relevant forces for change limited their ability to interpret their findings. By using an emic approach, the researcher is able to tap into the 'context-specific, situated knowledge' that officers on the ground and community experts can bring to discussions of the forces and barriers related to change in the police sector. Such an approach increases the validity of the findings and also allows researchers to evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different forces for, and barriers to, change for a variety of stakeholders. This approach also makes it easier to explain how the forces included in the force field diagram were generated and ensures that all relevant drivers and barriers are incorporated in the study. Future work in the area could explore the utility of this approach to the study of specific, targeted changes to the police. Longitudinal analysis would allow the researcher to explore the effectiveness of using Lewin's approach to increase change-readiness over time.

The current study is not without limitations. First, the fact that five different researchers conducted the interviews may have impacted the interview process. We proactively took the following actions to minimise the impact this would have on our findings: we used a semi-structured interview protocol, we instructed the interviewers to follow the protocol as closely as possible, and we had one individual (the first author of this paper) code all interviews.

Second, the context in which this study was undertaken (six police services in Canada) may mean that the findings from this study do not generalise to other police agencies or in other sectors. We do, however, stand by our claim that this study offers a valuable demonstration of the utility of using Lewin's approach to diagnose change-readiness in a complex sector with multiple stakeholders.

Third, the primary focus of the interviews was to highlight perceptions of existing forces for and against change. We did not check to see how these perceptions actually align with the facts of the situation. This means that while we can speak to the perceptions of those in our sample as to the key barriers to planned change that exist in the Canadian policing sector, we cannot say with complete certainty that objectively these barriers exist. That being so, the fact that perceptions have been found to drive behaviour (Tagiuri and Petruccio, 1958), implies that perceptions are important in their own right and cannot be dismissed when determining how best to move forward with respect to planned change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while Canadian police agencies have adapted to their evolving context, implementing change in this sector has been challenging. Complicating this is the fact

that little research has been conducted in Canada to guide the change management process. This study attempted to contribute something to the limited body of research that does exist by identifying the important forces for and against change in the Canadian policing sector. We believe this represents an important first step in preparing police agencies to implement change more effectively. That being said, police agencies in Canada are likely to experience ongoing difficulties as they grapple with how to align themselves better with the realities of 21st-century policing. This is especially true given that many of the barriers to change that our respondents highlighted are extremely strong and unlikely to abate over the next several years, and because Canadian police organisations do not appear ready to change.

The data from this study suggest that a lack of leadership from within as well as organisational cultures that are inertial and resistant to change may make it more difficult for police agencies themselves to 'get ahead of the change curve'. This is unfortunate, as our review of the literature indicates that change does not appear to be an option within this sector. Who leads the change and how the change unfolds over time is, however, still open for discussion. Accordingly, we end the paper with a quote from Elon Musk, which we hope will resonate with police leaders across the country: 'Some people don't like change, but you need to embrace change if the alternative is disaster.'

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