

Programme and Project Management: Getting it Right!

Jim Dale and Bob Golding argue that the Police Service needs to significantly improve its approach to programme and project management

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It is said that the only certainty is change. The level of change in policing is now at unprecedented levels as forces struggle to implement a myriad of central directives while at the same time manage the aftermath of the collapsed merger programme. Improving protective services, implementing work force modernisation and neighbourhood policing make up some of the current crop although there are many more. Given this level of activity it would be reasonable to assume that the police service is highly proficient at delivering programme and projects but the reality in many forces is very different. All too often projects and programmes fail to deliver, often with costly and damaging consequences.

In this article the authors argue that the police service needs to greatly improve its approach to programme management. Simple lessons learnt and applied in other areas of policing such as the application of doctrine with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, using trained personnel, peer reviews and mentoring can and should be applied to police project and programme management. Currently, there is no central repository for good practice and advice and forces are left to fend for themselves. The police service needs to take on the persona of a 'learning organisation' to avoid hard pushed force change teams having to 're-invent the wheel' every time a new initiative is launched.

Delivering change in any organisation presents significant risks. The Office of Government Commerce (OGC), the body set up to improve programme and project management in the public sector, state that:

*"Alarmingly, and despite the warnings and lessons learnt, up to 80 per cent of all changes fail to deliver the planned benefits. Many run over time and cost and the deliverables do not match the business specification or meet management expectations. Often, the true cost of the change is not evident until the full consequences of the poor delivery are understood."*¹

Stephen Lunn, a management consultant and former member of the ACPO Change and Implementation Support Team (ACIST) said that "Many of the problems encountered in the Police Service delivering programmes and projects are common to other sectors. There are several areas of good practice that could easily be transferred and which could result in significant benefits." Lots of helpful guidance and advice is provided by the OGC on their website (www.ogc.gov.uk). Particularly relevant are the eleven key areas of project and programme failure."² This includes:

Reasons for Failure	
1	Poorly defined roles and responsibilities
2	Inadequate management of risk
3	Failure to engage or manage stakeholders. Poor communications
4	Inadequate business case preparation
5	Poorly trained or inexperienced staff
6	Inadequate financial control
7	Poor benefits management
8	Poor portfolio management eg. as highlighted in the ACIST survey
9	Sloppy approach to procurement
10	Poor contract management
11	Inadequate change management

¹ 'Business Benefits through Programme and Project Management' - TSO publication, 2006

² The 11 Gateway Lessons available at:
www.ogc.gov.uk/senior_management_documents_gateway_lessons_introduction.asp

This list is not rocket science and the pitfalls can be avoided with sound project and programme management. Surely it is better to learn from the mistakes of others than your own? So why then does the police service get it so badly wrong and why are they ‘doomed’ to repeat these mistakes on future occasions?

A study undertaken by ACIST highlighted the frustration experienced by forces that were left struggling with the implementation requirements of numerous ‘doctrines’ from the centre which were ‘too long, not prioritised, not benefit focused and failed to provide adequate information’.³ This, of course, being in addition to changes forces might be seeking to do for themselves, for example in responding to the ‘protective services’ agenda. Good programme management takes a strategic overview, prioritises workloads and ensures that effort is focused. Chasing around trying to achieve everything usually results in very little being achieved.

Some forces maintain a dedicated Programme and Projects Office and employ trained personnel, however, many do not. At worst the response to a new initiative is to set up a project or programme team from scratch, usually made up of people who ‘happen to be available’. All too often, these are individuals without the appropriate training and skills and experience. If this wasn’t bad enough most Project Executives or Senior Responsible Owners (SROs)⁴ have not received any formal training and only have a poor understanding the methodologies that underpin good project and programme management. We would not command a firearms incident in such an unprofessional manner so why do we still appoint SRO’s for a multi million pound high risk collaboration programme who do not possess the experience or training / qualifications to perform the role?

The authors have, disappointingly, found an aversion to Programme and Project methodology amongst some at senior levels in the Police Service who see this as additional bureaucracy which over complicates and gets in the way of ‘getting things done’ efficiently. That view may well be based on some poor experiences where the process has become the end in itself rather than the benefits and outcomes which should be the reason for setting up a project or programme in the first place. The trick is having the confidence and expertise to use the discipline of programme and project management flexibly. Too many projects fail because the associated changes in business process required (e.g. the way we do things) are not made so as to exploit the new systems or technology delivered. The old adage ‘new technology and old organisation = expensive old organisation’ rings true all too often.

The OGC has set up an external review programme called ‘Gateway Reviews’. The intention is to provide a series of check points (referred to as gates) when programmes and significant projects are subject to external scrutiny and review. The reviews aim to be informal, supportive and focus on preventing major problems before they occur. Gateway Reviews are common place in other parts of public sector although far less so in policing. Why is this case? How many projects and programmes in your force are subject to the Gateway Review process? Why is police service comfortable with peer reviews for operational investigations but apparently ignores the Gateway process which works so well in other sectors?

³ ACIST Survey - 30.10.07

⁴ SRO is the term used to describe the person who is ultimately responsible for delivery of a programme

The Gateway Scheme involves recruiting and training reviewers from public sector so that these individuals can undertake reviews in their own or similar organisations. This is not a full time role but involves abstractions, typically of one week’s duration, for each review. Reviews are undertaken on a reciprocal basis, but always under the supervision of an experienced team leader. This minimises costs and provides excellent opportunities for the reviewers to gain experience which can be taken back and applied in their own work place. In time these individuals will provide an ideal recruitment pool for future SRO’s.

Encouraging, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) are now exploring ways in which forces can share good practice, particularly in relation to the more complex collaborative ventures that have been set up across the country to improve protective services. The ACIST survey, referred to earlier, indicated that the vast majority of forces would welcome some programme management support with respect to the centrally delivered doctrines. This support is urgently required given the scale of change being managed by forces both externally and internally driven. It is nonsensical that individual forces are left to wrestle with the complex issues of governance, funding, legal status and personnel related matters when central guidance could and should be available. This advice should extend to all areas of programme and project management. Doctrine is now successfully used in operational areas policing so why continue to exclude project and programme management? This need not be difficult if all forces adopted PRINCE 2, the UK Government’s de-facto standard for projects and MSP, the recommended methodology for programme management.

Bill Gates predicts that organisations will change more in the next 10 years than they have over the last 50. The pace of change is likely to remain, relentless. The Police Service needs to ‘raise its game’ and improve the way programmes and projects are structured and delivered. Public criticism and scrutiny has led to significant improvements in operational areas including the investigation of serious incidents, handling firearms incidents etc. These changes now need to be extended to project and programme management. Failure to do so is likely to lead, regrettably, to some costly and embarrassing failures.

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