

**Building capacity for Public Sector reform
A Systems Practice for Managing Complexity workshop, 14 January 2003**

Andy Humphreys - notes from his presentation

A rapid look at interventions spanning 9 years and still ongoing! - using three case studies.

1. Total systems intervention in strategic planning -

In 1992 I moved into a police command as a superintendent responsible for policing the Scarborough area of North Yorkshire. Policing, like many other public sector areas was in the grip of planning mania and very specifically was moving fast towards streamlining and performance management. This drive towards efficiency and effectiveness had been shaping police management since 1984 but had arrived at the 43 forces across England & Wales at different times and in different ways.

My new command coincided with a transfer from the Sussex force to North Yorkshire Police. Two forces at different stages of development. Whilst both forces delivered quality policing services, Sussex was regarded as a forward thinking organisation in terms of management development and planning whereas North Yorkshire was not so advanced.

Throughout 92/93 I developed a localised system of planning I called Area Planning. The driver for this was not a passion for planning, albeit it was necessary to have some form of plan to identify what we were going to do, with what resources and to be able to recognise when we had arrived. It had far more to do with needing to change a culture. A culture that wanted to be told exactly what to do and avoid ownership of the outcome at all costs!

I'll skip this management challenge by reporting that I developed Area Planning based upon an inclusive approach that saw all staff within the command area participating in what we as a team intended to achieve in the subsequent year. The outputs from this planning were then communicated to the communities we served and this process became the model against which the rest of the force started to engage in planning. It also became the

subject of favourable comment from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. This endorsement resulted in me being sent to Hull University for a year's full time Masters study into management systems. During this time I was to complete a dissertation that would enable a strategic planning process to be developed for the force.

The systems approach that would guide this work was through a meta methodology known as Total Systems Intervention. This is where I take a dangerous voyage into the unknown. As it will be apparent I have moved totally away from the academic world and as such know not where TSI is in relation to current systems thinking, has it flourished, has it become discredited, is it understood within this audience? For the sake of brevity I shall be clumsy and explain TSI as a 'toolbox' approach to systems application. [I'm sure I can hear Prof Mike Jackson groaning in disbelief at such a crass explanation!]

[TSI as a meta-methodology [Slide] looks at the appropriateness of other system methodologies so that they may best be utilised in problem context interventions to improve real life messes. TSI embraces a complementarist approach to systems thinking that is guided through three phases [slide].

During the creativity phase of this intervention together with my academic advisor and friend of many years Keith Ellis, I consulted, through structured interviews, stakeholders to create a 'metaphor picture' of North Yorkshire Police. The use of these metaphors [Slide detailing the metaphors] revealed:

- That there was an urgent need to clarify Chief Officer functions relative to strategic planning
- That the ownership and involvement of stakeholders in strategic planning needed to be established, and
- That there was a need to develop a communication forum and audit trail for strategic planning

I concluded that the dominant metaphors were organism/brain and the dependent metaphors were culture/political.

The choice phase involved utilising the framework of systems of systems methodologies [slide] which showed NYP as a complex system and that relationships amongst stakeholders was pluralist, hence NYP was placed as a systemic-pluralist organisation. This work led to the belief that two key systems based methodologies would assist in the development of the strategic planning process:

- Viable systems model [Stafford Beer]
- Interactive planning [Russell Ackoff]

The implementation phase saw both methodologies used with VSM being utilised as a diagnostic analytical approach and then IP to develop the planning process.

The VSM diagnosis was based on the stakeholder perceptions and it was clear that:

- There was a lack of co-ordination and control
- Audit information was restricted
- Feedback was poor, even non existent in some areas
- Executive 'interference' was evident at lower levels of the system
- System four was non existent and that strategy was missing

A proposed strategic planning process was developed building on the 'Mess Formalisation' stage of IP always keeping Ackoff's principle of 'idealised design in mind. The planning process designed aimed to meet specific criteria:

- To involve all those who could affect, or who would be affected by strategies related to policing North Yorkshire
- To inform and communicate, through involvement, to avoid the pitfalls of re-telling the strategy
- To increase the relevance of strategic planning to operational policing by concentrating upon the core service areas of policing
- To ensure that planning is a continuous process
- To offer a clarity of purpose for consultative forums by providing a guiding method for working within them

- To provide innovative dynamism required by organisations in a highly unstable environment

A workshop critically examined the planning process and following adjustment formed the framework against which strategic planning took place in North Yorkshire Police for some years.

Learning lessons -

[Slide -bullet the learning lessons]

Whilst this intervention was my most overt approach I have to admit to not surfacing the concept of metaphors during the creativity phase of the problem analysis. It was my assessment that the 'jargon' associated with metaphors may have been a threat to the credibility of the ultimate outcome.

The use of the System of Systems Methodology was useful as a newcomer to TSI however, it did feel like a pigeon holing exercise.

The information gathered during the creativity phase interviews was collected on a confidential basis. After being analysed it was fed back to the Chief Officers of the force and despite much of it being controversial and critical it was accepted. During the workshop the messages received were very different and at times conflictual with the interviews. This discrepancy was put down to the exposure of individual values in the presence of powerfully dominant people 'the boss's!' This certainly challenged the bringing together of project clients and stakeholders. It could easily have threatened the credibility of the interventions manager/consultant.

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Four years later, having just returned from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, I was asked to lead a small team to consider a 'root and branch' review of North Yorkshire Police. This was entitled the Boundary & Structure Review and reported directly to the newly appointed Chief Constable.

The background to the B&SR was to be found in a number of drivers [Slide-with explanation to set the context]. The collision of these factors created a huge temptation towards rapid but wrong decision-making! The temptation to leap to apparently sensible conclusions was a trap that I was keen to steer the decision-makers away from.

The power behind many of the drivers indicated to me that any possible systems intervention needed to be well supported through the best possible understanding and analysis. Somewhere down the line there appeared to be an inevitability around needing to model options. Finally, despite the engagement of key powerful drivers, change would only be effective by creating an evidenced based series of change options that would create an environment for change rather than attempting to impose a new series of systems designs.

Whilst I knew that I would probably fail to stay faithful to the full seven stages of Checkland's SSM it appeared to me that the philosophy and key features underpinning SSM would help in achieving a complex intervention.

[Slide of SSM 7 stages] I believe that it is readily accepted that whilst most easily described through the seven stages, practical application of SSM is an iterative dynamic activity working around and between the stages. In particular I wanted to use SSM in this intervention to secure an effective analysis phase. By this stage in my career I had been a part of, or witness to a number of change management interventions and as such I had a number of 'failures' under my belt! In almost every case significant failure factors were due to common issues: [Slide]

- 'Quick Fix' approaches
- Putting the wrong thing right!
- A lack of a systemic approach
- Imposition of change [not engagement]
- Poor communication
- Lack of completion of the change programme

There are bound to be others but these alarm bells were sufficient to tell me that the temptation to rush into 'doing' activity before understanding the problem was a recipe for disaster.

The analysis phase involved work to secure a sufficient understanding to move into 'framing' the intervention or identifying the systems for re-engineering. We even created a 'rich picture' which was framed and given to me by my team upon conclusion of the intervention [Slide]. This analysis led to the identification of 'desired outcome' statements that were agreed with the Chief Officer team.

[Slide of the desired outcomes]

- **Style** - "The provision of a local style of policing across the Force must be enhanced in any boundary or structural changes"
- **Supervision** - "The provision of effective supervision levels, particularly at Inspector rank, throughout the 24 hour period across the Force is essential"
- **Coterminosity** - "Divisions covering single or multiple council areas in their entirety are desirable"
- **Management structure** - "The Force structure must balance effective management with a commitment to 'front line first' service delivery"
- **Custody services** - "The provision of custody services should be provided by an independent centrally based department, at suitably identified locations across the Force"
- **Rationalisation of support services** - " Any changes in boundaries or structures will provide opportunities to review and rationalise the provision of police and support services"

Were these 'root definitions' ?- no. Did they create a description of what the systems were that needed to be modelled?-yes.

At this stage further extensive analysis was undertaken around the systems identified, moving back into analysis, and then work began on the construction of models. These models were often guided by a series of statements of principle that had evolved and emerged during the work. Statements such as: [Slide]

- Recognise the reality [The force had a system of local area policing with LAP commanders identified. It became apparent that the title and the actual individual functioning as the leader of these important policing units were often different. This resulted in a further principle of..

Another example would be the false lines that created LAPs which were more administrative than practical and did not reflect the community principles that underpinned the concept of LAP. Operational officers were ignoring them, administrative systems were not!]

- Same role, different rank, proportional to work load and responsibility [This would recognise that the demands placed upon individuals with the same role varied significantly. In some places LAP Inspectors were working 12-14 hour days in others their golf handicap was improving steadily! The result of this principle would be to place Sgts, Inspectors and Chief Inspectors in the same role grouping each able to report directly to Superintendents without the need to operate through a traditional rank hierarchy]
- Front line first [Administration was skewing operational effectiveness. Devolved budgets had brought about a re-charging practice which resulted in prisoners who had been arrested in one LAP within four miles of a custody area being driven 20 miles to a custody area within their own LAP to avoid re-charging for prisoner handling!]
- From the first floor to the ground floor [This was driven by a 'customer first' principle that would see staff, particularly support staff, working to enhance service delivery with role functionality subservient to customer needs. What did this mean? Well, rather than administrative staff sitting in a police station who's front office was closed to the public, as no police were available to open the station, some would move and be re-trained to work as front counter staff. If, as often was the case, there was limited demand for counter services then they could perform a function of administration. The key factor being that when there was a customer need the service maximised its opportunity to meet it.]

Constantly underpinning this intervention was a principle of creating a learning process. Many of the problems within this mess had been created or exacerbated by the very people who would need to agree to make changes to improve the situation. Therefore the learning approach was crucial to secure engagement and delivery. Interestingly, this sensitivity was almost exposed to dramatic affect when, having been around key elements of the SSM loop and after the stated desired outcomes had been surfaced, I produced a confidential document for the Chief Officers entitled 'Tinkering or Transformation'. This document was a surfacing of models and options

that could see some change or commence a more radical re-engineering agenda that would seek to create organisational headroom and get ahead of the problem situation rather than always seeming to be in problem solution 'catch-up' mode. One Chief Officer re-acted violently towards the title stating that it was 'pre-jorative'. Irrespective of views on sensitivity it was a lesson learnt in terms of client management!

Ultimately a change programme was agreed and action taken. The details are less relevant here but a few moments reflection on the systems approach taken may be worthwhile.

[slide] I fully accept that the seven stages of SSM were not slavishly followed and the evidence application of some stages was at best limited. However, the SSM principles were largely adhered to. Analysis was vitally important and systems for re-engineering were identified with 'desired outcome' statements. These allowed further real world analysis and modelling that led to changes.

[slide] A very small, bright team around me were exposed to systems thinking and embraced the philosophy with ease. At no time did I raise systems thinking with the Chief Officers or any other individual or group involved. Why? Firstly as I have mentioned I had overtly used a systems approach four years before. It was partially successful but tackling the cultural resistance to academic thinking took almost as much energy as the entire intervention! Secondly, I had a lack of confidence to always being able to explain the systems approaches and philosophies, I was, I am a police leader who has had the benefit of engaging on a Masters programme in this field but I fully recognise my own limitations. Finally and probably most sensitively, most of the 'good ideas' within this intervention needed to be attributed to the new Chief Constable. It was his force and his leadership that would ensure follow through of concept to achieve the change management programme. However, he was able to do this without knowledge of the systems thinking behind the change programme. This must surely be a factor for many consultants and those leading interventions.

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In the time left I just wanted to mention a current challenge. Over the last two years I have moved onto a more national and international platform

working for what used to be called National Police Training and is now called Centrex [the Central Police Training & Development Authority]. This organisation has a diverse challenge and is central to the learning and development of policing in England & Wales and has an extensive international portfolio. It not only trains most of the new police recruits, high potential officers, tomorrows Chief Officers and specialist investigators but it also operationally supports high profile investigations and major incidents. Last year we attend over 560 murders, X rapes and Y abductions. We also attended all major disasters such as the Potters Bar rail disaster and Yarlswood Detention Centre fire. We occupy over twenty sights in this country and last year worked in over 60 countries across the world. So where's my challenge?

There are two main threads:

[Slide]

- Internal business re-organisation
- Developing a National Police Centre for Excellence