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‘Effecting Change in Policing Through Police/Academic Partnerships: The Challenges of (and for) Co-production’

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Abstract:
This chapter explores and assesses some of the possibilities and challenges in fostering police organisational change through police/academic partnerships that aspire to a model of ‘co-production’. It advances the case for knowledge generation that is socially distributed, application-oriented, trans-disciplinary and subject to multiple accountabilities, as the basis for a transformation in the way academics engage with policing practitioners and the value and application of knowledge, data and evidence within policing. Experiences of implementing the N8 Policing Research Partnership are deployed to provide insights into the critical challenges that such endeavours present both to dominant versions of evidence-based policing and to prevailing assumptions about co-production as methodology and philosophy. They foreground the problematic and often ignored issues of differential power relations, structural conflicts, differing professional interests and the need to manage these in ways that manifest open dialogue about differential roles, limitations and responsibilities, as well as safeguards to integrity.

Introduction

In many public sectors, universities have played an important role in initial training, skills development and the elaboration of a specialist knowledge base upon which practitioners draw and which shape professional identity. Historically, this has not been the case within British policing. Despite current plans by the College of Policing to standardised national education levels for all policing ranks - and unlike some other countries where such degree training frameworks have existed for many years - in Britain, universities and police have had little professional rationale for close collaboration. Traditionally, police/academic relations have been likened to a 'dialogue of the deaf' (Bradley and Nixon 2009), more often characterised by mutual misunderstanding, suspicion, distrust and disengagement. Academic researchers and police, undoubtedly, work from radically different conceptions of what constitutes evidence, are influenced by contrasting interests and demands, and are driven by very distinct philosophies, values and cultural practices. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the use of research evidence in policing lags considerably behind other public services, such as health and social care, where it is accorded a more prominent and valued place in guiding professional judgement (Greenhalgh 2018).

Policing has tended to be viewed more as a 'craft' (Bayley and Bittner 1984) informed by hands-on experience, intuition, tacit know-how and 'situated knowledge' (Willis 2013), rather than a 'science' or body of knowledge derived from research evidence and reducible to principles that can be taught through formal education. A contemporary challenge, therefore, has been how to foster a 'dialogue of listening' (Johnston and Shearing 2009), while avoiding the rather unhelpful bifurcation between 'craft' (as somehow inevitably 'bad') and 'science' (as something of a sovereign 'good'). Some variants of evidence-based policing have posited an overly narrow interpretation of 'science' as providing the basis for taming the culturally-informed excesses of police discretion and craft-work, which it is believed result in police malpractices and ineffective policing. Sherman (1998: 4), for example, argues that evidence-based research must be 'a systematic effort to parse out and codify unsystematic "experience" as the basis for police work'. To this end, some have called for a 'shift in ownership of police science from the universities to police agencies' in which 'the police adopt and advance evidence-based policy and that universities become active participants in the everyday world of police practice' (Weisburd and Neyroud 2011: 1). While most commentators might endorse a closer, flourishing collaboration between the fields of policing and research, the nature of that relation is the subject of considerable debate (Sparrow 2016: 130-1). This chapter explores the development of a specific partnership relation as a case study from which wider inferences about the possibilities and pitfalls of police/academic partnerships might be drawn.

It was largely to address the above concerns that the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8PRP) was formed in 2013; as a platform for collaborations between universities, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs),[1] police services and partner policing organisations across the north of England. Organised around the existing N8 Research Partnership[2] – an alliance between the research-intensive universities of Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York - the N8PRP includes 11 police services and Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioners (OPCCs), including Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Durham, Greater Manchester, Humberside, Merseyside, Northumbria, North

[1] Introduced in 2012, PCCs are directly elected representatives in each police force area in England and Wales (outside London where slightly different arrangements pertain) whose role is to appoint, and if necessary remove, the chief constable and to hold him/her to account, set the budget and determine local policing priorities. Their remit extends to encompass responsibilities for victims services, crime and community safety.
[2] www.n8research.org.uk

Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. The partnership also incorporates other community safety stakeholders including Your Homes Newcastle and collaborates closely with the College of Policing - which has representation on the N8PRP Steering Group (its main decision-making forum).[3]

The N8PRP emerged from combined frustrations with the quality, scale and scope of existing police/academic partnerships – often limited to 'one-off' projects and bilateral relations between a single university and its local force – and a desire to exploit novel opportunities presented by (but also concerns about) changes to the policing governance landscape across England and Wales. In particular, this was prompted by the introduction of PCCs and the establishment of the College of Policing (both in 2012) as part of a wider professionalisation agenda. The arrival of PCCs raised a variety of concerns, including fears of greater (or more overt) politicisation of policing, the erosion of constabulary independence and parochialism - as PCCs might focus on local as opposed to national or transnational policing issues (Reiner 2013). However, it also opened up a space for a different dialogue than hitherto, as PCCs became significant new power-brokers in policing with their control of budgets, commissioning roles and responsibilities for appointing and holding chief constables to account. Given their relationship with the electorate, it was anticipated that PCCs might be more readily mobilised to ask challenging questions as to why policing practices are not more consistently informed by the best research evidence available, particularly in the face of concerns about police malpractices. The ingrained culture of institutional defensiveness evident in much British policing had been increasingly exposed over the previous decades through a variety of scandals and institutional failures. It had also served as an obdurate obstacle against organisational learning through external partnerships. Across diverse domains of policing - from child sexual exploitation to public order - a growing crescendo of public ire had begun to coalesce around the unwillingness or inability of police to learn from evidence of shortcomings, work collaboratively with other professionals and adapt behaviours in keeping with available knowledge about good practice.

The establishment of the College of Policing - with its aims to foster evidence-based policing and set standards in professional development - added significantly to the reshaped police governance architecture. Important questions were raised about the College's appropriate regulatory role within policing and the precise vision of evidence-based policing that it would promote. It also provided both a stimulus and direct funding to promote police/academic partnerships, via its *Police Innovation Fund* in 2014 and larger *Police Knowledge Fund* in 2015-17.[4] Given its national position and explicit mandate, the College has done much to advance the case for an evidence-based policing profession to the forefront of policy debate. It has helped stimulate the conditions for rethinking the role and operationalisation of research evidence in policing. Collectively, these developments provided an environment in which various collaborations between university-based researchers and policing practitioners have proliferated (Goode and Lumsden 2018).

This chapter explores and assesses some of the possibilities and challenges in fostering organisational change through partnerships between policing practitioners and academic researchers oriented around the co-production of knowledge. It reflects on my own personal experiences – together with those of colleagues - of implementing a programme of research co-production and knowledge exchange in the UK through the N8PRP. Initially established

[3] www.n8prp.org.uk/
[4] https://whatworks.college.police.uk/Partnerships/Knowledge-Fund/Pages/Police-Knowledge-Fund.aspx.

in the summer of 2013, the N8PRP attracted two initial grants awarded in 2014, which served as experimental pilots; testing the ideas, processes and operating mechanism, as well as forging relationships upon which the emergent partnership was constructed.[5] These early forays into partnership formation paved the way for and informed the more ambitious HEFCE *Catalyst Fund*; a five year programme of funding which commenced in May 2015.

As its Director and the Principal Investigator on the core external research grants that have underpinned its development, I draw on my role in designing, managing and overseeing the partnership since its inception. What follows, therefore, provides a personal account and reflections on the partnership, its ambitions, trials and tribulations. My vantage-point provides privileged opportunities for rich and 'deep' participant observation, but also attendant problems of selectivity and biases. Undoubtedly, others will (and) have interpreted and assessed developments and outcomes differently. Nonetheless, I hope to rise above personal anecdote and subjective assertions to explore the broader conceptual issues at stake and opportunities for critical reflection on lessons that might be learnt for other police/academic partnerships. My main interest lies less in presenting the model as somehow a blueprint for partnership relations and more with exploring fundamental questions about the production of knowledge in the context of policing, its value and application. This raises questions about the connections between what we know and how we know it; with attendant links between knowledge, power and culture.

In what follows, I advance the case for knowledge production that is 'socially distributed, application-oriented, trans-disciplinary and subject to multiple accountabilities' (Gibbons, *et al*. 1994), as the basis for a transformation in the way academics engage with policing practitioners and the value and application of knowledge, data and evidence within policing. It is argued that those who seek to advance co-production as an approach and method must acknowledge and negotiate the 'messiness' that it entails, develop clear governing principles and processes to regulate power differences and fashion models of accountability to ensure mutual respect for differential contributions and shared outcomes. At the same time as providing profound opportunities to attend to implementing evidence-based policing and embedding research into police culture and practice, the application of co-production also engenders deep-seated challenges in its translation from ideal to reality. The consequential negotiation and adaptation to context demand principles, procedures and practices for operationalising and regulating partnership relations and sustaining impact. I begin by outlining the aims, philosophy and development of the N8PRP before going on to reflect upon the implications for refining the conceptualisation and practice of co-production as a particular model for evidence-based partnerships.

Partnership Aims, Principles and Implementation

In essence, the *Catalyst Grant* programme was designed to constitute a series of interconnected mechanisms and points of engagement to deliver organisational change, both in terms of transforming the ways in which researchers engage with policing partners and the ways in which police practitioners utilise and mobilise research evidence. It constitutes, what I have described elsewhere as a 'scaffolding' around which police/academic engagements, collaborations and interdependencies in knowledge exchange and research co-production

[5] The first was a small three month College of Policing *Innovation Fund* grant (£50,000) which helped establish relations with practitioners across the north of England. The second was an ESRC *Knowledge Exchange Opportunities Scheme* grant (£100,000) which underpinned a more intensive year-long collaboration between West Yorkshire Police/OPCC and the University of Leeds as a pilot to test mechanisms for delivering co-production.

might be forged (N8PRP 2018: 5). It draws upon a theory of change informed by lessons from management studies about why organisational transformations frequently fail. Synthesizing the literature, Kotter (1995: 61) usefully identified eight steps necessary to deliver organisational change:

- Establishing a sense of urgency;
- Forming a powerful guiding coalition;
- Creating a vision;
- Communicating the vision;
- Empowering others to act on the vision;
- Planning for and creating short-term wins;
- Consolidating improvements and producing still more change (or 'not declaring victory too soon');
- Institutionalising new approaches and anchoring change in the organisational culture.

This is not to suggest that all the above steps were realised in practice. Rather, they became a loose 'road map' that helped guide the direction of travel - as a reference point and check-list against which progress might be measured - in what was inevitably the fraught and complex journey of implementing ambitions into practice. It was recognized from the outset that a five year programme – whilst a long-time in research funding terms – would only represent the first tentative steps in the institutionalisation of change. Having studied the faltering and unsettled attempts to implement community safety partnerships in England and Wales over the last 30 years (Crawford 1997; Crawford and Evans 2017), I was under no illusion as to the significant obstacles that stand in the way of desired organisational change both within policing and the academy.

Context

To some considerable degree, the 'sense of urgency' in policing had been set by a combination of the wider governance changes outlined above and the political and fiscal climate of austerity, which saw significant cuts to police budgets and reductions in police personnel. This resulted in an unprecedented decline in the number of police officers in England and Wales; falling from a peak of 144,353 in 2009 to 122,859 in 2016; a loss of approximately 21,500. The government mantra of 'doing more with less' challenged police managers – and frontline staff – to innovate and *do things differently*. Ironically perhaps, the politics of austerity questioned some traditional assumptions within policing about the appropriateness of accepted organisational strategies and opened up the possibility that research might provide possible solutions to intractable problems. Rather than continuing to pursue conventional ways of doing police-work, it encouraged some police managers to think about better ways to exploit existing data, assets and resources within the organization, as well as through relationships with partners. Perceptions of police omnicompetence and deeply-held assumptions that the police could 'do it alone' were increasingly challenged by the reductions in police personnel. Innovation and behaviour change became urgent matters in a considered response to 'managing with less'. In this context, the offer that academic researchers might be able to assist the police through data analysis and knowledge production became a more mutually attractive one. Conversely, from the perspective of the research community (and university management in particular), the growing emphasis on 'impact', stimulated by the Research Excellence Framework and changes to the research funding landscape, also provided additional impetus to the formation of, and investments in, new police/academic partnerships.

Forming a Coalition and Shared Vision

Building a 'guiding coalition' meant forging important strategic alliances with researchers and practitioners that shared a similar vision across partner organisations. Within the research community, this benefited significantly from the involvement of senior academics with longstanding reputations for independence in research. In terms of presenting and maintaining the partnership as independent of the police - and not a research arm of the police establishment - it was critical that, from the outset, the coalition included leadership from scholars with such integrity and shared vision. It was also important that this coalition engaged directly with and was seen as open and relevant to a whole generation of new scholars and early career researchers. In this regard, the cohort of collaborative studentships sponsored by the partnership played an important role. Experience suggests that early career researchers are particularly open and committed to co-production as an approach to research. However, they are also acutely aware of the vulnerable position that they can find themselves in through collaborations with police partners, who hold considerable power, influence and sway as gatekeepers enabling (or constraining) research endeavours. Gender mix was also significant in breaking with a prevailing image of policing, and to some degree police research, as predominantly male. It was also critical that this coalition reflected and incorporated multi-disciplinary perspectives, albeit the N8PRP remains largely a social science coalition of researchers, and hence not wholly reflective of all the relevant disciplines that might contribute to a better understanding of policing.

Crucially, during the embryonic phase of partnership development, considerable attention was accorded to deliberating and formulating a shared vision of the purpose, values and principles of the N8PRP. It was decided that the overarching aim would be '*to enable and foster high quality, independent research and to facilitate research-based contributions to public debate, policing policy, governance and practice*'. Furthermore, it was agreed that the focus of the partnership would incorporate *policing* as a process and set of activities conducted by plural agencies and actors rather than centre narrowly on the work of *the police* alone (Crawford *et al*. 2005). In practice, however, in part due to the large number of police partners, the work of N8PRP has converged – more than initially intended – on the work of *the police*. Nonetheless, the role of PCCs has helped serve as something of a counter-balance in this regard, given their wider policing, community safety and victim service responsibilities. Moreover, the principled commitment to 'policing' as a focus – and reflected in the partnership title[6] - has nonetheless informed the work of the partnership in diverse ways, including through its thematic priorities which have centred on policing problems that by their very nature necessitate the engagement of external partners.

The following core principles were elaborated to guide the implementation of the partnership's work: (i) an aspiration to co-production as an organising framework and ethos; (ii) commitment to a lack of a rigid hierarchy of knowledge forms, embracing a plurality of research methodologies, epistemologies and approaches; (iii) non-exclusivity in the partnership's activities which were to be open to non-N8 researchers and non-contributing partner policing organisations; (iv) mutual respect for differences across professional, institutional and disciplinary boundaries; and (v) adherence to the values of inclusivity, integrity and professionalism. Overarching this, the notion of 'independent interdependence' has served as a dynamic force binding the partnership (Crawford 2017: 207-8). These shared values provided interlaced golden threads around which the coalition was constituted and

[6] Despite this, some police partners have continued to refer (erroneously) to the collaboration as the '**Police** Research Partnership' (see Staniforth 2019).

coalesced, informing the partnership's purpose, aims and working methods. This vision contrasted subtly with existing variants of evidence-based policing and the approach adopted by other police/academic partnerships in the UK, at least enough to provide a distinctive rallying point for those actively engaging in its promotion and implementation.

While the N8PRP is based *in* the north of England, it is not exclusively *of* or *about* the north, but rather sees the shared geography as a common test-bed in which to explore and develop alliances in knowledge generation and its application. The ambitious size of the partnership enables it to deliver at a scale with real impact by fostering cross-force and inter-institutional collaborations. Nonetheless, it also engenders significant coordination challenges in working across over 30 different organisations. For example, it very quickly became apparent that the evolving relationships between PCCs and their police forces could not be taken-for-granted,[7] but constitutes an important, uncertain and (in some instances) unstable dynamic reflecting their different competencies, responsibilities, capabilities and cultures. The shared vision, therefore, revolved around the ambition to transform the terms of engagement, dialogue and workings of police/academic relations in the production and application of research in policing. Vitally, however, this vision incorporated at its heart a theory and method of how this ambition might be realised, namely through the co-production of knowledge in its generation, dissemination and implementation (to which I return below).

Coalition construction necessitated forging strong practitioner relationships not only among senior officers but also advocates at different levels of the organisation, so as to better enable the anchoring of change in the organisational culture. While considerable efforts were invested in communicating and meeting with a senior police managers and staff in the OPCCs, it was important to demonstrate the value of the partnership to key frontline officers who might then serve as its champions. It has long been recognised that policing's '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 in the exercise of discretion, as possible impediments to organisational learning. However, discretion itself is not necessarily the obstacle to implementing evidence-based policing. Rather, there is a need to enhance the capacity of officers to use their discretion in particular ways that are conducive to the application of evidence. Organisational learning may be less about constraining discretion through evidence-based guidelines – which are often resisted by frontline practitioners even in the evidence-rich healthcare context (Greenhalgh 2018: 40-54) - and more about empowering officers to mobilise their discretion in problem-solving ways that align with their personal motivations and draw on the best research evidence available.

Designing in Principles

Having forged a collective vision, communicating the vision and empowering others to act on it were essential requirements. In part, these necessitated securing the resources with which to advance the partnership aims and provide the means to enable their realisation. Hence, securing the *Catalyst* grant from HEFCE was critical. These funds were designed to drive innovation in higher education by supporting programmes of work that deliver public benefits.[8] Crucially, HEFCE were willing to entertain supporting high risk but potentially

[7] For instance, the fact that a PCC agreed to or signed off a piece of research and particular commitments to support it, did not mean that the assistance of the local police force was forthcoming or that the data necessary would be readily available. All such issues needed to be renegotiated at the various levels within the police force.

[8] See: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/catalyst/prioritiesandprinciples/

high yield projects, notably involving significant collaborations. Constructed as a research co-production and knowledge exchange platform, the *Catalyst Grant* had a number of features that warrant brief mention in that they were both unusual for a UK funding body and yet were pivotal in how the partnership evolved.[9] First and most importantly was the degree of openness and flexibility designed into the award. As the framework of the grant focused on relationships – the processes and mechanisms through which they would be sustained – nowhere in the application was there reference to any particular priority areas, themes or domains of policing in which research was to be conducted or knowledge exchange organised. In the spirit of co-production, all thematic priorities needed to be agreed by the partners through the collaborative mechanisms. The design was also pluralistic and flexible in its methodologies, in keeping with the fluid needs of co-production (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016). More traditional research funding sources might have balked at the apparent lack of specificity, methodological uncertainty and relative absence of designated research questions. The design focused more centrally on relationships and a platform for meaningful points of collaboration. Thus envisaged, collaborative advantages were intended to derive not simply from the combination of perspectives but in framing and shaping questions, methodologies and impacts differently. This flexibility in design conformed to a type of 'organised uncertainty' (Power 2007) bounded by forms of risk management.

A second distinctive feature was the significant degree of funding that was ring-fenced against the 'small grants' co-production scheme, through which the N8PRP could allocate funds directly to teams of academics and practitioners working collaboratively to develop new knowledge and innovative research in relation to intractable policing problems. Vitally, this mechanism enabled the N8PRP to incentivise and resource frontline practitioners and engaged researchers to work together in problem-centred co-production. Across the four rounds awarded (2015-19), the 'small grants' scheme has demonstrated how curiosity-driven and application-oriented research with considerable impact potential can be fostered with small levels of investment and a large dose of enthusiasm, commitment and institutional support from within a partnership framework that nurtures knowledge co-creation.[10] The research projects need to be scalable, with follow-on plans and identified impacts with dimensions of delivery and implementation built in. Against the specified criteria and established procedures, successful awards provide funding of up to £25,000 over 12 months.[11] The awards leverage considerable match-funding and investment of time from the participating teams. Funding decisions are made by the Steering Group in the light of independent reviews provided by external assessors. Each funded projects is required to produce an accessible four-page summary report (peer reviewed by policing practitioners) highlighting the key findings and their implication for practice.[12] Many projects have gone on to secure further research funding and/or resulted in peer-reviewed academic articles.

A final feature was the requirement that for every £1 of funding HEFCE provided, at least £1 of additional funding or 'in kind' contribution had to be secured up-front in commitments from partner organisations.[13] Needless to say, this took some considerable time and effort to negotiate, especially in the context of fiscal austerity in the public sector. However, this

[9] See http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/catalyst/projects/leeds/
[10] Across the first four funding rounds, 15 'small grants' have been awarded to the total value of £334,000.
[11] In keeping with the principle of non-exclusivity, awards are open to non-N8PRP institutions that include teams with at least one N8PRP policing partner and one N8 university partner.
[12] https://n8prp.org.uk/small-grant-reports/
[13] In the end, the £3 million secured from HEFCE was matched by £2.26 million from the N8 universities and £2.24 million from policing partners - a total £7.4 million – significantly greater than the minimum 1:1 ratio.

process was vital in terms of securing, from the outset, formal institutional investment in the partnership and throughout served as an instrumental reminder of shared commitments. It also constituted a symbolic representation that all partners had bought into the shared vision.

The *Catalyst Grant* also brought with it some considerable challenges. First, despite the aspirations of co-production and the reasonably extensive deliberations within the academic community at the outset, the grant was **not** itself co-produced in any meaningful way. The pragmatic need to submit the bid before a tight deadline and to present a coherent narrative militated against an extensive deliberative process of co-production among the many partners – notably the policing partners – who were largely asked to join the partnership once the programme had been pre-designed. Secondly, due to the funding source being a higher education funding council, the resources attached to the grant were, by necessity, held by and routed through the university partners alone. This resulted in understandable perceptions on the part of policing partners that the partnership was largely academic driven. Moreover, the fact that the academic community had established reasonably extensive cross-institutional collaboration including – but not restricted to the N8 Research Partnership – prior to the commencement of the *Catalyst Grant*, meant that the policing partners initially felt that they had not had the time to develop a collective or shared vision. For many, working across force boundaries was itself a relatively novel practice. This was as true of police personnel as it was for those from the OPCCs. Hence, they felt the need to develop their police-to-police collaborative relations both to better understand their collective interests and to enable them to engage in meaningful discussions with the research community. As a result, for the first year of the partnership, the policing members of the Steering Group held 'pre-meetings' without the academics present, to assist them in clarifying their own shared priorities and to enable them to cement their relations. While this practice stood in clear contrast to the idea of co-production, nonetheless, it was deemed pragmatically important in developing the partnership in the early stages. The practice was brought to an end once better working relations and greater familiarity between policing partners had been established. Subsequently, the partnership has developed to the point where one ex-police officer, who was engaged in the early years, recently reflected:

> 'the framework of the N8PRP has, for the very first time, brought the police forces of the north together where they are now sharing effective practices, discussing operational challenges and identifying common research requirements to better protect the communities they serve. Police officers are beginning to understand that collaborating with academic experts can provide unique perspectives and practical solutions to address their policing challenges.' (Staniforth 2019)

Table 1 presents, in simplified form, the distribution and organisation of the partnership and some of the key features, in terms of the eight substantive 'activity strands'. These are supplemented by the overall management and governance arrangements; foremost, the coordination of the partnership, the Steering Group and Advisory Board. For the purpose of the *Catalyst Grant*, one of the N8 universities has lead responsibility for each activity strand (see Table 1). Most strands developed their own (in)formal networks of practitioners and researchers with which they work closely. Cross-strand activities were encouraged where relevant to ensure synergies. For example, the *Training and Learning* and *Data Analytics* strands work closely to develop and deliver the data specialists continuing professional development (CPD) programme.

Table 1: Organisational Structure: 'Platforms for Engagement'

Activity Strand	Lead	Aims	Key Activities
Innovation	*Manchester*	To support innovation through partnership working with diverse stakeholders around prominent policing challenges.	• Annual *Policing Innovation Forum* around designated themes: cyber-crime, domestic abuse, early intervention, mental health; • 'Pop up' innovation dialogues (i.e. public order policing).
Research Co-production	*Newcastle*	To build research capacity and capability to tackle new and emerging fields of enquiry through co-production.	• Annual 'small grants' funding scheme with steer linked to Innovation Forum theme; • Collaborative PhD studentships;
Data Analytics	*Leeds*	To provide access to data that are otherwise inaccessible or poorly utilised, and to open up avenues for data analysis and data exploitation.	• Data Analytics Delivery Service (DADS) – portal service to support accessing data from policing partners; • Projects to foster data exploitation and utilisation; • Data analysts CPD programme.
Staff & Knowledge Exchange	*Durham*	To foster greater mutual understanding and trust between partners via inter-organisational people exchange and staff mobility.	• KE Fellowships (both practitioners and academics); • PhD internships and placements; • Bursaries to support collaborative Masters dissertations; • Annual 'knowledge exchange' conference.
Training & Learning	*Lancaster*	To enhance research training and learning among police and partner organisations to secure research impact and maximise the practical benefits to policing.	• Training workshops and methodological skills development events drawing on research expertise; • Data analysts CPD programme; • Workshops and 'summer school' linked to studentships.
Public Engagement	*Liverpool*	To embed public engagement and public understanding of policing into the programme of research.	• Understanding good practice in police models and practices of public engagement; • Deliberative forums around issues of public concern/interest.
International	*Sheffield*	To develop international collaborations and learn from international experiences in police/academic partnerships.	• Mapping international developments in police/academic partnerships and hosting an international conference; • Building international relations.
Evaluation	*York*	To evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the programme of engagement in ways that inform its development and learning.	• Process evaluation of working methods, relations, management and governance; • External review of impact and outcomes (Birkbeck College)

The programme design also sought to accord space to public engagement as dimension in police/academic partnerships. Not only is public engagement a vital element of effective policing, but also public understanding of innovations and research evidence are essential in navigating the social values that inform policy formation and its successful implementation. The co-production philosophy demanded that members of the public be viewed, less as passive recipients of a service and more as knowledgeable actors with capabilities and resources that might inform (or conversely, undermine) the application of policing practices. While effective policing is reliant upon public cooperation and compliance - which all depend on public confidence – so too, social values, public understanding and trust in research all shape reception of evidence-based reforms. Ultimately, evidence is only one - often highly contested - element in a complex mix of values, knowledge and implementation. Hence, engaging with 'the ethical principles, preferences, culture, and aspirations of society… informed by the general public' (Rawlins 2014: 233) is as vital in policing as in other public services. The intention, therefore, was to seek to embed public engagement and understanding into diverse aspects of the partnership in ways that might open up police/academic dialogue to wider social values and non-expert judgements. It was also hoped that public understandings might reinforce a problem-oriented approach that traverses the sometimes 'siloed' mentalities of large bureaucratic organisations. In reality, however, the partnership was only able to scratch the surface of this challenging agenda, largely through deliberative forums and public surveys about particular policing initiatives or reforms.[14]

Managing Expectations in Evidence-Based Policing

The reality of partnership working, especially where this entails attempts to implement a programme to transform the generation and use of research evidence in policing, is neither easy nor uncomplicated (Crawford and Cunningham 2015). Moreover, it diverges considerably from the lofty aspirations of programme design. In the case of the N8PRP, from very early on in its gestation, it required demonstrating to practitioners how the investment could deliver tangible benefits in the short-term that might have impact at the frontline on improved community outcomes. It was important to address traditional practitioner (mis)perceptions of academic research as 'at best a luxury that can be useful but can be done without' (Weisburd and Neyroud 2011: 3). This meant counteracting deeply engrained views held by policing practitioners that academic research is too slow to be of use, that it pays insufficient attention to the translation and application of findings to practice and that the findings are (more often than not) inaccessible and obtuse. Weisburd and Neyroud's (2011: 9) critique of academic research reflects much of this practitioner thinking that the 'need for academics to publish in peer-reviewed journals that are at best remote for most practitioners and in a style not readily transferable to the policing workplace has meant that much useful research might just have well be buried in a time capsule'. Furthermore, many practitioners needed to be convinced that academics would actually listen to and take on board their views and insights in designing new research, rather that coming to them with preconceived ideas of what should be researched, how and why.

Through its distinctive emphasis on co-production, the partnership also sought to differentiate itself from, and avoid some of the limitations of, dominant approaches to evidence-based policing (Sherman 1998; 2015; Neyroud and Weisburd 2014), notably its narrow and hierarchical understanding of evidence, its elitist approach to knowledge generation and its overly linear understanding of implementation (Sparrow 2016; Crawford 2017). Reflecting some of the most significant and pertinent insights from contemporary developments in

[14] See: https://n8prp.org.uk/public-engagement/

evidence-based healthcare (Rawlins 2014; Greenhalgh *et al*. 2014), the partnership disavowed adherence to a rigid hierarchy of knowledge - with random control trials as the 'gold standard'. It strove to reflect the shift away from evidence based on 'hierarchies' within healthcare research to a pluralistic understanding of 'appropriateness' (Abeysinghe and Parkhurst 2013), focusing on what constitutes 'good (enough) evidence'. By engaging policing practitioners in the co-production of knowledge, rather than once the questions, methods and research design have been set, the partnership sought to advance the approach that those who are going to use research and apply the knowledge base should be involved in actively generating the evidence. It sought to depart from the mechanistic and linear reading of organisational change as a causal chain by which evidence that is externally generated is implemented. Such a 'mythology' of implementation as an outcome is belied by the more complex, non-linear and multiple processes and relations through which change ensues and develops. In this, evidence includes professional experience and 'practical wisdom' that helps with 'contextual judgements about *what is likely to work* (or at least, what might be tried out to see if it works) in *this situation*, for *these people* in *this organisation* with *these constraints*' (Greenhalgh 2018: 5, emphasis in original). Thus envisaged, experience-based 'craft knowledge' can help tell us something, not only about how things get done but also why they are done, as well as the normative and highly politicised contexts in which much policing occurs. As Fleming and Rhodes (2018: 20) highlight 'experience is crucial to evidence-based policing and decision-making because it is the key to weaving the varieties of knowledge together'.

Over time, the partnership required planning for and creating short-term wins that engaged the partners in ownership of the outcomes as well as consolidating small-scale successes and pathways to further change. The challenge of institutionalising evidence-based approaches to policing and anchoring change in the organisational culture meant that there was never much danger in Kotter's (1995: 66) warning of 'declaring victory too soon'. Given the grandiose nature of the ambition, there were evident risks that the partnership might founder if not built firmly upon incremental change and short-term successes that could demonstrate value and public benefit, whilst simultaneously fostering understanding, commitment and motivation among practitioners. Nonetheless, the complexity of the tasks meant that implementation would most likely result in ambiguous processes of translation, compromise and adaptation.

Challenges for Co-production

In reality, the N8PRP experiences of co-production have proved neither easy nor unproblematic but reflect considerable tensions that require management and negotiation. Additionally, they raise fundamental challenges for co-production itself; as ideal, methodology and practice. While co-production has become significantly more prominent in recent years, its advancement reflects a considerable degree of ambiguity and uncertainty as to what it means, its ambitions, how it is operationalised and the challenges to which its implementation gives rise. First outlined by Ostrom and colleagues (1978) in a series of studies of Chicago police in the 1970s, the concept of co-production was posited as a means of increasing the effectiveness of local service delivery through increased 'consumer' involvement in service production. From this perspective, co-production is about the sharing of information and shared decision-making between service providers and users. Building on this, the term co-production is now applied to new types of public service delivery, notably in debates on health (Clark 2015) and social care (Needham and Carr 2009).

In parallel to debates about service delivery, co-production has been deployed as a model of *knowledge production* with close affinities to that which Gibbons and colleagues (1994)

argued was beginning to transform the process of research (albeit they did not use the term). According to their thesis, the traditional paradigm of scientific discovery, what they rather inelegantly refer to as 'Mode 1' – characterised by the dominance of experimental science, an internally-driven taxonomy of disciplines and the autonomy of scientists and their host institutions (namely universities) – was being supplemented (and in some instances superseded) by a new paradigm of knowledge production, 'Mode 2', which is 'socially distributed, application-oriented, trans-disciplinary and subject to multiple accountabilities' (Nowotny, *et al.* 2003: 179). One of the key characteristics of Mode 2 is that knowledge production 'is carried out in a context of application' (Gibbons, *et al*. 1994: 3). As a methodology, co-production is closely related to, and builds on, long-standing traditions of participatory action research and co-operative inquiry (Kindon *et al*. 2010). However, the collaborative nature of partner relations cuts across the full life-course of the knowledge production process; from definition of the problem and questions, through design of the research and its data analysis, to translation, implementation and application of the findings. It contrasts with traditional linear approaches to research, where the main involvement of non-academics is as the subjects to be investigated or as commissioners and recipients of research outcomes.

There has tended to be greater clarity within the literature about the critique of prevailing assumptions - about what knowledge is, how it is produced, its outcomes/impacts and implications for service provision - that co-production offers, more so than what it constitutes as a specific methodology or the challenges that attend to its operationalisation. *Co-production as critique* might be summarised as follows:

- It assumes that knowledge is not the sole preserve of (elite) academic communities, but rather that knowledge is socially dispersed.
- It rejects a linear understanding of explanation and causation, preferring to see knowledge production as relational and arising through sometimes small, iterative processes of mutual learning.
- It challenges an instrumental and mechanistic 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.
- It contests the idea of impact as outcome highlighting the importance of serendipity, whereby impacts arise from opportunistic or unintended encounters.
- It questions the idea of the 'ownership' and 'authorship' of knowledge and impact.
- It challenges existing service models and delivery patterns, and questions assumptions that citizens are the passive consumers rather than the active producers of services.

One field in which co-production has developed in conceptually nuanced way is within science and technology studies, where it has been deployed to attend to the constitutive relations not only between humans but also between people and things; society and technology. Sheila Jasanoff (2004) has sharpened the notion of co-production as a processes through which scientific ideas and beliefs develop simultaneously with the representations, identities, discourses and institutions that give practical effect and meaning to ideas and objects. Jasanoff (2004: 275) argues that co-production affords insights into description, explanation, normative analysis and prediction. In relation to description, co-production offers situated and constitutive insights – reveals a thickness to the connections between what we know and how we know it. Explanation is exposed as non-linear and not the outcome of mono-causal accounts of change or progress; preferring 'more complex forms of accounting in which causes and effects are braided together in strands that resist artificial separation into dependent and independent variables' (Jasanoff 2004: 277). With regard to normative

analysis, co-production highlights the political and cultural dimensions of knowledge production and raises questions about the choices made and the power relations that inform these. Power is constituted as much in the marginalisation of alternatives as it is in the adoption of dominant or taken-for-granted viewpoints. Finally, co-production can be predictive in highlighting durable long-term trends or forces. As an approach, it may help reorganise - through reciprocal feedback loops - the relations between knowledge, culture and power. As such, co-production assumes that knowledge and governance are mutually constitutive. It underlines the performative effects of research and knowledge: the ways in which (social) science can reshape the social world it seeks to describe. Hence, co-production implies that 'evidence' should not necessarily be understood as the 'solution' to social problems – as proponents of evidence-based policing too readily assume. Scientific knowledge does not simply solve governance problems, but also creates new ones. So too, the effects of research on policy are not always benign or helpful, alerting us to be attentive to the ethical implications of research influence.

Yet, these perceptive insights require translation into practical strategies; a task rendered more demanding in that co-production implies flexibility and fluid methodologies, organised around the relationships that are its backbone. The experience of the N8PRP reflects the challenges of translation and application in the shadow of co-productionist ideals. The N8PRP sought to deploy co-production in a way that assumes mutual respect, a lack of a rigid hierarchy of knowledge forms, fluid and permeable disciplinary boundaries, a two-way flow of knowledge (not simply its 'transfer') and a normative concern with usefulness and action (Crawford 2017: 203), in the knowledge that reality diverges from such tense and lofty ambitions. Hence, elaborating appropriate practices of co-production became the focus of considerable attention.

While co-production implies a reformed conception of what constitutes knowledge, how it is mobilised and used, less emphasis has been given to how to realise the relocation of power and control and the transformation inter-organisational relations through new mechanisms of planning, delivery and governance. As Star (2010: 607) notes, co-production leaves unresolved questions about how 'to collect, discipline and coordinate distributed knowledge'. Patently, 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, particularly in the context of policing. Yet, there is an implicit assumption that co-production as an approach is linked to empowering relatively disenfranchised groups. In much of the literature, co-production is presented - somewhat unproblematically - as an unalloyed good, in which the addition of differing perspectives, interests and practices are melded in ways that are mutually beneficial and add value. Pain *et al*. (2015) present co-production as a 'soup' comprising diverse sources of knowledge.[15] These are deemed to blend harmoniously and simultaneously provide certain checks and balances. Thus envisaged, professional differences and disciplinary boundaries are transcended through the process of coming together in a shared project of knowledge generation. For Pain *et al*., this blending constitutes a consensual form of 'embodied connection… when people are active together in a shared space with a common goal' (2015: 8). From this perspective, co-production enables a democratisation of the research process and conforms to an ethic of doing research *with* rather than *on* people. This is particularly evident in partnerships with civil society and

[15] Likewise, Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2014: 16) use the metaphor of colour mixing, to highlight the manner in which 'co-creation' goes beyond simply bringing pieces together as many collaborative endeavours tend to do, but to transform the constitute parts – the metaphorical blue and yellow – into something different, namely the colour green.

community groups that are marginalised within policy networks. Here, the shared values of academic researchers may align more readily and closely with those non-academic partners and the knowledge generation process may be seen as explicitly giving voice to the lived experiences of those working within such milieu.

Police, however, are powerful and authoritative actors, well versed at articulating their preferences or interests and imposing their own narrative construction of events on others. The police and OPCCs are powerful political organisations with considerable resources, as well as abundant human, social, cultural and symbolic capital upon which to draw. PCCs have large budgets and are vested with wide powers and responsibilities. Police officers have recourse to significant legal powers, access to informational resources and can deploy legitimate coercive force. Their generic coercive authority differentiates the police from most other public servants. Research within policing partnerships invariably highlights this dimension of power and the frequent tendency of police to dominate collective agendas and side-line dissenting voices. Consequently, policing foregrounds the challenges of managing differential power relations in unavoidable ways. In other contexts, the subtleties of power differentials may be more easily overlooked. Nonetheless, the involvement of frontline police practitioners in co-production can both untap the abundant curiosity and thirst for knowledge that practitioners frequently harbour and challenge organisational assumptions and hierarchical structures of command and control that presuppose knowledge trickles down from above through formal policies and procedures rather than emerging at its coalface.

Following Jasanoff, co-production may be better conceived as less a theory than an 'idiom', with profound conceptual insight but also limitations: 'Working in the co-productionist idiom… requires, not only attention to its possibilities but also modesty about its limits' (2004: 275). These limitations are both temporal and subject to reflection and local tailoring. Inherently, co-production as idiom needs to be *translated* in practice, whereby such dimensions of translation are complex processes of negotiation during which meanings, claims and interests change and gain ground (Callon 1986). Translation, in this sense, entails the exercise of power. It has a political meaning, referring to the pursuit of interests or specific interpretations, frequently involving acts of persuasion, power plays and strategic manoeuvres. Translation is never *word-for-word* equivalence, but involves differentiation or variation, and the possibility of invention. In this sense, co-production is what Innes *et al*. (2018: 16) term a 'dirty concept' as it translates into practice. It entails adaptations, concessions, adjustments and compromises:

> 'These compromises and amendments are necessary and inevitable if the "pure" theoretical construct is to have practical utility and traction. For complex undertakings such as co-production, this means that what gets done in practice typically "resembles" the theoretical model, as opposed to reproducing all its elements in detail.'

For Innes *et al*. (2018), however, dirtiness also has a pejorative meaning that borders on the 'deceptive', in that it can be exploited as a cover for the pursuit of other – less benign – agendas; such as cost saving. Without denying the possibility that co-production can easily be so used, given its conceptual slipperiness, this somewhat confuses the descriptive analytic value of 'dirtiness' by introducing distinct motivations. Hence, I prefer Nowotny's (2017: 49) use of the term 'messiness' emphasising 'contingency, indeterminacy, sense-making and openness to change'. Messiness evokes a 'reordering' urge that necessitates working with and within co-production to strive to impose order and purpose. For Nowotny, this can be a productive and innovative process: 'Messiness can release the creative energy that comes with the diversity of experimental mixing and combining' (2017: 56). As such, co-production

constitutes an 'orderly mess' (Nowotny 2017: 12-13), in which 'unpredictability is the name of the game' and flexibility in adapting to shifting contexts and situated exigencies are ever-present requirements. As much as some proponents might prefer to deny or evade the issue, the practice of co-production demands some forms of regulation and governance, however 'light' or 'loose'. The messiness of co-production, in responding to contingencies, emergent events and fluctuating circumstances, necessitates norms of arbitration. These may be informally woven into the subtle design and interactive negotiations of the encounters and interactions between people (and things) – as the N8PRP has sought to do in its design - or they may take on more overtly managed and mediated forms.

The experience of the N8PRP suggests that clear procedures informed by agreed principles can provide normative checks to guide such regulatory needs. Moreover, the demands of intermediation require different skills and capabilities on the part of those engaged in co-production, notably in relation to leadership and the negotiation of relationships, but also with regard to the challenges of translation work and boundary crossing. Despite an inevitable blurring of roles, responsibilities and autonomy, this does not mean they disappear altogether. Researchers need to retain their critical independence in co-production partnerships. To do otherwise would endanger research being subsumed to the self-serving interests of powerful organisations. In operationalising the notion of 'independent interdependence' as the premise for relations between researchers and policing partners, the N8PRP has sought to recognise difference and safeguard the integrity of research independence. The reality, however, remains that negotiating the mismatches, discrepancies and 'messiness' of co-production is always precarious and unstable, demanding continual vigilance.

By contrast, the celebration of blurring in some versions of co-production risks not only effacing power differentials but also losing sight of the diversity and distinctiveness of contributions, expertise and skills. In the 'soup' of co-production in which varied perspectives and priorities are melded and (con)fused, there are evident dangers that autonomy, accountability, integrity and the value of distinct contributions and responsibilities are lost in a mixture of sameness. It is, after all, the synergies of differences that constitute the life-blood of collaborative advantage. The 'boundary work' that co-production entails allows different groups (actors, professions, disciplines) to work together *without consensus* (Crawford and L'Hoiry 2017). It defines the negotiations and possibilities for the construction of shared ways of seeing that arise from otherwise different approaches, understandings and ways of working (Nowotny 2017: 41). In police/academic partnerships, co-production is aligned less to the priority of empowerment, *per se*, than to knowledge generation and organisational learning. Experiences show that disagreements and tensions are better managed openly rather than subsumed in the quest for a 'goal of unity' (Crawford 1997: 137-9). Shared understanding does not imply that all the partners necessarily agree on the problem/evidence or hold the same view of it (Crawford and Cunningham 2015). In this light, mutual recognition of difference represents a more secure premise for co-production relations than an assumed consensus or undifferentiated 'soup' of inspirations. Such 'boundary crossing' recognises the differences that structure social worlds and organisational groups, but also the need to work across these in dynamic ways that prompts continual reassessment of assumptions, critical self-reflection and questioning of terminology. The N8PRP experience indicates that these movements between social worlds afford considerable possibilities to challenge introspective organisational cultures, myopic managerial practices and entrenched attitudes within both police and academic communities.

Conclusion

Lessons from implementing a police/academic research co-production partnership present critical challenges to both dominant views of evidence-based policing and prevailing assumptions among many proponents of co-production. They demonstrate that science alone is not enough to ensure the utilisation of evidence. They underscore the complex interplay between knowledge (evidence), values (politics) and implementation (behaviour change). Consequently, they highlight the need for a pluralistic notion of what constitutes evidence and the appropriate methods for its production, as well as a nuanced, relational and non-linear understanding of the social processes through which knowledge generation, translation and application occur. Realising organisational change demands building relationships of mutual respect, fluid and permeable disciplinary boundaries, the absence of a rigid hierarchy of knowledge forms and a normative concern with action. Police/academic partnerships also present challenges for co-production as an approach and methodology. They foreground issues of differential power relations, structural conflicts, differing professional interests and the need to regulate and manage these in ways that manifest open dialogue about differing contributions and responsibilities. The co-production process is not free of hierarchies, conflicts and differential power relations, all of which require complex and subtle negotiation and management. Our experiences suggest the value of 'independent interdependence' as guiding framework for negotiating the lived realities of co-production and safeguarding research integrity. It also demands attention to forms of governance and accountability that ensure active responsibility for shared outcomes.

In the context of policing, co-production is not a vehicle for the realisation of research *for* the police - in place of research *on* or *by* the police - but rather the generation of knowledge *with* the police that simultaneously challenges assumptions and working practices. If research becomes too closely tied to the organisational interests of the police, it will undoubtedly 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 reflection and organisational learning. However, for such partnerships to play an evident role in transforming organisational cultures, they also need to be embedded and sustained in frontline practices. As such, they necessitate the active participation and involvement of those who are charged with applying knowledge in the process of its production. The reality is that successful inter-organisational research partnerships need to be forged, nurtured and supported at all levels by people committed to realising the benefits of collaborative working and exploiting the (sometimes disruptive) opportunities for innovation and cross-cultural learning that boundary crossing and knowledge co-production provide. As I have sought to show, co-production is both difficult, in that it engenders significant governance, regulatory and relational challenges and departs noticeably from its ideal or theoretical formulation as enacted in lived practices. Nonetheless, the dynamic and evolve challenges of co-production in police/academic partnerships provide profound insights into different but interconnected processes in making practices, institutions and identities and, hence, in *knowledge making*.

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