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# Volunteering in Policing - Critically examining strategies, cultures and leadership

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Presentation to the 16th Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology, Münster



Institute for  
**Public Safety  
Crime and Justice**

# Why is our focus on police volunteering?

- Combination of economic and political factors is seen as placing an impetus on police volunteering (Bullock and Leeney, 2014);
- July 2016: National Strategy for Citizens in Policing
- A discourse of expansion in volunteerism is a dominant feature in many police forces across England and Wales, and within national policy.
- In an age of ‘doing more for less’, the meanings of being a volunteer and/or a Special are being reconstituted;

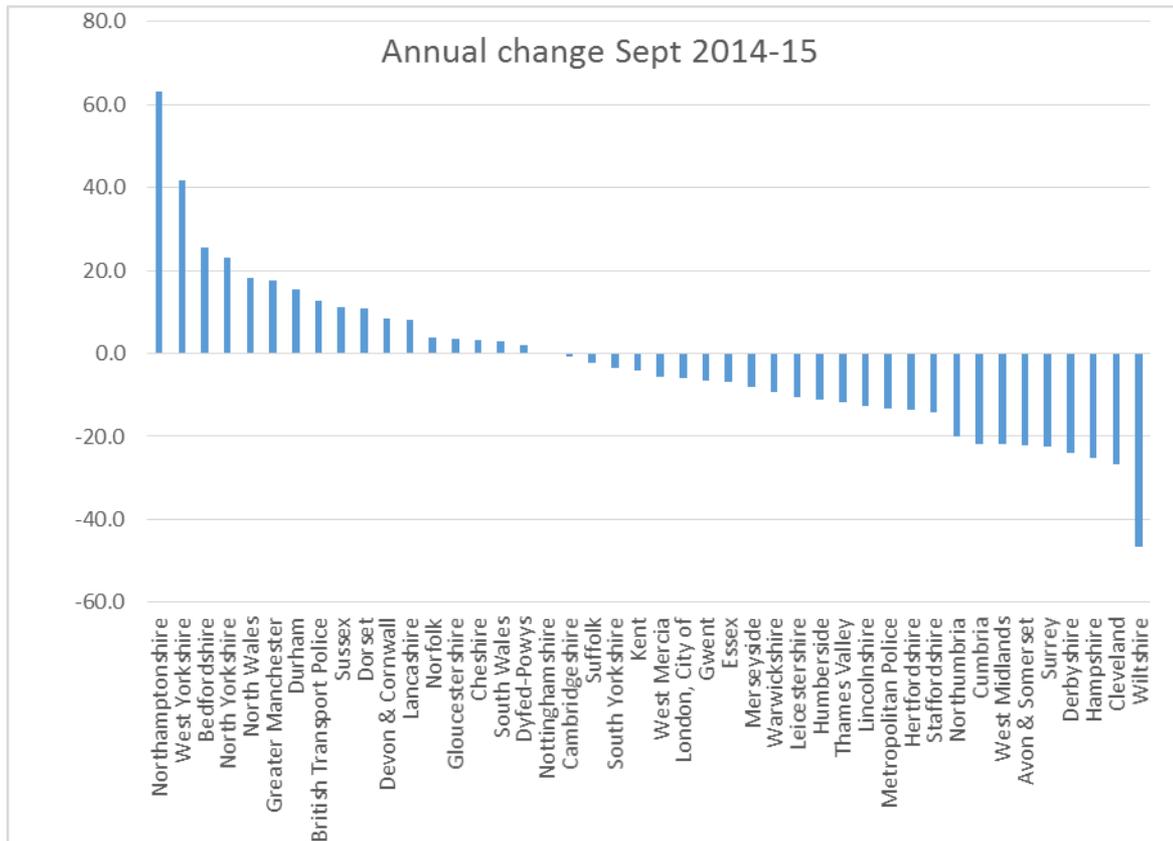


# The Special Constabulary

- There are approximately 16,000 Special Constables in England and Wales, and a further 7,000 Police Support Volunteers.
- Special Constables typically complete between 4 and 16 hours per week (Gaston and Alexander, 2001), with the main activities being community patrol, traffic and policing special events.
- Special Constable role as a ‘training ground’ for becoming a regular full-time officer (Pepper, 2014)
- Crucial to note that recruitment, training, operational deployment and management varies geographically, with relatively limited sharing of good practice



# Diversity across England and Wales



A widely varying picture in respect of change of Specials numbers

National 'standstill' position masks large rises and falls in individual forces

A great deal of volatility through time for individual forces in respect of numbers

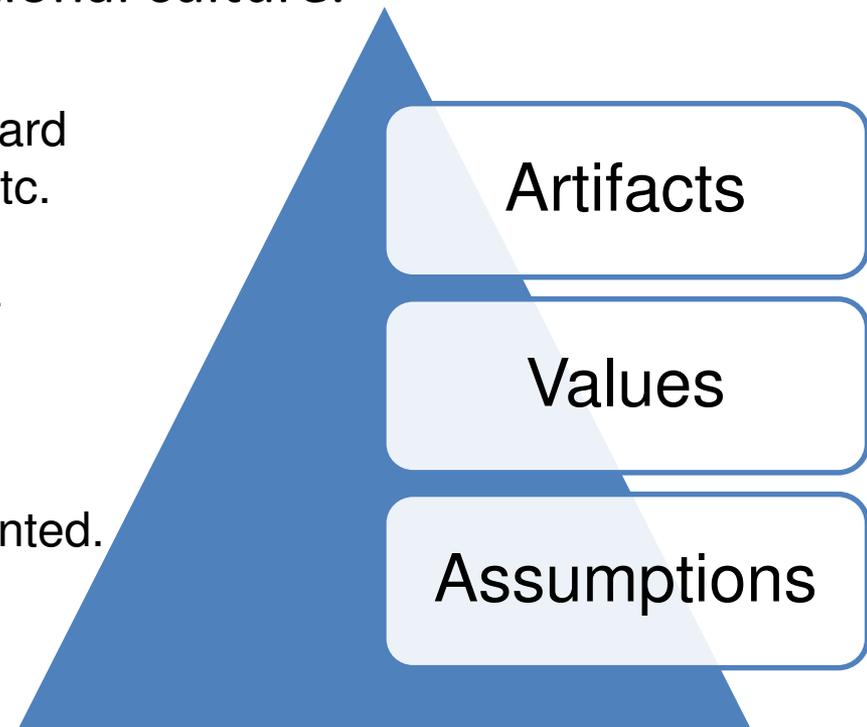
# Organisational cultures

- Organisational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values and beliefs which influence how people within an organisation behave.
- Schein (2010) model of organisational culture.

**Artifacts:** Characteristics that are seen, heard and felt – structures, uniforms, processes etc.

**Values:** Thought processes and attitudes – standards, rules, beliefs etc.

**Assumptions:** Deeply embedded beliefs – self-evident, unconscious and taken for granted.



# Approach and Status

- Completed primary research in two sites and ongoing in another 2 sites
- Interviews with both Police Force staff and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner staff (completed and analysed 25 interviews)
- Interviews last between 45-60 minutes covering the following topics:
  - Formal strategy and vision;
  - Organisational change;
  - Operational implementation and effectiveness;
  - Meanings associated with volunteers and Specials;
  - Leadership;
  - Future.

# Thinking differently

- Strategic leaders under pressure to think differently about how to operationally deliver Police and Crime Plans with reduced Regular Constabulary;
- ‘Singular’ pathway for Specials to enter and progress within the Special Constabulary;
- Organisational leaders expressed a desire to better define and articulate distinct pathways for people to become a Special Constable, creating in effect different ‘types’ of Special Constable.

*...at the moment we're quite, we're very one-dimensional, that they are a uniform and they go in a response, well not even a response car, they go in a car and do frontline duties...*

*We're still asking these people with lots of experience to go through this funnel to become a cop. And then maybe when they get through the other side, we might say, "Right, what else can you offer?"*

## Breaking tradition

- The tradition and history of the Special Constabulary within the force is understood as a recognised barrier as well as the behaviours and attitudes of influential staff working in the police;
- This newer thinking in the leadership of the police is a good sign of progress within the force, but this had not yet filtered throughout the organisation;

*...culturally I think we've come a huge way, I really do, but actually in terms of the way that people think, I'm not sure...*

## Breaking tradition II

- Whilst the integration agenda might be seen as promoting an equal treatment of Special Constables and ‘regular’ (paid) officers, managers must recognise the need for a different approach and style;
- The organisational culture, in terms of its values and underlying assumptions, would present some resistance to considerable change in respect of the role, position and degree of reliance upon the Special Constabulary

*I think we have to free ourselves up, you know... there are those radicals that say there should be no limits. Can a Special be a Firearms officer if they meet the standard? It's not about whether you're paid, unpaid, whether you're full-time or part-time. It's whether you've got... whether you meet the standards that are required, is the key.*

# Purposeful volunteering

- The need to attract, train and embed volunteers within the organisation mapped against organisational threats and strategic priorities;
- The current system in operation was deemed to be highly inefficient in getting the right types of people, being unsustainable when aiming to grow the Special Constabulary;
- This process has revealed cracks within the organisation, in terms of how it is prepared, equipped and receptive to a new dynamic of partnership with citizens at the core of its business.

*I think most sensible, reasonable people would accept they're on a precipice of huge potential. And I would hope that they [Police] would accept that part of realising that is within their gift and control.*

# Conclusions

- Organisational thinking in respect of who Specials are and what they can do must change.
  - Need for multiple pathways
- If the right cultural conditions are created, Specials and volunteers can be catalysts of change, helping to expose the force to different ways of thinking and challenging traditional ways of doing things
  - Need to challenge damaging behaviours
- The professional identities of Special Constables are ambiguous, contested and confused. There is an unhelpful ambivalence of status in respect of Specials being seen (or not) as ‘Constables’ and as ‘police officers’.
  - Need to see Specials and the wider body of police volunteers – their support, their development, and their professionalism - as core to organisational development.

# Thank you

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