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Research co-production and knowledge mobilisation in policing

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Abstract

This chapter argues for a transformation in the relations between researchers and police partners in the co-production of knowledge to inform policing strategies and practices. In contrast to certain dominant models of Evidence Based Policing, co-production affords a different understanding of the generation, mobilisation and application of knowledge. It requires a fundamental refiguring of both the way researchers engage with police partners and the place and value of knowledge, data and evidence within policing. The attributes and challenges of co-production are explored and analysed drawing on experiences from existing police-university collaborations. It highlights the significant hurdles that need to be negotiated to realise the necessary structural and organisational change that co-production demands. Co-production embraces a plurality of sources of data and raises questions about the nature of power relations between partners and the dangers of collusion. The chapter advances a vision of the division of labour that is structured around the 'independent interdependence' of researchers and practitioners.

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Introduction

Calls for evidence-based policing as a major plank in the professionalisation of the police have reached something of a crescendo in recent years, in the UK in particular. Against a background of fiscal restraint in the public sector, these calls have taken on a decidedly prominent place in justifying continued public investment in the police organisation. In the process, social science is heralded as promising to transform and modernise the use of police discretion (Sherman, 1998; 2013). Science is thereby invested with the potency of providing the basis for contemporary police legitimacy and delivering a transformed frontline. Yet the goal of realising an evidence-based profession remains as stubbornly elusive and as complex as ever.

The existing relationship between research (in universities) and policing practice has been evocatively portrayed by Bradley and Nixon (2009) as a 'dialogue of the deaf'. In this chapter, I argue that this entrenched state of affairs is not helped by the manner in which the 'dialogue' has been conceived and conducted within certain models of Evidence-Based Policing (EBP). My aim is to advance a distinctly different vision that is structured around the 'independent interdependence' of researchers and practitioners in the co-production of research, knowledge generation, and the mobilisation and application of evidence in policing. This demands a transformation in both the way researchers engage with policing partners and the place and value of knowledge, data and evidence within policing. It also raises questions about the appropriate division of labour, the nature of power relations between partners and the dangers of collusion. Whilst the context and experiences outlined in the chapter are distinctly British, my contention is that the implications for police-academic relations extend beyond these islands, especially to the English-speaking world in which the EBP movement has developed some considerable momentum.

In support of these arguments, I draw upon experiences and insights from leading two collaborative initiatives designed to strengthen the research evidence base and foster the mobilisation and translation of knowledge into policing practice in England. Both programmes of work were informed by a particular conceptual and philosophical approach to the need for change in the relationship between research and policing and the manner in which change might best be realised. The first was an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Knowledge Exchange Opportunities Scheme (2014-15); a collaboration between West Yorkshire Police/Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for West Yorkshire and a team of researchers at the University of Leeds. This was funded as a year-long experimental pilot to explore the challenges and opportunities for different modes of knowledge exchange and research co-production. These were focused around four research themes of public order, acquisitive crime, community engagement and policing partnerships.[1] Each brought together researchers with policing professionals working in collaborative teams overseen by a steering group incorporating senior officers. In particular, the chapter draws on evidence collected via focus group interviews conducted with members of both the research team and policing partners.[2]

The second project is the ongoing N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP) funded by a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Catalyst grant (2015-20). This is a collaborative partnership between eight universities and 11 police forces in a five year programme of activities. It constitutes a platform for collaborations between universities, PCCs, police forces and partners across the north of England.[3] It seeks to harness the skills, capabilities and resources across the participating police force areas, enabling multi-

disciplinary expertise in problem-solving. It affords opportunities to deliver research, innovation and impact at a significant scale given the nature of cross-force participation.

The chapter draws on the design, ambitions and practical experiences of these two initiatives to illustrate both the potential and challenges that confront a model of research-practice co-production in policing. The chapter argues for a transformation in the relation and division of labour between academic researchers and policing partners as well as the value of co-production in knowledge generation, mobilisation and application within policing. In contrast to certain dominant models of EBP (Weisburd and Neyroud 2011; Sherman 1998; 2013), it suggests the way forward is a judicious mixture of ambition and caution; ambitious in its transformative logic for organisational culture and working practices, but cautious in the understanding of 'evidence' which embraces a plurality of sources of data, rejects a rigid hierarchy of knowledge and recognises that the ultimate destination is always incomplete knowledge. The attributes and challenges of co-production are explored and analysed. It argues that co-production offers opportunities to disrupt creatively existing working assumptions among both researchers and policing practitioners with a transformative potential for innovation in policing. However, it also highlights the significant hurdles that need to be negotiated to realise the necessary structural and organisational change that co-production demands.

'Dialogue of the Deaf'?

Within the UK, there is a limited history of collaborative relations between research and policing. Relations are more often than not informed by and reflect mutual misunderstanding, suspicion, distrust and disengagement. Undoubtedly academic researchers and police professionals both display very different organisational cultures, priorities, interests and

working practices. Not only do they embody radically different conceptions of what constitutes 'evidence of effectiveness' (Buerger, 2010) but they are also influenced by contrasting demands and driven by very distinct philosophies, values and motivations. Whilst it would be wrong to become overly preoccupied with polarised stereotyping, nonetheless, caricatured misunderstandings frequently inform existing beliefs from both sides. Consequently, such perceptions need to be acknowledged, challenged and overcome. That they exist in abundance has been apparent in both initiatives. The ESRC project provided ample examples from the focus groups. One officer, for example, commented with regard to expectations at the outset:

> 'I was completely unsure as to what to expect. Was it just going to be a talking shop, with lots of "academic" theory, and where nothing would have changed by the end?'

Another officer suggested:

> 'The grant was awarded to the University of Leeds, so I was concerned that the academics might see it as a means to an end; that is to produce journal articles, rather than a useful report.'

More broadly, the different time-horizons of police and academics was a frequemtly noted source of tension. As one officer observed: 'The [police] culture of not being able to invest in something that is interesting and has longer-term benefits is a problem'. Dispelling such concerns – by producing reports in a timely manner - was therefore vital to relationship building and securing trust.

Less frequently noted are the similarities between universities and the police. They are both large bureaucratic organisations that have experienced – to greater or lesser degrees of success – recent government-imposed managerialist reforms. Both organisations exhibit traditional conservative assumptions, albeit different styles of management. If left to their

own devices they tend to stick with what they know for as long as possible. Both are rich in 'knowledge assets' (Bastow *et al*., 2014) – people, data, resources and practices – that are ripe to be deployed in and through external collaborations.

Recent changes to the UK policy environment have encouraged something of a rapprochement between universities and police practitioners – albeit sometimes more in name than in substance. As a consequence, there has been a flurry of recent police-academic partnership developments (Goode and Limsden, 2016). Key factors propelling this trend include the inauguration of the College of Policing in 2012 with its mission to 'set standards of professional practice that draw on the best available evidence' and 'provide practical and common-sense approaches based on evidence of what works' (College of Policing, 2014: 10, 35). The College has helped push the case for an evidence-based profession to the forefront of policy debate. It has done much to stimulate the conditions for rethinking the role and operationalisation of evidence in policing. Additionally, the introduction of PCCs as 'commissioning' bodies for crime and policing services by altering the policing governance landscape have opened up new possibilities for external dialogue (Crawford, 2016). Since their first elections in November 2012, some PCCs have injected new opportunities for innovation, added greater transparency and foregrounded the role of 'public engagement' - albeit narrowly conceived in terms of public opinion reflected in surveys, news and social media. However, they have also introduced greater politicisation, shortened-time horizons with regard to priorities (based on electoral timescales), fostered a certain parochialism given that PCCs' electorate are only those within their force area, and added a new dimension to inter-force rivalries and competition. More controversially, British government austerity measures (since 2010) - resulting in significant reductions to budgets and police personnel - have forced senior police managers to explore ways of 'doing more with less'. As such, they

have challenged many traditional assumptions and working practices and injected opportunities for research informed collaborations as a means of cost savings.

Limitations in Dominant Models of EBP

In their call for a 'new paradigm of police science', Weisburd and Neyroud (2011) provide an important contribution to thinking about and re-imagining the relationship between research (universities) and practice (police). They present a strong argument in support of the view that policing practices would be substantially improved by more systematic attention to, and application of, evidence about the effects of policing strategies and interventions. However, it is their preferred vision for the future, the assumptions that inform their repositioning of the police-research relationship and their conclusion that the police take charge of the research agenda that, for me, are problematic. They call for a 'new paradigm that changes the relationship between science and policing', in which 'the police adopt and advance evidence-based policy and that universities become active participants in the everyday world of police practice' (*ibid*.: 1). They argue for a 'shift in ownership of police science from the universities to police agencies' (*ibid*.: 1). As Sparrow (2016: 130-1) astutely notes, most commentators would endorse a closer, flourishing collaboration between the fields of policing and scholarship: 'However, at this time, the relationship remains fragile, and much harm might be done if we accept a vision for the future of the relationship that is somehow misguided, inappropriate or off-base'. Before outlining an alternative vision, it is worth briefly summarising deficiencies in the approach proffered by Weisburd and Neyroud.

Narrow Understanding of Evidence and 'Elite Science'

The approach they advocate advances a narrow understanding of evidence and 'science'. It posits a clear hierarchy of knowledge informed by a ranking of methodologies with random

control trials (RCTs) at its apex - epitomised by the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods (Sherman, 2009). RCTs strip away the complexities of reality in an effort to isolate certain factors. Such contextual factors, however, may be central to a programme's execution and impact. Whilst RCTs provide strong internal validity they do not tell us much about whether we could replicate that intervention in another context (Hough, 2010). They embody a linear notion of causality. Yet for complex social phenomena, not only are causes multiple, but feedback loops may make them more circular in effect. Critically, it is important to be cognizant of the limits of our knowledge; to know what we do not know or at least to appreciate that there are limits to what we know. Methodological pluralism is needed for such tasks. There is a palpable danger that a rigid hierarchy of knowledge – with RCTs as the 'gold standard' – simply reflects an illusory 'desire to attach certainty to police operations' (Hope, 2009: 127). In its narrowing of the frame of relevance, such an approach advances an 'elite science' (Sparrow 2016).

This methodological elitism is unnecessarily blinkered and unrealistic - in at least two senses of the word. First, it is as if 'realism' and 'realist evaluation' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Pawson, 2013) had not already provided a robust critique of the assumptions within and limitations of the quasi-experimental paradigm and its methodologies. As Tilley (2009: 138) summarises:

> 'Social programmes involve intentional inter action. Differing sub-groups interact with programme components in different ways. Stakeholders, including subjects, adapt over time, meaning not only that the intervention but also responses to it change over time. There is ineluctable complexity as programmes set off chains of action, inter action, feedback and adaptation.'

Secondly, it is unrealistic in the sense that such experiments are costly, time consuming and resource intensive. They are, as Eck (2002: 109) warns, 'an awkward, inefficient and unnatural way to learn about what works when we are interested in small-scale, small-claim, discrete interventions'. They do not lend themselves well to the deployment of knowledge in aid of ongoing reflection and learning.

Despite drawing heavily on Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) in support of a 'police science', there is less frequent acknowledgement of the nuanced debates within healthcare about what constitutes good evidence, notably the more recent shift away from evidence based on 'hierarchies' to an understanding of 'appropriateness' (Abeysinghe and Parkhurst, 2013). In place of a fixed hierarchy of evidence, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the UK has issued revised guidelines (NICE 2012)[4] that proffer a more pluralist understanding of 'appropriate evidence'. As Michael Rawlins (a former NICE Chairman) has powerfully argued, in the context of healthcare:

> 'The fundamental flaw with the development and use of hierarchies of evidence is that they fail to recognize that it is not the method that matters, but whether the particular method is appropriate to answer the particular question… practitioners… harm themselves, their discipline - not to mention the patients they seek to serve - by slavish adherence to hierarchies of evidence.' (2004: 235)

Specificities of Policing

There are certain features of policing that should not be ignored in drawing lessons from the healthcare setting. Policing entails the more routine use of coercive force over and against certain groups of people. Whilst some facets of healthcare are clearly coercive (notably mental health) and entail dimensions of control and rights, nonetheless, the everyday

deployment of coercion informs the fundamental relation between police and public in a distinct way to that between healthcare professionals and patients. As Thacher (2001) has argued: 'Policing is not a treatment'. Arrests are not aspirins! Importantly, unlike aspirins arrest involve coercion (either implicitly or explicitly) and can be delivered in very different ways which dramatically affect the manner in which they are received by those subject to them and their resultant impact. Simply put, there are good and bad arrests, there are ones that conform to principles of procedural justice and those that do not. Some arrests will be triggered by the manner in which suspects respond to police actions, particularly in relation to public order offences. This underscores the complexities of the social world – which is neither linear nor static – and which entails 'reactance', reflexivity and feedback on the part of practitioners charged with implementing services, as well as member of the public or 'recipients' of policing strategies. Whereas more health-care is a good in itself, policing is contested. More security is not inevitably a social good, notably given the tense relationship with liberty.

Science alone is not enough

Even if there is agreement on the 'evidence' – be it in the context of healthcare or policing - there remain important questions about social values and deliverability. These introduce into the mix other, messier dimensions in the (non-)utilization of research in policy and practices. This might be interpreted as the interplay – or clash - between three very different lenses: politics (values); evidence (knowledge); and delivery (implementation). Evidence alone is insufficient. It has been recognised for some time that policy-makers and practitioners make decisions in environments where they are subject to various, often conflicting, pressures, influences and priorities. 'Evidence' is only one (often contested) element in this complex mix (Nutley *et al*., 2007). That policing is a normative enterprise – governed by key

principles of respect for individual rights, due process and equal treatment – and, hence, intrinsically political has been long recognised (Reiner, 2010). Recently, PCCs have injected a starkly evident political dimension. Engaging with the political and normative dimensions of policing demands consideration of social value judgements; with 'the ethical principles, preferences, culture, and aspirations of society' which are themselves ultimately 'informed by the general public' (Rawlins, 2004: 233). RCTs and EBP have blind-spots when it comes to politics and values. In the context of healthcare, questions of public understanding and trust in research and guidance derived from it have been identified as pivotal in transcending conflicts of interest (Lenzer, 2013). There is an important place for public understanding, deliberation and judgement of evidence and the role of the public as agents in knowledge production. Yet the citizen and the public are conspicuously absent from the elitist 'new paradigm' in the reformulation of science in policing that some EBP advocate. They are seen as passive recipients of a service rather than as active co-producers of security, policing and order.

Evidence in the Service of Organisational Legitimacy

For Weisburd and Neyroud evidence is recurrently interpreted a means for promoting legitimacy. They argue that 'the advancement of science in policing' is 'essential to retain public support and legitimacy' (2011: 6). This appears to misunderstand that it is not science *per se* that enhances legitimacy but the public understanding of science wherein legitimacy resides. This implies a role for citizen engagement and public deliberation as embedded in the process of knowledge mobilisation – increasingly recognised in the context of healthcare (Ocloo and Matthews, 2016).[5] What Weisburd and Neyroud construct as a bilateral relation between police-academia, should rather be viewed as a multi-level relationship between policing (plurally understood), citizens and research institutions.

Engagement that injects a judicious dimension of public purpose and social value is also important to keep in check the very powerful organisational interests that inform knowledge generation, validation and what counts as 'science'. There is a lingering concern with Weisburd and Neyroud's arguments that evidence is to be used to legitimise policing rather than to challenge and improve it. Legitimacy from their perspective is associated with justifying large amounts of public sector resources that are accorded to policing. They note: 'Policing is becoming increasingly expensive as a public service, and without a scientific base to legitimize the value of police, it is likely that public policing will face growing threats from other less costly alternatives, like private policing' (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011: 10).

Evidence in the service of organisational legitimacy raises acute concerns about vested interests. It reminds us of the need for sensitivities to relations of power-knowledge and the involvement of knowledge in the maintenance of power relations. This is, of course, a significant concern in the field of medicine and healthcare where important lessons might be learnt with regard to evidence biases and the hidden hand of vested interests (Greenhalgh *et al*., 2014: 5). The 'dark sides' of the close relationship between 'science' and medicine are reflected in the corrosive interests of drug companies in the production and communication (as well as silencing) of scientific 'evidence' (Elliott, 2010). Research must be mindful of the interests and organisational priorities of the police or others. Knowledge needs to remain the basis of critical reflection. Hence, there is a need for research to maintain a critical independence and 'detached stance' that constitutes a central value in ensuring impartiality. Even-handedness and lack of bias are key to assuring the perceived authority and legitimacy of evidence in the eyes of the public and other stakeholders.

Knowledge Co-production

Bradley and Nixon (2009: 430) argue for a new methodology of engagement built on establishing and sustaining 'long-term partnerships between police and academics' in which there is greater regard for 'diffusion and impact'. It is in this same vein that colleagues and I have been forging new forms of relations and deploying experimental methodologies with the aim of constructing the terrain for a new dialogue. The model of police-university collaboration that we have been building (through the ESRC and HEFCE projects) is founded on a philosophy of research co-production and knowledge mobilisation; namely the systematic process of getting the best evidence to the appropriate decision-makers in an accessible and timely manner so as to influence decision-making (Bannister and Hardill, 2013). This model is closely related to, and builds on, traditions of participatory action research and co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). The idea of co-production was first articulated and developed by Elinor Ostrom and colleagues in a series of studies of the Chicago police in the 1970s (Ostrom and Baugh, 1973; Ostrom *et al*., 1978). They posited co-production as a means of increasing the effectiveness of local service delivery through increased 'consumer' involvement in service production:

> 'Coproduction involves a mixing of the productive efforts of regular and consumer producers. This mixing may occur directly, involving coordinated efforts in the same production process, or indirectly through independent, yet related efforts of regular producers and consumer producers.' (Park *et al*., 1981: 1002)

Subsequently, co-production has acquired a foothold within policing, albeit primarily with regard to service production and community policing (Friedmann, 1992). Co-production has also gained considerable currency in debates on health and social care (Boyle *et al*., 2010; Realpe and Wallace, 2010).

Co-production contrasts with more traditional approaches to research, where the main involvement of non-academics is as the subjects to be investigated or as commissioners and recipients of research findings. It departs from the more linear model of research engagement with policy set down in the Rothschild Report (1971) on *The Organisation and Management of Government Research and Development* which heralded a period of increased government research funding but did so in a framework of a customer-contractor principle, whereby: the customer says what they want; the contractor does it (if they can); and the customer pays. Kogan and colleagues concluded that the Rothschild formula:

> 'failed to note how in those areas of policy where data are diffuse, and analyses most likely to be strongly influenced by value preferences, problems must be identified collaboratively between policy-maker and scientist. It failed to acknowledge that policy makers have to work hard to identify problems, to specify research that might help solve them, and to receive and use the results of research.' (2006: 15)

Despite such discerning observations, much the same assumptions inform the dominant 'donor-recipient' model of impact that underlies the UK assessment of academic research; instituted by HEFCE in the form of the Research Excellence Framework (REF).[6] Implicit therein is an apparently benevolent knowledge producer (university/academic) whose research eventually effects change over an external community, organisation or policy domain. This presents a highly instrumental, mechanistic and linear reading of impact as a causal chain by which one party does something to/for another party at a particular moment in time and space which is visible, concrete and tangible in that it leaves traces. Such a 'mythology of impact' as an outcome is belied by the more complex, non-linear and nuanced multiple processes and relations through which impact ensues and develops. It ignores the

very real dimension of serendipity, whereby impacts arise from opportunistic, unintended or chance encounters.

By definition, co-production involves bringing together parties that may have markedly 'different priorities and preoccupations' (Martin, 2010: 212), with the aim of working together towards a mutually-agreed 'production' (Brudney and England, 1983; see also Wood and Bradley, 2009). At the core of co-production is the idea of collaborative advantage; 'gained through collaboration when something is achieved that could not have been achieved by any organization acting alone' (Vangen and Huxham, 2003: S62). Hence, negotiating common purpose, forging shared priorities and ensuring appreciation of the divergent contributions of differing partners are all cornerstones for mature partnerships in co-production. This notion of collaborative advantage when applied to knowledge generation, validation, diffusion and application provides the framework for the approach to research co-production and knowledge mobilisation, advanced here. As such, it is argued that co-production has greater potential than traditional approaches to provide practical and policy-relevant insights and impacts, as well as findings that advance intellectual understanding (Pohl *et al*., 2010): 'Co-production as a meta-methodology… may not just contribute to generating both academic insight and public benefit, but potentially also *different* (and *greater*) intellectual insights' (Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016: 14-15, emphasis in original). Advantage derives not simply in the combination of perspectives but in framing and shaping questions, methodologies and impacts differently. Co-production implies a reformed conception of what constitutes knowledge, how it is mobilised and used. In sum, our approach to co-production assumes mutual respect, a lack of a rigid hierarchy of knowledge forms, fluid and permeable disciplinary boundaries, a two-way flow of knowledge between

researchers and non-academics (not simply its 'transfer'), and a normative concern with usefulness and action.

A Plurality of Knowledge

Importantly, co-production challenges the notion of a distinct hierarchy of knowledge. By contrast, diverse forms of expertise – among academics, practitioners, businesses and members of the public – are considered valuable and contribute to knowledge production and mobilisation. It is the interplay between different forms of knowledge, in providing varied insights that matters. RCTs certainly have their place – in some cases an important place – but they do not and cannot stand alone. Moreover, there are many questions that RCTs are not well placed to answer or assist in constructing the evidence base and its utilisation. Co-production embraces plural sources of knowledge and mixed methodologies. Co-production also acknowledges the importance of police officer intuition, practical reasoning, situated knowledge and, more generally, the role of 'police craft' (Bayley and Bittner, 1984). Whether recognised or not, 'policing "craft", or the culmination of knowledge based on hands-on experience, is a feature of police culture that poses a formidable obstacle to implementing new policies and practices' (Willis, 2013: 2). Rather than bemoan the lack of uptake of 'scientific evidence', as some EBP proponents do (Sherman 2015), greater value would be derived from engaging with such sources of knowledge mobilisation. The argument here is not for the triumph of one over the other, but rather for a fuller appreciation of the qualities, merits and insights provided by each in understanding and contextualising the other. There is no uncomplicated answer to the question of what counts as good (enough) evidence. In large part, it depends on what it is we seek to know, what purposes are sought and in what contexts the evidence is to be used. Whilst it is wholly appropriate to debate and challenge the standards of evidence and rigours of methodologies, we also need to be realistic about the

extent to which such standard-setting will shape or influence the complex and highly politicised decision-making that policy-makers, policing managers and local practitioners engage in everyday (Nutley *et al*., 2013).

From this perspective, knowledge mobilisation is a collaborative process entailing critical reflection on social reality and possibilities for transformation in order to effect change. It underscores the value of ongoing lesson learning, reflexivity and contingency in a way that radically departs from the fixity of gold standard 'what works' that preoccupies some social scientists, the fear of failure that haunts police practitioners – aptly conveyed by one police officer in a focus group who described how 'policing initiatives are doomed to succeed' – and the quest for 'golden bullets' that fixates policy-makers. It stands in stark contrast to the ingrained culture of institutional defensiveness which has marked much British policing; as evidenced all too clearly in the police response to the Hillsborough disaster over nearly three decades (Scraton 2016). Co-production prompts a culture of learning, external engagement and openness. Hence, for our purposes, co-production is a means to realising wider structural, organisational and cultural change both among policing organisations and within universities.

The Politics of Evidence

Co-production also encourages not only a focus on the *supply* of evidence – to generate knowledge and to present it in a form that is accessible to policy-makers and practitioners – but also to the *demand* for evidence. The approach to co-production advocated here is that those who are going to use research and apply the knowledge base should be involved in building it by actively co-producing the evidence. Policing professionals need to become knowledge producers as well as evidence users. Rather than research conceived as a distanced and linear process, it is an interactive, reciprocal and iterative process. This means

recognising the 'politics' of evidence informed policy-making (Cairney, 2016) and the manifest centrality of emotions and affect to such questions. How people feel and their emotional sensibilities can be important dimensions in policies that centre on behaviour change (Hardill and Mills, 2013). This is particularly evident in relation to policing and punishment, where rational decision-making and evidence often take second place to deeply ingrained feelings, fears and sentiments that are aroused by problems of crime and victimisation.

The political role of the PCC reinforces this dimension. In reality, the experiences of collaborative partnerships from the two projects between policing partners and universities highlighted that the relationship between the police force and PCC within an area is not a simple one. The relationship is embryonic and many PCCs are still feeling their way as there remain evident questions and challenges over where the power lies and what delimits the full scope of the governance powers. The experience from the ESRC project highlighted that the two organisations should not be treated as undifferentiated or the same in priorities, values and capabilities. Rather their differing roles, contribution and limitations need to be recognised. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that commitments made by the PCC can be relied upon with regard to the police force or that communication between the two is in any sense straight forward. The nature of the multilateral relationship made lines of communication and reporting more complex and even more important to get right. One of the recommendations of the ESRC project emphasised the value of police forces having a portfolio holder for promoting evidence-based policing and overseeing research relations via appropriate organisational structures that combines and straddles the Office of the PCC and police. It was felt that such a structure would ensure greater coordination, simpler lines of communication and buy-in at the top. West Yorkshire Police have subsequently implemented

such a model in the light of the ESRC project experiences with the establishment of the Joint Innovation Group (in early 2016).

The dissonances between police and PCC also raise questions about deliverability. It has long been recognised in policing that 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) invariably subverted, transformed and resisted policies in their implementation. Cultural obstacles to fostering change at the frontline are substantial and return us to role of police 'craft' and intuition as impediments to the application of 'science'. A number of respondents voiced the concern that the 'culture' of the police organisation 'will trump whatever' the evidence says or even what the senior command team may seek to foster concerning the use of evidence. Once again, this demands a fuller appreciation of the qualities, merits and insights provided by such practical reasoning in knowledge mobilisation and utilisation.

The Challenges of Co-production

This underscores the fact that co-production is neither easy nor uncomplicated. Co-production brings considerable challenges and raises tensions and differences that need to be managed. It blurs roles, relations and boundaries. The boundaries between pure and applied research become less distinct as do disciplinary and professional boundaries. It implies greater flexibility and more fluid methodologies. Fundamental to co-production is an open and flexible research process, and the relationships that are its backbone. Co-production challenges traditional research practices, working assumptions and models of operation. Rooted in relationships, it demands flexibility in terms of methods. But flexibility is not only a product of relationships (which themselves shift and change over time), but also in recognition of the complexity of the social world and the challenges of *emergence*. People are active, reflexive subjects who exercise volition and this often demands reflexivity built into

modes of research and evaluation. Emergence highlights the potential effects, adaptations, societal changes and unintended consequences that are associated with the introduction of new programmes or innovations (Pawson, 2013). Hence, co-production draws into sharp focus the non-linear nature of the research process and of knowledge translation and impact. It also demands different skills and capabilities, notably with regard to leadership and the negotiation of relationships.

For some, it challenges conventional understandings of assessment and raises questions about rigour in research. As Pain and colleagues (2015) note, there are significant differences in time, openness and relationships required for co-production to reach its full potential and flourish. What is less often acknowledged is that co-production thrives in the right conditions, and can be challenging to orchestrate without them. There are serious barriers that include funding, development time, institutional structures, priorities and reward mechanisms. This presents problems for evaluating impact which arises as 'a process often involving a gradual, porous and diffuse series of changes undertaken collaboratively' (*ibid*: 4). Whilst co-production is open, dynamic and flexible, and hence, impact cannot be fully known in advance, this does not mean that it is left to chance or accident. Rather, this points to both requirements to foster the conditions that underpin and enable serendipity and the necessity to exploit and maximize the utility of serendipitous developments.

For some, co-production enables a democratisation of the research process. It conforms to an ethic of doing research *with* rather than *on* people. Notably in the context of participatory community studies, this translates into an ethical commitment to 'nothing about us, without us' (Pain *et al*., 2015: 8-9). Co-production has been described by Pain and colleagues (2015) as constituting a 'soup' made up of multi-faceted knowledge that reflects lived experience

and is stirred up and checked by many different people and diverse inspirations throughout the process. However, as this analogy suggests there are dangers that co-production is seen as blurring, effacing and eroding professional differences and disciplinary foundations. Some celebrate this erosion and blending arguing for 'embodied connection' as 'a state that is created when people are active together in a shared space with a common goal' (Pain *et al*., 2015: 8). Yet, particularly in the context of policing, there are a number of pitfalls with these rose-tinted visions of co-production.

First, the celebration of blurring is in danger of losing sight of distinctiveness, difference and the diversity of contribution, expertise and skills, as the varying different perspectives and priorities are commingled, melded and (con)fused. In the 'soup' of co-production there are evident dangers that independence, autonomy and the value of distinctive contributions are lost in a mixture of sameness. It is, after all, difference that constitutes the life-blood of collaborative advantage.

Second, there is an implicit assumption – particularly evident in research co-production work with voluntary sector and civil society organisations, as well as community groups – that co-production as a strategy is linked to empowering relatively powerless and disenfranchised groups. In the context of policing, this is far from the case. The police are a powerful, authoritative organisation that is well versed at articulating its own preferences and interests, as well as its narrative construction of events (as the police response to Hillsborough testifies). Additionally, PCCs have large budgets and are vested with wide powers and responsibilities. Research into various forms of policing partnerships invariably highlights the tendency of police to dominate agendas and to side-line dissenting voices (Crawford, 1997). Police officers themselves have recourse to significant legal powers, access to informational

resources and can deploy legitimate coercive force. The 'special competence' of the police is their capacity for decisive action; the authority to intervene where 'non-negotiable coercive force' may have to be used (Bittner 1970: 46). This generic coercive authority, although relatively rarely used, differentiates the police from most other public servants.

In such a context, co-production is aligned less to the priority of empowerment but rather to engagement, reflection and checking the legitimate use of power. The co-production process is not free of hierarchies, structural conflicts and differential power relations, all of which require complex and subtle negotiation and management. Disagreements and tensions should not be side-lined, avoided or subsumed in the rush for a 'goal of unity' (Crawford, 1997: 137-9) or quest for consensus. Rather, conflicts need to be recognised, addressed and managed in appropriate open forums through deliberation. Shared understanding does not mean that all the partners necessarily agree on the problem/evidence or hold the same view of it (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015). This does not mean that the basis of a consensus cannot be constructed, but rather that to do so necessitates the acceptance of difference and the active negotiation of commonalities. Mutual recognition of difference represents a more secure premise for co-production relations than an assumed consensus or undifferentiated 'soup' of inspirations. Conflict may be the healthy expression of different interests which need to be negotiated in open and constructive ways that recognises - and where possible seeks to compensate for - power differentials.

Critical Reflection and 'Independent Interdependence'

All of this demands that knowledge creation and mobilisation – co-produced or otherwise – should not become an extension of policing; driven purely by the needs and exigencies of the police organisations. Co-production is not a vehicle for the realization of research *for* the

police (in place of research *on* or *by* the police), but rather the generation of knowledge that challenges policing assumptions and working practices and yet maintains a critical distance and autonomy. This also exposes deficiencies in the dominant model of EBP proponents who argue for the 'integration' of research with practice, whereby science and research are 'an organic part of the police mission' (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011: 11). There are similar parallels here with Braga's (2013) vision of 'embedded researchers' working within police departments. If research becomes too closely tied to the organisational interests of the police it will lose its vital critical distance and become an arm of, and justification for, prevailing practices (or dominant programmes of change) rather than an engine of critical improvement.

Hence, boundary crossing is both an essential and dynamic element of co-production which prompts continual reassessment of assumptions, critical self-reflection on values and questioning of terminology. Boundary crossing affords considerable possibilities to challenge introspective organisational cultures and myopic managerial practices, as well as inappropriate attitudes and behaviours within organisations. Despite an inevitable blurring of boundaries, this does not mean that they disappear altogether. Research and researchers must retain their critical independence. To do otherwise would fall foul of the worse criticisms of some of the self-serving interests that blight some pharmaceutical research (Goldacre, 2012). 'Independent interdependence' becomes the standard for relations between organisations in co-production – constituting 'the weak force which binds' parties (Rock, 1990: 39). Partners need to have a shared understanding of mutual respect and appreciation for the divergent interests, values and norms that hold the partnership together. However, for such partnerships to play an evident role in transforming organisational cultures, they also need to be embedded and sustained in frontline practices. The reality is that successful inter-organisational partnerships need to be forged, nurtured and supported at all levels by people committed to

realising the benefits of collaborative working and exploiting the disruptive opportunities for innovation and cross-cultural learning that boundary crossing provides.

Trust

Co-production relies upon open and trusting inter-personal and inter-organisational relations. Trust is a central coordinating mechanism of networks of co-production and is essential for cooperative behaviour (Tyler, 2010). A key ingredient in successful partnerships entails establishing and sustaining trust relations across agency boundaries (Crawford 1997). This is not easy, particularly where there is a history of mistrust or misunderstanding. A crucial element in establishing trust relations is making different partners aware of the limitations and capabilities of their own and participating organisations' contribution; so that they neither try to 'do it all' (something that the police are particularly prone to do and often expected by others to do as a '24 hour' service), nor do they have unrealistic expectations of what others can deliver. Mutual respect and recognition of professional judgement, discretion and differing organisational priorities, help to foster open partnership relations built on trust. As one officer put it:

> 'There needs to be a common understanding of what collaboration means. It looks good on paper, but it means much more than ticking the box. It means sharing the challenges and the risks.'

Another, police respondent from the ESRC focus group categorically stated: 'I've learnt the benefits of collaboration and that *one plus one really is equal to greater than two*!'

The importance of the quality of partnership relations of building trust and mutual understanding as well as ownership of and commitment to the relationship and its outcomes has been a key finding from our experiences of co-production. Research is more likely to

effect change if it is owned by the very people who have a capacity to effect change. Co-production, like models of participatory action research, can help overcome problems of knowledge mobilisation and deliverability, especially in contexts where there are high levels of mistrust of traditional sources of expertise – like policing and mental health services (Ungar *et al*., 2015). A key success of the ESRC project, according to one police focus group respondent, was felt to be that it 'provided an open platform for honest conversations'. Both researchers and police participants were surprised at the level of ownership that the police had in the ESRC initiative. From the academic focus group the research officer working on the project declared himself to be surprised at the level of police 'involvement in project design' and 'influence over' its direction. He had expected the academic team 'to be in the lead, with [the police] supporting implementation'. Similarly, police officers admitted to having initial scepticism that 'the academics might even have some sense of findings in advance of research'. This was dispelled, by the nature of the partnership and the pivotal role accorded to co-production. The decision to shift the focus of one 'partnership' case study from the police-fire service relation to safeguarding children at the request of the steering group - heavily influenced by the persuasive arguments of the assistant chief constable - was frequently cited as an excellent example of how the focus of the research orientation changed as a product of genuine co-production. This translated into considerable buy-in from policing partners given the degree of ownership and stake they possessed in the partnership. Consequently, members of the academic team (with long-standing involvement in police research) remarked that they had not previously experienced the high levels of support provided by the policing partners via the Steering Group. This was both 'novel and helpful' according to one. However, developing sustained and good quality inter-organisational trust relations takes time. The longer a relationship develops, the greater the scope for the quality of trust relations based on shared experiences.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to contribute to thinking about ways in which to fashion methodologies and collaborative infrastructures that are well suited to the tasks of fostering the use of evidence in practice and promoting cultures of organisational learning, innovation and critical self-reflection in police and universities. This entails a better understanding of the complex interplay between evidence/knowledge, politics/values and delivery/implementation in policing research and frontline practice. Ultimately, a key ambition of co-production is to transform the ways in which academic researchers engage with policing partners and ways in which policing practitioners utilise evidence that is rigorous and relevant. This chapter has sought to delineate and explore the contribution of co-production in identifying the most effective means of mobilising research-based knowledge and enhancing the role that social science research can make to policing policy and practice. This means moving away from top-down 'elitist' models of knowledge to an increasing recognition that the purposes for which knowledge is assembled, synthesised and appropriated all matter. It demands that we contend with questions about the forms of knowledge that are appropriate in given contexts and how they might best be strengthened through use. Translating evidence into practice remains a central thorny problem, accentuating the importance of developing 'translational capabilities' among researchers and non-academic partners (Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016: 8). Given the significant cultural obstacles to the kinds of organisational transformation implicit in the above agenda, it is unlikely to be realised overnight. Such partnerships aspire to long-term goals and demand clear leadership and vision – creating and communicating a 'clear sense of what is at stake' – as to its direction, benefits and realistic outcomes (Martin and Mazerolle, 2016). It necessitates planning for and creating 'short-term wins' which requires academics to think differently about the timeliness and accessibility of academic

research and reporting, but also attend to the pitfalls of real-time reporting. Competing time horizons, therefore, need to be managed prudently in building and maintaining relationships of mutual trust and the appreciation of divergent contributions; the hallmark of *independent interdependence*. It requires forging coalitions to effect change, not only senior champions but various advocates at different levels of the organisation and, hence, anchoring change in the organisational culture (Kotter, 1995). Collaborative research partnerships built on relationships rather than one-off projects provide new spaces for both researchers and police professionals to engage with complex and vexed issues about shared norms and values and to challenge organisational assumptions and ways of working. Thus envisioned, co-production can help to 'do things differently' in ways that accord greater ownership over, understanding of, and regard to the value of, research in building an evidence-informed knowledge base in policing.

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[1] Summary reports from each are available along with further information from the project website, see: http://www.law.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/an-exploratory-knowledge-platform-for-policing.

[2] The focus groups included six researchers and five policing professionals from the OPCC and police. I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Claire Johnson, the project manager for the ESRC project, who conducted the focus group interviews.

[3] For further information see: www.n8prp.org.uk.

[4] The comparative role of NICE in healthcare is frequently lauded by proponents of EBP as an 'independent evidence assessment agency' (Sherman, 2009).

[5] One of the core activity strands of the N8 PRP is dedicated to 'public engagement' to foster a public voice within debates about evidence and its role in public policy and delivery.

[6] See: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/REFimpact/