

An exploration of police leadership, culture and employee motivation

Exploring the intersection of leadership, culture and employee motivation in the policing context.

Key details

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Police region	North West
Level of research	Professional/work based
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Research context

Leadership represents an enduring challenge in policing, with consequences of poor leadership including low workforce morale, compromised wellbeing, poor culture and elevated levels of voluntary resignation. This doctoral project aims to deliver an evidence-based framework for enhancing leader-employee relationships in policing. Through synthesis of culture, leadership and motivational theory, the project examines the influence of police organisational and occupational culture upon the leadership approach and its consequences for employee autonomous motivation and commitment. This will lead to the proposal of a framework for police leadership – the SERVANT model.

The model is informed by an extensive literature review and multi-method qualitative research grounded in a social constructionist philosophy. This included 45 semi-structured interviews with employees drawn from across the rank and role structures of three diverse English police forces.

Thematic analysis of the results demonstrated the primacy of supportive values-based leadership which fulfils employees' needs for autonomy, competency and relatedness. It also emphasised the extent to which such approaches may be thwarted by enduring facets of police organisational and occupational culture. The SERVANT model therefore advocates for leadership which is supportive, ethical, reflective, promotes employee voice, is authentic, nurturing and which engenders trust in relationships.

The SERVANT model presents a unique contribution to theory in its synthesis of empirical evidence with theory drawn from three distinct fields into a single, accessible, and evidence-based framework for police leadership. This is subject to ongoing validation activity with key stakeholders in policing governance, alongside peer review by academic and policing practitioners. Therefore it also provides a unique and significant contribution to practice in the burgeoning field of police leadership development as the first known model of its kind specifically developed for a law enforcement audience.

Research methodology

Participants in this study are volunteers from three UK police forces of contrasting size, rural-urban location, socio-economic context and crime and public order demands. In each force the volunteers represented a wide range of personnel working at levels from sergeant to chief officer ranks and police staff equivalents.

The research comprised 45 semi-structured online interviews and the results were subsequently analysed using thematic analysis. The first round of analysis yielded 164 individual codes which were classified into 46 categories and six resultant themes which were subsequently validated with participants and stakeholders via a qualitative questionnaire.