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**The impact of a Supportive Leadership Program in a Policing organisation from the participants' perspective.**

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## **Abstract**

Aim: The aim of this study is to explore the implementation of an organisational level intervention, focussing on Supportive Leadership (SL), in an Australian police organisation from the perspective of supervisors and managers.

Design: The impact of the intervention was explored using a qualitative methodology using semi-structured telephone interviews with 44 participants who had attended the Supportive Leadership Workshop, designed to improve awareness of good management practices. Data was subjected to thematic analysis using a social constructivist theoretical orientation.

Findings: Findings showed that SL as a concept was generally accepted by a majority of participants and that they had integrated a number of SL strategies into their work practices. The participants also identified the importance of senior personnel role-modelling SL and the negative impact of non-role modelling.

Research limitations and implications: The major limitation of the study was the non-random sample of voluntary participants. However, the nature of conducting applied studies in police organisations is inherently difficult due to confidentiality and their paramilitary nature. This study highlights the need for future studies in police leadership and occupational stress that directly explore issues from the perspective of the supervisors and managers.

Practical implications: Interventions such as SL need support and role modelling from senior management to enhance their credibility.

Original value: This paper reports on an applied intervention that received major support and funding within a police organisation. It is of value to other organizations considering similar interventions because it highlights issues that could be addressed to further enhance the program.

Keywords: Police, Organisational level intervention, supportive leadership, culture, climate and management.

## **The impact of a Supportive Leadership Program in a Policing organisation from the participants' perspective.**

One Australian police jurisdiction has recently undertaken a supportive leadership intervention, as one of a number of other interventions, in an attempt to alter the current organisational culture and climate to a work environment characterised by supportive leadership and appropriate communication practices. In this study, Supportive leadership (SL) is defined as “attitudes, communication, behaviours and actions by managers and supervisors that enable staff to feel supported thereby to work effectively, productively and appropriately” (Supportive Leadership Workshop, Participant Workbook, p.3). Supportive leadership has previously been identified as one of the factors that contribute positively to organizational climate (Head, 2000).

The terms organisational culture and climate have been conceptualised in a number of ways in the literature. Landy and Conte (2004) proposed that organisational culture and climate are two different, yet overlapping concepts – “climate is about the context in which action occurs and culture is about the meaning intended by and inferred from those actions” (p.526). Using this conceptualisation, the vision of SL was created in the police jurisdiction and communicated from higher levels of the organisation (commissioned officers) via an in-service program of SL training that was delivered as a one-day workshop to all managers and supervisors. It was anticipated that the current organisational climate would be changed at the lower levels (work groups, units and divisions) by workplace practices implemented by supervisors and managers that reflected SL principles.

The aim of the SL workshop was to promote appropriate managerial leadership behaviours at all levels. The long-term aim, however, was to contribute to a range of other initiatives currently being implemented to change organisational culture and reduce occupational stress.

Past research has identified links between stress, job satisfaction and supportive leadership. Brough and Frame (2004), in a recent study of New Zealand police officers, found a strong association with job satisfaction and turnover intentions. This study reinforced previous findings (Brough & Kelling, 2002; Brough & O'Driscoll, 2004) where adequate supervisor support was directly related to a number of organisational and individual outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Research by Adams and Beck (2001) into the critical behaviours for police managers indicated that motivating behaviours such as feedback and support given to staff were essential components of an ideal manager's behaviour. The policy implications from these research studies indicate the need for training programs that improve the effectiveness of supervisor support to their subordinates. This Supportive Leadership workshop is an example of such a program.

A study conducted by Hart and Cotton (2002) with an Australian police service involving 793 participants found that the nature of police work is not inherently stressful. Rather, it is the organisational context in which the work is done (Hart & Cotton, 2002). This study showed there is a relatively stronger contribution of organisational factors to police officers' occupational well-being suggesting that individual approaches to stress management might be of much less benefit than

approaches that focus on organisational level interventions (Hart & Cotton, 2002). Supportive leadership is an example of an organization-wide intervention of this nature.

Sutherland and Cooper (2000) also highlighted the importance of the quality of interpersonal relationships at work in stress reduction. Supportive relationships are less likely to create workplace stress. Social support, in the form of group cohesion, interpersonal trust and a liking for one's supervisor contributed significantly to lower job stress and better health (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). Quick, Quick, Nelson and Hurrell (1997), also suggested that the nature of the superior-subordinate relationship is potentially stressful if the style of leadership employed does not meet the employee's needs. According to the Path-Goal theory of leadership developed by House (1971), the effect of leader behaviour on subordinates' satisfaction and effort depends on the situational aspects of the work.

Leadership is a complex construct that makes the process of understanding the concept very difficult (Antonakis, Cianciolo & Sternberg, 2004; Yukl, 1998; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002). However, despite these difficulties, Sheehan and Corder (1989) point out that good leadership is a critical element in police organisations because "the organisation's best chance for achieving desired behaviour is through employee commitment to well-established professional values and goals and it is through leadership that police executives must seek that commitment" (p. 122). Good police leaders are also supportive of, and appreciate the efforts of their staff and in return they gain their respect and understanding from leading by example, fostering and enhancing the positive aspects of the police culture (Macdonald, 1995).

## **Police Leadership**

In a recent review of police leadership, Densten (1999) identified three crucial issues that need to be addressed: “the importance of leadership in police organisations, the negative behaviours of police leaders, and the unique aspects of the law enforcement environment which affect leadership” (p.2). With respect to the importance of leadership, Densten found that i) the actions, values, beliefs, goals, and styles of police leaders significantly influenced rank-and-file officers, particularly in any process of change within the police organization; and ii) that police leaders controlled several key variables, which influenced individual police attitudes and departmental philosophy.

Densten (1999) also identified a range of negative leadership behaviours - such as frequent empty and ritualistic gestures, conservative, cautious and authoritarian management styles, poor communication skills and lack of managerial support. Finally, he suggested that the unique aspects of a policing environment, which affect leadership, are formal rank and control. These issues need to be considered when evaluating interventions such as SL within a policing environment.

Cooke and Lafferty (1989, cited in Landy & Conte, 2004) suggest that one of the main problems with change to a culture of SL is the inherent nature of the power culture in police organisations. The power culture refers to “non-participative organizations structured on the basis of the authority inherent in members’ positions. Members believe they will be rewarded for taking charge, controlling subordinates and at the same time being responsive to the demands of superiors” (p.525).



Another problem with the implementation of SL is the inherent difficulty in identifying a specific leadership framework that fits in a police culture. In a review of police leadership, Sheehan and Cordner (1989) concluded that leadership is difficult to provide in police organisations because “police leaders operate in an environment that includes the constraining influences of politics, law, other interdependent agencies, police fraternal organizations and unions, budgets and human behaviour” (p.355). Therefore, as highlighted by the literature, implementing SL or any other type of leadership training is a difficult task in a police environment.

Despite these difficulties, however, addressing such leadership issues may ultimately lead to a less stressful work environment. The research evidence (Cooper & Cartwright, 1997) suggests that by initiating organisational strategies that promote the principles of supportive leadership, positive changes are expected in relation to organisational culture, climate and workplace stress.

### **The Police Organisation**

The Police jurisdiction, in this study, is a large organisation consisting of 11, 961 employees, 8, 434 of who are operational police officers. The remaining 3, 257 employees are referred to as unsworn staff, public servants, or staff members. For the purpose of this study the terms sworn staff and unsworn staff will be used.

The senior executive officers of the policing organisation have become increasingly concerned about the number of workers’ compensation claims lodged by their employees related to psychological stress (SMWP, 2002). In 2002, the organisation undertook a large staff survey to measure organisational climate, stress and morale.

The survey tool was utilised during 1995/96 by this police jurisdiction with 809 sworn and unsworn staff members representing a wide cross-section of ranks/classification levels. The results of the survey indicated that the greatest source of stress to the employees was the way in which they were supervised and managed by senior staff within the organisation. Other major sources of stress identified by the employees were: excessive work demands; lack of participative decision-making; poor administration; and poor communication.

Based on these findings, the Stress Management Working Party (SMWP) recommended that the organisation develop strategies to reduce the costs and lost productivity associated with stress in the workplace. As a result, the Supportive Leadership program was developed to create a work environment that was more conducive to psychological well-being, positive job attitudes and high standards of performance. This workshop was to be delivered across the organisation to sworn and unsworn staff that had responsibility for managing and supervising subordinates.

### **Supportive leadership workshop**

This five hour workshop consisted of five sections: Section 1 – Introduction, Section 2 – Case Study, Section 3 – Establishing and maintaining a supportive culture and supportive environment, Section 4 – Priorities, expectations and strategies for leading supportively and Section 5 – Conclusions and commitment (SLW Participant Workbook, 2003, p. 18). The specific aim of the SLW was to communicate the values and strategies of the concept of supportive leadership to all supervisors and managers in the policing organisation with the intention of establishing a common foundation of standards and practices.

The aim of the current study is to evaluate the Supportive Leadership intervention conducted in one Australian police jurisdiction from the participant's perspective. The three broad research questions are:

1. Has awareness about SL increased as a result of attending the SL workshop?
2. What are managers and supervisors doing differently, as a result of attending the SL workshop?
3. What organisational barriers obstruct the use of SL practices by the supervisors and managers?

## **Method**

### **Design**

A qualitative research design was used because it assists in understanding people's experiences in a rigorous and detailed way (Ryan & Bernard, 2000), and it allowed the participants to describe their experiences and their perspectives of SL in their own words. This type of qualitative research methodology captures data that is rich and meaningful. According to Rich and Ginsburg (1999), qualitative methodologies have the ability to offer insight into 'why' and 'how' trends occur. Therefore, for this exploration of the experiences related to supervisors and managers attending the SLP, qualitative research methodology was an ideal approach to clarify how a whole host of factors interacted to form the participants' perspectives.

### **Participants**

The participants were 25 (17 male and 8 female) employees of the police jurisdiction who had attended the SL workshop and had volunteered to take part in a audiotape-

recorded telephone interview. The participants were sourced from varying areas across the state and the ranks involved were Sergeant, Senior Sergeant, Inspector, Administration Officers (levels 5 and 7) and two senior managers. A further 19 (16 male and 3 female) volunteers were interviewed using a refined interview technique to validate and clarify the themes obtained from the initial sample. A similar range of ranks were involved.

### **Procedure**

Participants were invited to participate in a telephone interview via an electronic survey administered by the police jurisdiction. Volunteers emailed their contact details directly to the researcher, a female ex police officer who is now a university-based researcher. According to Denscombe (2003), this type of sampling is a method that suits the convenience of the researcher and it suited this particular study due to the limited money and time within which to complete the research. As Stake (1995) also contends, a researcher's time and access to participants for research work is almost always limited, so it seems logical to access participants using a convenience sampling method. Telephone interviews were used because this method allows for participants to be reached quickly over long distances (Neuman, 1997). In this study, volunteer participants were from a police jurisdiction, which is responsible for policing over a vast distance.

A semi-structured interview was used to explore the perceptions of managers and supervisors who attended the Supportive Leadership workshop. The three research questions were asked of all participants and further discussions centred around the questions.

All participants were advised that the interviews would be audiotape-recorded and that their anonymity would be protected. In terms of ethical clearance, the police jurisdiction gave permission for their employees to participate in the research project and the participants gave informed consent prior to the telephone interview. Ethical clearance was also obtained from the Griffith University Ethics committee prior to the commencement of the project. The decision was made to stop interviewing supervisors and managers when the point of saturation within the data was reached (i.e. when the supervisors' and managers' responses were displaying a consistency and a sameness in the themes related to the SL workshop).

### **Analysis**

According to Aronson (1994) and Patton (2002) using a thematic analysis method results in a more complete understanding of the ideas of the research participants. Rice and Ezzy (1999) argue that thematic analysis involves examining the interview text to detect the important messages contained therein. The emerging themes then become categories of the analysis and the important issue is the position of the idea in the narrative rather than the frequency of the theme within the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Shank (2002) explains the investigative process undertaken in thematic analysis - "thematic analysis, first and foremost, is about searching for patterns in data" (p. 129).

The framework for conducting this thematic analysis, as suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), is a systematic process that involves the initial coding of the data, then clustering of the codes to develop concepts or categories from the coding and

then developing themes from the concepts to enable explanation of the phenomenon under examination.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and consisted of approximately 76,000 words. The data was coded to identify concepts that best represented each unit of text. This was done to ensure that the data or transcript of the interviews would ‘speak for itself’ (Silverman, 2000). A process of sifting was then used to categorise units of text into common themes. This process of theme identification was checked by the use of another sample of a further 19 volunteers using a different interviewer. The task of the second interviewer was to investigate the perceptions of the interviewees by presenting them with a summary of the findings of the initial interviews and asking for their comments about those emerging themes. It was considered that a different researcher with a non-police background and of a different gender would address possible concerns of interviewer bias or subjectivity. The themes were then presented to an expert panel for verification and were also presented back to the participants for member checking to enhance rigour.

## **Results**

The transcripts were analysed line-by-line to detect the different concepts spoken about by the interviewees. As each concept emerged, it was labelled. Thirty-one categories of concepts were identified in this first wave of coding. The following table shows these first level themes.

Take in Table 1

Categories or themes related to one another were grouped together or amalgamated to produce bigger concepts and ideas that were spoken about most often by the interviewees. In the second wave of coding, five second level themes emerged. Themes that were insignificant were eliminated.

For instance, Theme 23 related to the 'Lifesaver model of management'. Only one interviewee spoke about this concept, therefore, a decision was made to eliminate this category in the second wave coding. Similarly, theme 31 related to 'Problems with the research instrument'. Only one interviewee spoke about this category during the interviews with the twenty-five participants, so this theme was eliminated. Some themes were specific to the SL workshop or future training needs so consequently they were eliminated.

Take in Table 11

The three core themes that best accounted for the data have been given the following identifiers – 'Individual and organisational values', 'One rule for us, one rule for them' and 'Human Resource Dilemmas'. The qualitative data from these three core themes are used to define, explain and discuss the three research questions below.

### **Discussion**

Each of the research questions will be discussed and exemplified with direct quotes from the core themes. This gives a direct voice to the participants and encapsulates their perspectives.

### **1. Has awareness about SL increased as a result of attending the S.L. workshop?**

It was generally agreed that the SL workshop had raised awareness throughout the organisation about SL strategies and principles.

For example, one interviewee said – *“It wasn’t really training as such, it was more like, I’ve had it put to me that maybe it raised awareness”*. Another reported – *“Yes, it was more of an awareness thing. Yeah, it’s not training, it was an awareness session”*.

The SL workshop was not viewed as introducing any new concepts, rather it generally raised awareness of the need to utilize existing SL strategies – *“it was a reminder basically, just a refresher about what I should be doing and what I am doing. Yeah, a reminder”*.

When asked to comment on the concept of Supportive Leadership and whether it is a good thing for the Police Jurisdiction to be doing, one interviewee had the following to say:

*“Oh, yeah very much so, it (SL) involves recognising the value of the people that you work with, of valuing their opinion and their input and being sensitive to their needs in the workplace.*

In essence the comments made by this interviewee reflect what the Police Jurisdiction was trying to achieve by introducing the concept of Supportive Leadership within a policing environment.



One manager who was interviewed said that as a result of attending the workshop he was attempting to change the culture of the workplace by implementing a more humanistic environment. He described the previous environment at the workplace to one characterised by negativity, blame, punishment and low morale. The workplace had a 'sick leave' culture. Staff members in this worksite averaged 16.2 days of sick leave per year. Since implementing a more supportive approach the average number of sick leave days taken has dropped to 11.6 days per year per staff member. The interviewee had this to say about the effect of implementing SL in his section: *"It has legitimised what we're proposing here, what we're doing. The organisation has said S.L. is the way to go. So, it has fitted in, it was very timely"*.

Another interviewee said that the SL workshop had provided a formal structure in which to operate as a supervisor when dealing with subordinates. The following comments illustrated this analysis. *"It (the workshop) actually gave some formal process to me, to things I had actually been doing. Probably some things were (done) without thinking. Just natural, that's how you treat people naturally."*

Thus, in terms of the awareness of SL, the program can be seen as a success. It fulfilled the initial part of the aim of the workshop as stated in the Supportive Leadership Participant Workshop Booklet (2003) - *"to communicate the values and strategies of supportive leadership to all supervisors and managers"* (p.1).

If barriers to implementation are removed, as discussed in the next two major themes, it is also possible that the long-term intention of establishing a common foundation of

standards and practices through the Jurisdiction may also be possible. This was the intent of SL and formed the second part of the aim of the program.

## **2. What are manager's doing differently as a manager, as a result of attending the SL workshop?**

The SL program has resulted in the implementation of new SL behaviours or the reinforcement of existing SL behaviours. SL strategies are seen to be personally valued and examples from the interviews provide evidence of this. The use of SL strategies in work-related practices (eg., involving staff in decision-making, consultation meetings, open-door policy, giving feedback both positive and negative) are also elucidated to provide understanding of how SL is valued and used.

### **Personal support at work**

The interviews revealed the value of support for individuals when they are undergoing a range of personal experiences – i.e. important milestones in people's lives such as the birth of a child, an impending wedding or birthdays. When these are recognised by tokens such as the purchase of flowers, gift or a card it contributes to feelings of support.

For example, in some cases the Peer Support Officer or the treasurer of the social club may be given the responsibility to make such arrangements. In one particular section, the Officer in Charge has made notes of the first names of the partners of the staff so that if he needs to contact them he can use their first name. Comments centred on the issue of recognising that staff members have a life outside of the Police Jurisdiction - *"I mean like my boss here you know he makes a note of when people start, their dates*

*of birth, their partner's name and their kids' names, you know just the little things like that and you know an interest in what happens to people outside the job. Another interviewee said, "at times when people aren't going so well or they might need a bit of time off, we organise that. Work is not the total focus."*

Furthermore it was considered that interaction between staff of a police station on a social level has a positive effect on morale – *"it's a morale thing to have the interaction on a social level between the staff. I think that is important"*. Such strategies highlight the care and consideration elements of SL on a personal level and were considered by the interviewees to encapsulate the concept of Supportive Leadership.

### **Workplace Support Strategies**

Workplace strategies demonstrating the use of SL are incorporated in a number of areas – participative decision-making, consultation meetings, open-door policy and giving feedback.

There were many examples that suggested that SL strategies were practised by supervisors/managers on a daily basis. For example, one Officer in Charge had daily interactions with the staff and if a work related issue arose, such as a job that had 'gone badly', they would become acquainted with the circumstances by speaking directly with the staff involved. Another interviewee invited all his team leaders to attend a workshop he had devised, to identify the culture of their particular section so they could develop strategies to make it a more supportive environment.

Regular staff meetings held every roster period were also used and identified as SL strategies - *“We do (have a meeting), one every roster period. The Sgts and I sit down and discuss the direction of the Division, problems they see and issues they want to implement.”*

#### Participative decision-making

Involving staff members in decision-making was used by an Officer in Charge as a method of employing the principles of Supportive Leadership. For example, when the police division was experiencing an increase in the theft of jet skis, the Officer in Charge, spoke with the relevant staff members to devise a plan to address the situation. The staff were asked to provide input into the decision making process and assist in the formulation of the plan to address the issue. One interviewee explained the method for participative decision-making at his station in the following way - *“My Sergeants and I, what we do is we go and have lunch and we talk about some of the staff, how they are performing, where we best think they could go.”*

#### Consultation meetings

The majority of interviewees had instigated regular meetings with staff to discuss the direction of the particular station, staffing issues, and operational policing issues that may impact on the day-to-day business of policing. The interviewees indicated that the meetings they held tended to be a mixture of formal and informal processes to promote conversations and relationships between the different levels of staff. Some were conducted in the meal rooms at stations or at informal lunches or BBQs.

One interviewee (with 140 staff) stated that he conducted formal meetings or workshops with his team leaders at least twice a year. Some interviewees stated that separate meetings might be held for Constables and Sergeants to increase communication and relationships at the various levels. One interviewee had this to say about keeping his staff informed about work issues - *“I have musters on a morning basis to address any concerns or to let them (the staff) know what is happening. Just to give them a communication and more feedback through and between the various ranks”*.

#### Open-door policy

A majority of the interviewees had an ‘open door’ policy and identified that they thought it reflected the principles of SL. Basically, it meant that staff members were able to enter the office of the boss and speak with them about any issue of concern. The issues raised by the staff might be work-related or related to a personal matter. Many interviewees saw this policy as a way of reducing the hierarchical nature of policing to a more personal, supportive and open management style. One interviewee said - *“It doesn’t matter who you are, if you want to come and talk to me, you come and talk to me. If there are issues you want to discuss, come and discuss them.”*

#### Giving feedback

The interviewees generally indicated that this area can be problematic for them because some tended to focus on the staff who were doing well and found it difficult to manage people who were not performing up to standard. Some interviewees conducted staff surveys to gather feedback about work-related issues. Other interviewees ensured they acknowledged the good work of staff either personally or

by email, if they could not do it in person. One interviewee reported that he sat his staff down after every course to give both negative and positive feedback. This feedback took the form of evaluating the delivery of the course, the staff member's individual performance and the team's performance.

In response to a question about being a supportive leader one comment encompassed the essence of SL - *"I think it just comes back to basic common sense. You treat people the way you want to be treated."*

The concepts of 'respect' and 'courtesy' were offered and the interviewee responded - *"Exactly. Yep. Make sure everyone knows exactly what they have to do when they're doing it. And when they do something good, then you say 'that's good' and when they do something not so good, you help them out to make sure we get it right next time. And we treat each other equally"*.

From an organisational perspective it appears that SL was welcomed and/or already inherent in many management practices.

### **3. What organisational barriers obstruct the use of SL practices?**

Many interviewees reported that one of the major problems with the implementation of SL strategies was the perception that management and the senior executive failed to provide role models for SL. It was noted that there was *"one rule for us, and one for them"*. The actual practices of senior management were not evaluated directly, however, the interview participants perceived that some management practices obstructed SL from becoming an integral part of the organisational culture.

### **Non-attendance of senior officers at SL workshops**

Many interviewees identified that the non-attendance of senior officers at the SL workshop had a trickle down effect, in that subordinate staff were not fully committed to the concept of SL. One interviewee commented that *“the senior management here...they didn’t go, so that sent the message out to others, that you’ve been rostered to attend this, but really don’t, there is no need to turn up.”* Another interviewee made the following comment about a senior officer not supporting the concept of SL – *“it makes it (SL) almost a complete waste of time because it becomes a ‘do as I say and not a do as I do thing’...and getting the most out of people loses its focus somewhat if not everyone is doing it.”* Another interviewee observed that if people at his level (Sgt) had to attend the SL workshop then *“surely, if it’s good enough for us then they (senior officers) should also be going through the same sort of thing.”*

### **Senior officers not applying the SL principles in the workplace**

Interviewees felt *‘let down’* when senior officers did not use the principles of SL in day-to-day work practices and interactions with staff. One interviewee said - *“Well, there are times when I think, well, why bother”* (when senior staff are not applying the principles of SL). Another interviewee observed that it was essential for the officers at the lower levels to see SL supported and used more by police of higher ranks. Another interviewee made the following comments - *“How can you expect it (SL) to have any credibility if your commissioned rank or your executive officers don’t embrace it? One rule for us and one for them?”* The impact of non-supportive leadership had significant negative implications for staff. For instance, *“it can be very stressful at times because we are in a leadership role ourselves, ...if I was wanting to*

*advance myself, the autocratic style of leadership that I receive is holding me back from learning other jobs or other aspects of my job even”.*

### **Role-modelling**

The interviewees expressed the belief that if the senior officers above them were role-modelling and demonstrating the principles of SL, this encouraged a flow on effect which inspired innovation and increased morale. For example, an interviewee commented (when asked: “when you see someone above you using the SL principles, does that encourage you”?) *“Oh, most definitely, the Inspector has taken on the role of ensuring that NCOs attend a leadership training day...we talked about what we could do as a group to try and help the people who are on the road and get the best out of them for themselves and the Jurisdiction”.*

For another interviewee, the benefit of positive role modelling was clear - *“If you are going to bring about the kind of change we have been talking about (SL), it has to be led and believed in and modelled and demonstrated from the top and down”.* He went on further to suggest that if officers at a lower level do not believe SL as being something worthwhile and valid, then it (the concept of SL) would be *“still born”.*

### **Organisational culture factors**

Historically, policing in Australia has been organised along authoritarian and paramilitary lines, which includes regulation of employees through strict organisational rules and legislation. Policing is very hierarchical in nature with ranks generally ranging from Constables to Commissioner. Within the organisation there is a strict compliance with the chain of command for decision-making, policy



formulation and administrative tasks. Using SL strategies in this type of environment, therefore, presents difficulties because it is contrary to the normal operational procedures inherent in policing cultures. For example, one of the interviewees had the following things to say about middle ranking command positions, *'they never want to say "no" to anybody, they just kick the problem upstairs (to a higher rank for a decision). And eventually it comes to this level where you say "no" that's a stupid idea, you're not getting that resource allocation, and they are all peeved (and say) Headquarters doesn't understand us'*.

Another interviewee said: *"the style of police management historically has been authoritarian and to give an order and to expect a response and then look at punishment if people don't achieve the desired response rather than looking at the reasons why they don't"*. This contradiction in cultural values shows the difficulty in implementing SL practices in a chain-of-command environment and serves to exemplify some of the barriers to decision-making faced by individuals due to organisational factors. The following statements further exemplifies the inherent difficulties of organisational culture change in a paramilitary environment - *"It's much easier to direct somebody to do something, what makes us paramilitary is the fact that we have a rank structure, which is really just a pay scale. I think it allows (some) people to boss people and order people around. I am you supervisor, therefore I can tell you what to do and it allows that kind of autocratic decision making and then use it as a fall back because we are a paramilitary organisation"*.

Another interviewee commented - *"they are used to operating in their instinctive way using an old style of management because they have had 30 years of it. They*

*understand the rhetoric of the different ways of being (managing) but are not very good at applying it in the workplace”.*

Although many positive aspects of police culture were identified (eg., *“loyalty, professionalism, hard working and devoted to the job”*), a number of negative aspects were described and viewed as barriers to SL . Negative statements included the following comments – *“out of touch, cronyism or networking, inexperience, lack of people skills, poor communication, self-esteem (I’m better than you, just do as you’re told)”*.

Organisational culture has clearly identified as a barrier to the organisation embracing SL practices – *“Yes, I think definitely culture. I think that Police umm, don’t want to be told how to do something to begin with. So they think that they know everything’. ‘When you have a look at the police organisational culture, (it believes) that nobody is an expert at policing except police”*.

*“It’s ultra-conservative. The organisational culture doesn’t accept change readily. It doesn’t accept anything that isn’t seen as arresting offenders and locking offenders up and treating them to the nth degree of the law. So anything less than that is the soft option, or the social work option. This is what your SL sort of thing would fall into”*.

The cultural aspects of the organisation that impede SL, is perhaps best summed up by one interviewee – *“Oh, well there is still some element of punishment. If you are of lower rank and you get it wrong, you might be punished so that is still a factor... members of the police jurisdiction looking over their shoulders a lot of the time”*.

## **Conclusion**

The results support the notion that SL is a useful first step in the organisational culture change process for this police jurisdiction. SL has raised awareness and reinforced current management practices and has been used to address both personal and workplace issues. Specifically, workplace strategies such as participative decision-making, consultation meetings, open-door policy and giving feedback have been shown to exemplify SL practices.

Overall, the SL workshop successfully met its primary objective of raising awareness and has reinforced or facilitated SL practices across the police jurisdiction. This supports the preliminary evaluation findings by Biggs, et al. (2003). It must also be recognised that organisational change is a long and arduous process, but even more so in a policing environment. In this jurisdiction, it must be noted that SL is only one of a number of initiatives recommended to address occupational stress and change organisational climate, and therefore cannot be evaluated in isolation. However, there are organisational cultural barriers that need to be addressed if change is to occur.

Senior management may support SL and there may well be legitimate operational or organisational reasons for non-attendance. However, the overall perception of non-attendance is that it indicates lack of commitment and devalues the concept of SL. This signals to lower ranked personnel that the SL program is tokenistic. For organisational leadership cultural change to eventuate, this negative perception needs to be addressed.

This applied study has some limitations that should be considered for future research. Firstly, the self-selection of participants in this study reduces the transferability and consistency of the research findings (Slevin & Sines, 2000), though it is not unusual in this type of research to use a non random sample. Secondly, although Kvale (1996) raised questions of interviewer reliability and objectivity, this study attempted to overcome these issues by using a systematic reflection of the conversations held with the participants. According to Kvale (1996), however, this bias may be on the side of the interviewer or the interviewee. The interviewer, in this case, was an ex-police officer and, as Patton (2002) contends, because the researcher is the primary research instrument, researcher bias will be inevitable. Alternatively, Kvale (1996) posits that a subjective perspective may highlight specific aspects of the phenomena being investigated by bringing forward new dimensions. In an effort to overcome bias, however, a second interviewer (different gender and non-police background) was used to clarify themes with the further 19 participants.

Future studies may examine the congruence between a supportive leadership style and the para-military culture of policing organisations. Operational policing lends itself to the giving of orders and the expectation that the orders will be complied with without question by subordinates in emergency situations. However, in terms of interpersonal relationships with co-workers this style of management is abrasive and the required leadership style is quite different. Therefore, police managers need to be able to adopt a leadership style that is congruent with the circumstances being encountered both in an operational environment and a non-operational environment. This difficulty has been highlighted in previous research (Densten, 1999; Sheehan & Cordner, 1989)).

The current evaluation has demonstrated that SL is an organisational level intervention that has raised awareness and reinforced or facilitated SL practices. . Organisational barriers, which may be specific to a police culture, however, have been highlighted and should continue to be addressed by future interventions and research.

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**Table 1**      **First level of themes from interview data**

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | Negative comments about the SL workshop                               |
| 2  | SL reinforces current strategies being used                           |
| 3  | Recognition of the value of human resources                           |
| 4  | Meetings and staff consultation and input                             |
| 5  | Importance of senior officers role-modelling SL                       |
| 6  | Organisational factors as a source of stress                          |
| 7  | Positive comments about SL  |
| 8  | Specific training in skills needed at the various levels              |
| 9  | Paramilitary organisation and rank structure                          |
| 10 | Negative comments about surveys                                       |
| 11 | Recruits at the Police Academy should have talk from Senior Sergeants |
| 12 | SL not relevant for administrative staff                              |
| 13 | Workload effects ability to provide SL                                |
| 14 | Human Resource issues that impact on SL                               |
| 15 | Difficulty in 'changing' people stuck in their ways                   |
| 16 | Importance of Senior Executive applying principles of SL              |
| 17 | On-going commitment to SL training                                    |
| 18 | Effect of lack of support for SL from Senior Executive                |
| 19 | Police management style   |
| 20 | Nature of policing – makes it difficult to use SL principles          |
| 21 | Impact of accountability on policing                                  |
| 22 | Organisational culture  |
| 23 | Lifesaver model of management   |
| 24 | SL strategies already being used                                      |
| 25 | Organisational commitment   |
| 26 | Development of SL skills  |
| 27 | Police Union impact   |
| 28 | SL not appropriate for police organisation                            |
| 29 | Negative comments about training                                      |
| 30 | Environmental factors   |
| 31 | Problems with research instrument                                     |

**Table 11** Model of the themes identified in the study

| First level theme  | Second level theme  | Core themes                               |
|--|---|---|
| 4: Meetings, consultation and staff input strategies and Theme 24: SL strategies already being used.   | <i>Strategies being used that support the principles of S.L.</i>                                  | <i>Individual Values</i>                  |
| 5: Importance of role-models – management behaviour re SL,<br>16: Importance of senior executive using or supporting SL principles<br>18: Effect of lack of support for SL from the senior executive or supervisors.   | <i>Importance of support or lack of support for and role-modelling by senior officers of S.L.</i> | <i>One rule for us, one rule for them</i> |
| 3: Recognition of the value of human resources,<br>14: Impact of Human Resource issues<br>15: Difficulty in changing people stuck in their ways.   | <i>Impact of Human Resource issues on S.L.</i>  | <i>Human Resource dilemmas</i>            |
| 6: Organisational factors as a source of stress,<br>9: Comments re paramilitary organisation and rank structure,<br>13: Organisational factors affecting the ability to provide SL,<br>19: Police management style,<br>20: Nature of policing as a factor impacting on SL<br>22: Organisational culture. | <i>Organisational factors impacting on S.L.</i>   | <i>Organisational factors</i>             |

|   |   |                                 |
|---|---|---------------------------------|
| <p>This theme contains evidence from the interviews to support the view that the S.L. workshop reinforced what some managers were already doing in their day-to-day practice.</p> | <p><i>SL reinforces current strategies being used</i></p> | <p><i>Individual Values</i></p> |
|---|---|---------------------------------|