Shared leadership with minority ethnic communities: views from the

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Shared leadership with minority ethnic communities: views from the police and the public in the UK

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The study compared and contrasted the views of police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives on different aspects of shared leadership in the context of policing in minority ethnic communities. Drawing on data collected in the UK during 2003–2005, the challenges facing police forces pursuing shared leadership approaches to delivering services are examined, with a view to providing supporting evidence for addressing training needs and reviewing institutional development. There is clear support for policing systems where the views of community members are actively sought by police leaders. On the other hand both police and minority ethnic community representatives recognise the low quality of cross-cultural communication and general lack of cultural awareness as obstacles to successful policing. There are also key institutional issues which need to be dealt with before adoption can take place. On the basis of the evidence presented the viability of shared leadership must be considered as conditional on making certain reforms in policing practice and training.

Keywords: leadership; practice; training; minority ethnic culture

Introduction

This article focuses on leading police services in minority ethnic community settings in the UK. The study aimed to assess the viability of a ‘shared leadership' system where the police work in partnership with people from minority ethnic communities to resolve local crime and disorder problems. The evidence collected is based on data representing the beliefs and perceptions of respondents, with experience either as police leaders 1 or representatives of minority ethnic communities, 2 regarding principles and practices related to shared leadership.

Data were initially gathered from a survey involving a sample of 200 police officers and 100 minority ethnic community representatives located in five police command units across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland conducted during 2005. Subsequently in an effort to follow up issues raised by the survey, six focus groups were convened with police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives. Finally interviews were conducted with a total of 14 police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives with analysis completed in 2007. The triangulated research design allowed for a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data to be considered.

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Research questions were initially derived from the literature dealing with community policing and ‘shared leadership’. The proponents of shared leadership believe that once the police and the community have a collective focus, they can share a leadership commitment to realise a vision of what is best for the community in terms of safety and general quality of life. Such an approach to policing minority ethnic communities has produced strong and consistent support. For example, a form of partnership working was strongly advocated by Lord Scarman in 1981 and again by Sir William Macpherson in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in 1999 (Scarman 1986, Macpherson 1999). As police services have responded to the Lawrence Inquiry there is evidence to suggest that significant advances have been made in the way they consult with their local communities at a strategic level. A report in 2005 for the Home Office Research Group acknowledged that while the principle of consultation between the police and local citizens was now well established, the specific purposes were often unclear and problematic. The study also confirmed that police agendas rather than community concerns tended to dominate meetings, with the process of consultation being understood differently by police and community participants (Foster et al. 2005).

Establishing the fit between the concept and reality of ‘community’ is itself problematic and may explain the lack of a settled institutional approach to community policing. As noted by Herbert (2006, pp. 3–10) it is exceedingly attractive to think that residents of particular localities will gather together on the basis of shared understandings of problems facing them and decide on ways of ameliorating them, but in reality this process may prove elusive. Instead across the world we see police services trying to promote something called community policing and discovering how hard it is to engage with residents of particular localities. Communities vary in the extent to which shared values and experiences can be represented in dealings with the police. At worst the term community is a misnomer implying that people sharing a space have similar values and a desire to be represented collectively, when the reality suggests this is not the case. As Herbert concludes, communities sometimes fall well short of the expectations that are placed on them by policing and indeed other public services such as those associated with housing. Although this study focuses on minority ethnic communities, their cohesiveness cannot be assumed in spite of having a shared experience that is influenced by ethnicity as well as geography. The current study stresses the concept of ‘open policing’, which does not assume fully formed communities exist. The focus in this article is on how police services are led in respect of engagement with minority ethnic communities as opposed to the neighbourhood development issues that may also need to be addressed if the desired relationships are to be achieved. The latter issue is a major research problem in its own right and is not dealt with in the current article.

While a generalised commitment to consultation with minority ethnic communities is evident in contemporary approaches to policing in the UK, in practice the problem of working out how best to understand the different needs and the different approaches required to provide a good service with equal access and outcomes remains unresolved (Holdaway and O’Neil 2006). In late 2004, the UK Government White Paper on police reform, Building Communities, Beating Crime, was published (Home Office 2004). This amounted to a re-launch of community policing initiatives. By 2008 dedicated neighbourhood policing teams were established in every part of
England and Wales and more specifically constituted on geographically defined 
neighbourhoods rather than the broader and more problematic concept of 
community. The teams are made up of police officers, police community support 
officers (PCSOs) and special constables, working closely with local authority staff 
and volunteers. Neighbourhood policing and Police and Community Together 
(PACT) meetings were to serve as the mechanisms for engaging with ‘local people’ 
(Home Office 2008). Drawing on research provided by the Her Majesty’s 
Inspectorate of Constabulary (Flanagan 2008) and the Cabinet Office (Casey 2008) 
there was once again a reiteration of the commitment to community engagement but 
with a greater appreciation of the need for the police to integrate with wider 
nearhood management policies pursued by local authorities. By 2009 Scotland 
and Northern Ireland had begun adopting their own versions of neighbourhood 
policing and PACT meetings to facilitate engagement with local people. 

While acknowledging the changing structures in which police–community 
relationships are being developed, this article focuses on the basic viability of shared 
leadership principles. It is not clear, for example, if shared leadership is able to 
command legitimacy, in the sense that both police leaders and members of minority 
ethnic communities share an understanding of what the concept means. It is also not 
certain that both groups approve of the respective roles that it implies for them. 
Additionally, it is relevant to ask whether police leaders and members of minority 
ethnic communities think this form of leadership is possible on the basis of 
experience. Based on evidence gathered, conclusions are drawn on the future 
leadership and management of the police service in minority ethnic community 
settings. The need for police services to change specific institutional practices and 
respond to a training and development agenda associated with shared leadership is 
also considered.

Policy context

Police leadership in minority ethnic community contexts was identified as problem-
atic as far back as 1971 when the Select Committee on Race Relations and 
Immigrations stated:

If the best examples of leadership in police and immigration relations prevailed 
throughout forces in the UK, many of the difficulties we have dwelt upon would, within 
a reasonable space of time, diminish. In some places they could wither away. (House of 
Commons 1972)

A decade later the Brixton riots in 1981 were the first disturbances in a year of unrest 
throughout England, with riots occurring in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, 
Sheffield, Nottingham, Hull, Slough, Leeds Bradford, Leicester, Derby, High 
Wycombe and London. Lord Scarman’s influential report criticised as insufficient 
the formal liaison taking place between the black community and the police in 
Brixton. Scarman (1981) argued that the absence of such communication was both a 
symptom and a cause of the ‘withdrawal of consent’ that underpinned the policing 
problems in the area (Jones and Newburn 2001). 

In the 1990s in England and Wales the nature of the relationship between police 
leadership and minority ethnic communities continued to be problematic, attracting
media attention when the Macpherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence was published in 1999. It raised a wide range of issues and recommendations and specifically named police leaders who were involved in the incident, either praising or clearly criticising their leadership behaviour.

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary in his report published in 2000 also identified weaknesses in partnership working. In that report, he concluded that a lack of proactive police leadership behaviour at the corporate level on community and race relations strategy as well as the failure of local commanders to practice appropriate strategies as part of their daily professional lives, militated against police forces ‘winning the race’ (HMIC 2000). It is against this background that the current study of leadership emerged. Following the suicide bombings in London in the summer of 2005, enhancing the ability of police services to develop effective relations with minority ethnic communities has become even more of policy priority.

**Shared leadership**

The origins of shared leadership lie in the idea that leadership can be explored as a social process – something that happens between people (Doyle and Smith 2001). Leadership has not traditionally been seen as a social process, instead both popular and academic approaches have tended to stress the individual leader rather that the led. Reflecting more of a concern to recognise the roles that leaders actually performed, behavioural or style approaches attempted to capture leader’s behaviours in the context of the organisation (Halpin and Winer 1957, Hemphill and Coons 1957). According to Burns (1979) ‘transactional’ leadership is the dominant form of behaviour and is reliant on exchanges which are based around offers of remuneration or status in return for effort and compliance. Control is also exerted through the ability of the leader to impose penalties in the same ‘currencies’. However, the circumstances and demands of shared leadership seem to require that police officers acquire what has been conceived as ‘transformational’ qualities (Dobby et al. 2004).

Transformational leadership theory stresses skills in vision building, strategising, aligning people, communicating, motivating and inspiring followers and is often invoked when the difference between management and leadership roles needs to be identified (Bass 1985). Transformational leaders think creatively with followers, as opposed to thinking creatively for followers, implying that police leaders when developing local strategies for tackling crime will tend to involve individuals who belong to the relevant community. Transformational leaders may still be rare, as Adlam and Villiers (2003) concluded in their research into police leadership in the twenty-first century.

This not surprising and in any case it would be wrong to portray leadership as a straight choice between transactional and transformational modes. Typically leaders need to employ both types of leadership (Bass 1990, Jung and Avolio 1999, p. 949). As concluded by Kakabadse and Dainty (1988, p. 16):

> Ability to adjust managerial style to suit circumstances was repeatedly commented on as an important leaned skill. Recognising that a different approach is required to suit different circumstances is of considerable concern for a chief officer.
The achievement of a reciprocal relationship between police leaders and minority ethnic communities of any description may in itself be a major step forward. For example, police leaders may be prepared to engage in a transaction which deploys more resources to reduce local crime on the basis of information provided and the demonstration of cooperation from minority ethnic communities.

Nevertheless researchers and practitioners now tend to agree that the organisation’s ability to cope with the numerous complex challenges it faces, requires more than the reliance on a ‘single’ individuals capacity of leadership and promote a perspective that places organisational leadership ‘not in individual … but in the collaborative efforts of many’ (Johnson 1997, p. 2). This perspective variously emphasises human relations-oriented features such as teamwork, participative decision-making, empowerment, collaborative risk-taking, enhanced communication and interpersonal relations and minimised control over others. The literature now includes theories based around ‘shared’, ‘distributed’ and ‘post-heroic’ leadership (Brown and Hosking 1986, Gronn 2002, Pearce and Conger 2003), ‘social exchange’ leadership theories (Dienesch and Liden 1986, Graen and Scandura 1987, Dansereau 1995, Sparrowe and Liden 1997), ‘relation perspective’ of leadership (Grint 2005) and the ‘management of meaning’ (Smircich and Morgan 1982). All of these positions pursue the same basic argument that a leader’s impact is dependent on the relationships they establish with followers. Located within this broad field of ‘relationship aware’ literature on leadership, the precise term used in relation to this study of police leadership and minority ethnic communities is ‘shared leadership’.

For Bryson and Crosby (1992, p. 345) shared leadership needs ‘leaders who enable themselves and others to define or discover the common good by grappling with public problems’.

**Shared leadership and the system of policing**

The contemporary leadership literature has broadened the concept of leadership and the problem of how to develop positive relationships for the pursuit of mutual purposes with followers is now fully recognised (Yukl 2002). It can be concluded that the currently favoured police leadership model resides in ‘relationships’ rather than the singular police officer. In the aftermath of the Lawrence Report there has been a certain recognition that in relation to the training of police officers to work in minority ethnic community settings, traditional means of learning about police powers and practices by rote is not sufficient. Police officers need to be given help in becoming ‘reflexive practitioners’, who will be aware of how values and beliefs affect their professional behaviour (Rowe and Garland 2007). This of course implies that leadership of police services in minority ethnic community settings should also become a reflexive process where leaders are aware of how values and beliefs are formed through their relationships with officers and the public.

In spite of such emergent consensus it should be recognised that the contemporary leadership problem associated with policing minority ethnic communities effectively, is wrapped up in a wider problem. This is related to the need to change from a traditional type of policing which it is suggested has an overly narrow law enforcement, crime control or crime repression focus. This is no new conclusion. Earlier observers recognised the extent to which policing took place in the absence of proactive attempts to seek the views of members of the communities served.
For example, two principal institutional characteristics emerging from the influential Knapp Commission (1972) which investigated police corruption in New York, were suspicion and hostility directed at outside interference and an intense pride in being in the police group. Both characteristics may incline police leadership philosophy to be defensive and inward looking. There is also the view that policing is a bureaucratic system and that police leaders are created out of that environment (van Maanen 1974). They are characterised as seeking solutions to problems through conformance with rules, rather than responding to the signals emanating from their operating environment. The assumption that policing deals with serious crime, as opposed to the maintenance of wider social order in a community is also assumed to be embedded in police service thinking. Under this model reactive policing, where actions follow crimes, is the norm, with a disinclination to engage with broader ‘service delivery’ issues which would require more complex relationships to be built with the community being policed. This policing model assumes that a ‘closed’ system needs to be maintained which isolates the individual police officer from their ‘clients’. The client is treated as a passive entity unless the victim or perpetrator of a crime. As a closed system success is measured on the basis of the police service organisation’s own internally determined objective, whether these accord with the perceived needs of the community served or not. Closed policing systems by virtue of the barriers they have erected between themselves and the communities served can only measure effort rather than ends. In the absence of external accountability means and ends are typically not differentiated sufficiently (Goldstein 1990). The theory of open and closed orientations to operating environments helps understanding of how organisations deal with their environments in many social and business contexts (Morgan 1996).

Community policing by contrast is dependent on an ‘open system’ where the police are far more open to the possibility of responding to external interests. In relation to minority ethnic communities, the policy and philosophy of community policing were influenced by Lord Scarman’s inquiry into the inner-city disturbances in the 1980s (Scarman 1981). It involves police leaders working in partnership with communities to resolve local crime and disorder problems and amounted to a profound shift in police thinking and community thinking (HMIC 2000).

Section 106 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (now included in Section 96 of the Police Act 1996) decreed that in each police area the views of local people should be obtained on matters concerning local policing and their cooperation sought in the prevention of crime. The behaviour and philosophy of police leaders are therefore shaped and influenced not only by the policy of community policing but also by law.

Open-system community policing has widened the strategic focus to include issues such as public safety, crime, fear of crime and community quality of life. Communities are seen as participants in shaping police objectives and evaluating interventions. Much of the community policing literature is indeed focused on capacity building within communities, for example building and sustaining a community partner to work with the police on matters of neighbourhood crime.

In practice, however, elements of community policing will have been established alongside closed-system models and in the circumstances of policing minority ethnic communities the extent of the adoption of community policing practices may be more limited than in the UK as a whole. The study anticipated that cultural barriers
and associated limitations on communication, constrained the extent to which elements of open-system policing and community policing have been negotiated into a working system. Of key importance to the research undertaken, shared leadership, it is contended, cannot be pursued in the absence of a significant adoption of community policing practices.

Research methods

A three-stage research design was established which involved sample surveys, focus groups and interviews with police leaders and minority ethnic community leaders in five different police service areas across the UK. The triangulated approach to data gathering greatly enhanced the depth of understanding gained about the problem of shared leadership.

The sample survey

Working in five designated police service areas in the UK, a sample was selected to include 270 police leaders, defined as those officers at sergeant rank or above with specific duties in relation to liaison with minority ethnic groups, and 100 minority ethnic community representatives, defined as individuals currently meeting on a formal basis with the police in relation to community issues. As such it is quite possible their particular view of the police is not shared by people from the same minority ethnic communities who have not engaged with the police on this basis. A larger-scale study might have attempted to examine differences between the views of these two populations.

The police force areas used in the study and size of samples were as follows: Metropolitan (London) 100 police leaders, West Yorkshire Constabulary (Bradford Area) 50 police leaders, Strathclyde Police (Glasgow Area) 50 police leaders, South Wales (Cardiff Area) 50 police leaders and Police Service of Northern Ireland (Belfast and Dungannon) 50 police leaders. The precise numbers of police officers who met the criteria were not always easy to define, with no exact database available to determine the population of officers fitting our definition of ‘police leader’. We estimated that a sample target figure of at least 50% of the relevant population had been achieved in all police services examined bar the Metropolitan Police Service where the percentage target was more modest. The survey produced 147 completed responses to the questionnaire. The response rate was 49%.

The other subjects selected to complete the questionnaire were from minority ethnic communities located in four of the five police force areas chosen for this research. This included 25 people from each of the West Yorkshire Constabulary (Bradford Area), Strathclyde Police (Glasgow Area), South Wales (Cardiff Area) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Belfast and Dungannon) forces. As was the case with police leaders, this proved to be a difficult population to accurately define. On the basis of estimates which were made a target sample figure of at least 30% of the total number of minority ethnic community representatives was achieved in all four police service areas.

The proportions of people from different minority ethnic groups were randomly selected for each sample and included Pakistani, Indian, Chinese, Asian Muslims, Travelling Community, Portuguese, Filipino, Black (African and Caribbean) and
Iranian participants. It was decided that on the basis of reports from other researchers and police liaison officers that there was likely to be a problem in securing an acceptable response from minority ethnic community representatives in London. They have been asked to participate in a high number of research studies and an element of reluctance to respond was anticipated. London was therefore left out of this element of the study. Of the 100 minority ethnic community representatives surveyed, 49 responded accurately to the questions. The 49% return rate was roughly consistent over each of the areas sampled and in total similar to the police sample.

**Focus groups**

The police liaison officers helped identify a small sample of police leaders who had completed the questionnaires. They were asked to choose a cross-section of police ranks that were representative of the leadership group, including females where possible. A total of three focus groups were conducted in West Yorkshire (including one Superintendent, one Chief Inspector, two Inspectors and two Sergeants), Strathclyde (including one Chief Superintendent, three Superintendents, one Chief Inspector, two Inspectors and two Sergeants) and South Wales Constabularies (including one Superintendent, one Chief Inspector, two Inspectors and two Sergeants).

Minority ethnic community representatives were also recruited to focus groups in West Yorkshire Constabulary (Wakefield, six people – two Indians, one Black African, one Chinese and two Asians), Strathclyde Constabulary (Glasgow, nine people – one Indian, three Black African, one Chinese, two Asians and two Pakistanis) and South Wales Police (Cardiff, eight people – three Indians, one Black African, one Chinese, one Somali, one Iranian and one Spanish/Arab) to take part in focus groups.

**Interviews**

The police officers chosen had first-hand experience of working with minority ethnic communities and of managing the practical day-to-day issues that arise in such communities. Participants included a Chief Inspector from the Rural Region of the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI), a Chief Inspector from the Urban Region of the PSNI, an Inspector from the Metropolitan Police in London, a Chief Inspector from the Metropolitan Police in London and a Superintendent from the Metropolitan Police in London.

With the help of police liaison officers interviews were arranged with minority ethnic community representatives from London and Northern Ireland. The participants included a black man with a history of working in the public sector in London and also acting as Chair of the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) in the Metropolitan Police, a London-based Chinese businesswoman who had also been the Vice Chair of the IAG, a Portuguese woman living in Craigavon, Northern Ireland, a Filipino woman actively involved with minority ethnic communities in Omagh, Northern Ireland, an Indian businessman from County Armagh, Northern Ireland, a black man residing in County Down, Northern Ireland, a Muslim man residing in Belfast, a Chinese woman actively involved with welfare and
community life in Belfast and a male member of the travelling community residing in West Belfast.

In line with a commitment made to respondents regards anonymity, interview and focus group participants are given numbers and identified with police services areas referred to as A, B, C and D. Police officers are also identified by rank.

Research questions

The challenges facing police forces pursuing shared leadership approaches to delivering services were considered with a view to identifying training needs and reviewing current institutional development capacities. The study compared and contrasted the views of police leaders and minority ethnic group representatives on different aspects of shared leadership with stress placed on collecting their views on attitudes and practices thought to be conducive to progressing an open policing agenda. The literature suggests that this involves prioritising relationship, greater focus on ‘ends’ (e.g. crime and quality of life) rather than means (e.g. arrests) and an associated need for an expanded policing focus to include such issues such as public safety, fear of crime, safe business environment and community quality of life (Fielding and Innes 2006). The literature also suggests that communities need to be seen as participants not subjects in policing. Law enforcement may be ‘de-emphasised’, as crime prevention, victim assistance and general community building are given priority (Davies and Thomas 2003). Police leader and ethnic minority representatives’ responses to these positions were explored in some depth.

While policy-making over the last decade and beyond has been much influenced by community policing concepts, the extent to which changes in philosophy have been embedded in operational practice are hard to verify (Vito et al. 2005). Evidence relating to leadership styles employed by the police in minority ethnic community contexts is scarcer still. Shared leadership requires consensus around aims and working methods consistent with an open style of policing. The questionnaire in capturing the views of both police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives, measured firstly the extent to which such a consensus had been formed. The research also identified issues on which police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives held different opinions. Community policing, and shared leadership in particular, require strong lines of communication based on a high level of knowledge about local people and their priorities. The extent of the police leaders’ knowledge of minority ethnic cultural norms was therefore a second issue which required investigation. Shared leadership will also be dependent on police officers possessing appropriate skills in relationship building with minority ethnic communities, the third area examined in the study.

In respect of the survey a series of 10 questions were formulated to investigate these issues. Questions were constructed so that they were relevant and comprehensible to both police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives. An important feature of the project was the facility created to compare police and minority ethnic community representative responses to the same question. This greatly enhances the validity of conclusions which are made on the viability of shared leadership.
Focus groups and interviews mainly dealt with the issues arising from the results generated by the questionnaire but allowed for interactive discussions around subjects which emerged in the course of the sessions.

Results

Consensus around aims and practices consistent with shared leadership

An open style of policing is recognised in current practice by both police and minority ethnic community representatives. The results in Figure 1 record that 70% of police leaders and over 50% of minority ethnic community representative recognise a style of leadership which mixes problem solving and relationship building. Surprisingly perhaps, given the accepted tradition of closed-system policing, only slightly over 20% of minority ethnic community representatives and just under 20% of police leaders classified the dominant style as reactive ‘problem solving’. Open-style policing is also seen to be acceptable in the sense that both police and minority ethnic community representatives are supportive of the principle that the community should influence the focus of the policing agenda. As demonstrated in Figure 2 police respondents strongly disagreed with a proposition that focusing policing on issues raised in meetings between the police and minority ethnic community representatives had negative consequences. Minority ethnic community representatives were a little less clear in their rejection of this statement. Another important test of the acceptability of open-system policing is answered by the extent to which respondents are prepared to relinquish traditional command and control practices which focus on direction, control and results such as prosecutions and convictions. A fairly significant difference was recorded in the responses given by police leaders and minority ethnic community representatives, with nearly 70% of minority ethnic community representatives agreeing/strongly agreeing as opposed to less than 50% of police leaders. While it would have been surprising if police leaders did not have an attachment to established means of managing, the data in Figure 3 nevertheless indicate a considerable willingness to move away from a command and control style on the part of respondents. The study also tested how comfortable police leaders were with the idea of focusing on values and expectations when meeting with minority ethnic groups. This implies that police leaders are prepared to accept that discussing community priorities has to take precedence over formally endorsed objectives.

Figure 1. What do you feel best describes the style of leadership adopted by police when they meet with you? (Police leaders, \(n = 147\); minority ethnic leaders, \(n = 49\).)
Potentially, therefore, such a decision to accept a degree of fluidity over agendas addressed in meetings might draw attention away from the pursuit of a predetermined and internally formulated policing agenda. The data record that a comfortable majority of police leaders reject the proposition that discussing the values and expectations of minority ethnic communities in meetings will have a detrimental effect, on the other hand nearly 70% of minority ethnic community representatives agreed (Figure 4). It is possible that the meaning of this question was perceived completely differently by each group. Alternately minority ethnic community
representatives were expressing a degree of caution regarding the practical business of delivering an open system of policing. The latter conclusion is supported by views expressed in focus groups and interviews.

Police focus groups conducted to look beyond the survey data collected suggested that agreement on the desirability of conducting policing on an open-system basis is one thing, but delivering is another. Police leaders seemed keen to work in partnership with people from minority ethnic communities but their comments indicated frustration with the time actually available to make achievements in this area, citing the need to balance ‘people issues’ with a competing managerialist agenda, which corresponds more closely to a closed system of policing. A number of discussions took place concerning the lack of current engagement on the ground with communities, something that had become progressively worse over a period of two decades due to a shifting of priorities towards more tangible measurable targets. This is a tension that has been recognised in previous research on community policing (Fielding and Innes 2006).

There was certain evidence revealed in police focus groups of the continuing prevalence of closed-system policing. For example, one participant commented:

There’s the feeling of we are the police, we know what’s best and I’m always right. We are not used in this country to listening to the community. (Chief Inspector 4 from Police Service A)

Encouraging minority ethnic communities to believe they could influence police leadership was seen by police participants as difficult. While there was recognition in the police focus groups that people issues, defined in this context as engaging with communities, are critical to the pursuance of effective police leadership, it was also clear that police services are under considerable pressure from central government pressure to produce ‘results’. In these circumstances the unpredictable and long-term task of developing relationships with minority ethnic communities seems often to be
‘boxed off’ from the mainstream policing activities. In one focus group, in particular, there was an admission that police leaders tended to ‘delegate the strategy’ or pass it to ‘specialist’ units to implement:

We as police leaders tend to pass the responsibility for the strategy to the specialist teams, for example, the Minority Support Teams. (Superintendent 2 from Police Service B)

and

That’s what we tend to do; we squad it, bring in specialist teams. (Superintendent 3 from Police Service B)

Ethnic minority focus groups also picked up a sense of the lack of ‘mainstreaming’ in respect of policing in their communities as captured in the quotes presented below:

I feel police leaders should meet people like us more often; no disrespect to [pointed to the police Inspector who chaired the meeting], but we never see the bosses. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 5 from Police Service B)

and

The level of engagement is very minimalist; there is a need for the police to come out of the police stations and into the community. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 2 from Police Service C)

A degree of suspicion was evident in relation to what may be referred to as the corporate strategy of police services in relation to minority ethnic communities. This was expressed as discontentment with the strategic priority given to policing the communities which the focus groups lived in. Participants tended to agree they were at the lower end of the list of priorities.

Unease was also detected in respect of the tension between the corporate ‘image’ projected by police forces and the reality of the focus groups communities:

Police leaders produce great policy documents but what they say is not happening in the community. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 1 from Police Service A)

and

The police have plans and policies that are well written and glossy, that are designed to build better relationships with minority ethnic communities but they never seem to make them happen on the ground. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 7 from Police Service C)

Minority ethnic community focus groups looked for more lasting commitment to what we have referred to as open-system policing and shared leadership as one participant put it:

A lasting impact is needed, spiritual or soul, rich dialogue, not ticking boxes, not fluffy. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 5 from Police Service A)

In an interview a police leader acknowledged a deficiency evident from his own experience:

We only engage at points of crisis and conflict. (Chief Inspector 3 from Police Service C)
In another group a specific comment was made regarding police leadership indicating an appreciation of substance over style:

... Chief Constable had a personal commitment, didn’t have a flashy style, high public profile, being taken seriously as the highest levels. (Superintendent 1 from Police Service A)

The issue of engagement appears to be hard to resolve. On the one hand, there appear to be doubts over the terms of engagement, with minority ethnic community representatives unimpressed by some of the efforts made by the police which they perceived as being superficial. The foundation of shared leadership lies in an effective social process which allows a common understanding of public problems to develop. An institutional determination to lead through a process that involves thinking through problems with minority ethnic communities is proving difficult to express in convincing terms on the basis of the evidence collected.

Engagement is not, it needs to be acknowledged, a concept which is easy to pin down in precise terms. Engagement may be more easily observable ‘in the breach’, than defined in concrete terms consistent with a managerialised approach to policing. The government-sponsored National Practitioner Panel for Community Engagement in Policing, which has operated since 2003 to facilitate the development of community engagement in policing, uses a wide definition of community engagement which includes consultation, social and marketing research, and community and stakeholder engagement (Community Engagement in Policing 2010). What is clear is that engagement in all the various forms it may take needs to be evaluated to discover what really works. This is genuinely difficult policy territory; for example a Home Office report on community engagement, while advising that more evaluation needs to be carried out in the UK, also concluded that ‘leaders of police forces and partner agencies have to be genuinely committed to delivering engagement’ (Home Office 2006, p. v). ‘Commitment’ which featured heavily in the accounts given by minority ethnic community respondents in the current study is likely to prove hard to define and measure.

The results obtained in the current study suggest it will not be possible to establish shared leadership unless open-system policing is supported in both organisational and philosophic terms. While a considerable implementation problem appears to exist on the basis of data collected in focus groups and interviews, this did not cause police leaders or minority ethnic community representatives to reject the basic principles needed to promote shared leadership.

**Communication with and understanding of minority ethnic communities**

In line with current thinking on community policing it was anticipated that the task of leading the police service in minority ethnic community contexts would to some extent demand that the police officers involved find suitable communication methods to acquire knowledge of the ways of life, beliefs and social practices of the people they worked with. Figure 5 shows that nearly 80% of police leaders and over 80% of minority ethnic community representatives agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that a scant knowledge of cultural background had a negative effect on meetings with ethnic minority groups. (It was felt that the ethnic mix present in the communities examined made this question just as relevant when posed to minority
Respondents also confirmed that poor levels of cross-cultural communication had a negative effect on meetings (Figure 6). Strengthening the case for time to be devoted to police–minority ethnic community engagement, high percentages of respondents regarded meetings as a good place to learn about people from other cultural backgrounds (Figure 7). In testing the effectiveness of different communication mediums, the perceived value of engagement through face to face meetings was confirmed by the answers to a question which asked both sets of respondents to identify their main sources of preparation. Police leaders
see ‘previous meetings’ as their main source of knowledge. The results also indicate that a relatively low proportion of police respondents were able to draw on their existing knowledge of other cultures. Knowledge of race and diversity law was not highly valued in this particular context by police leaders. Minority ethnic community representatives on the other hand drew on their knowledge of ‘other cultures’ (32%) as well as ‘previous meetings’ (22%; Figure 8). This suggests that existing training provision failed to provide the resources police leaders required and consequently they relied on experience instead. Focus groups with minority ethnic community representatives reaffirmed the view that police officers were often lacking in knowledge concerning the minority ethnic groups they worked with.

The responses not only indicated how important experience in working with minority ethnic communities was in delivering effective leadership, but also suggested that in practice this proved difficult to accumulate. Minority ethnic community representatives frequently commented in focus groups about the lack continuity achieved at an operational level:

The consistency of police engagement is totally patchy; for example, different initiatives in each area; one police officer doesn’t seem to communicate with another on history of incidents. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 7 from Police Service C)

Figure 7. At your meetings with people from other cultural backgrounds how often did you ‘learn lessons from such encounters’? (Police leaders, \( n = 147 \); minority ethnic leaders, \( n = 49 \)).

Figure 8. When you prepare for meetings with individuals from minority ethnic communities what was important? (Police leaders, \( n = 147 \); minority ethnic leaders, \( n = 49 \)).
In an interview a minority ethnic community representative noted:

... the link was the community officer; now there is no link because there is not a community police officer. (Minority Ethnic Community Representative 3 from Police Service B)

Police focus groups indicated that police leaders who had been involved in meetings seem to gain confidence from this form of engagement. While this in itself is unsurprising it raises questions as to how police services develop and maintain a group of officers with the relevant knowledge. The philosophy of shared leadership requires police officer to think creatively, share experiences and seek common solutions to local problems. This will not happen effectively if police services routinely rotate officers around district command units. The possibility of substituting experience with training is not currently viable. In what was a recurrent issue in police focus groups, participants wished to discuss the problem of maintaining ‘continuity of police commanders in communities’.

Police officers also complained of having little time to interact on a personal level with members of the minority ethnic communities they were supposed to partner with. This reinforced the view that important aspects of open-systems policing in minority ethnic communities were treated as an ‘extra’ rather than mainstream activity. Police focus group participants also frequently complained of being driven by performance management targets, which failed to capture the subtleties of the relationship building needed to acquire satisfactory levels of knowledge about specific minority ethnic communities. As one police leader put it:

You have performance target PSA 2 which is how effective you engage with the community. (Superintendent 5 from Police Service B)

Skills in building relationships with minority ethnic communities

The study tested perceived levels of skills in relation to engaging with members of minority ethnic communities. Police respondents were asked how skilled they thought they were at getting individuals from minority ethnic communities to express their personal feelings about problems when they meet to solve local crime problems (Figure 9). They were also required to indicate how skilled they considered themselves to be in encouraging individuals from minority ethnic communities to ‘become more involved’ when they met to solve local crime problems. Police leaders were generally confident about their skill levels. Over 80% thought they were quite or very skilled at getting individuals to express feelings about problems and over 70% quite or very skilled at getting individuals to become more involved. Minority ethnic community representatives were asked to rate police leaders on the same skills. Their responses were markedly different, with roughly half believing police leaders were quite or very skilled and half considering them to be quite or very unskilled (Figure 10).

Police focus groups indicated that officers were keen to become more knowledgeable but currently perceived training as inadequate. The training problem is complex given the perceived skills needed to be effective in the context under discussion. For example, focus groups were asked to consider what makes a community beat sergeant effective. Key phrases repeatedly noted in the conversations
that took place included ‘they are friendly’ and ‘good personality’, both of which indicate that effectiveness might often depend on ad-hoc reliance on individuals rather than formal officer training. This presents difficulties for police services that are committed to the concept of equipping officers with competencies required for special tasks or general policing roles. Leadership skills required for open-system policing in minority ethnic communities even if identifiable in general terms may not be easily ‘deconstructed’ and presented in a training package focused on specific competencies.

More generally the lack of training of any description was also frequently discussed by participants in police leader interviews as illustrated by the selected comments below:
The biggest negative is, we announce a massive initiative before we have trained the front line staff. (Interview; Chief Inspector 3 from Police Service A)

Consistency in training is not being achieved, police leaders are reduced to learning on the job, as one focus group pointed out:

I have never had any kind of training in my current role. I had quite a lot in my previous role, but I would say that your training comes very much on the ground. You live it every day. (Superintendent 5 from Police Service C)

Conclusions

The data collected in the survey stage of this study suggest that shared leadership has an underlying viability in minority ethnic community settings, but a distinction needs to be made between the endorsement of a principle and the positive reporting of experiences of particular actualisations in the context of a police service. Based on responses to a series of four questions, it appears that there is clear support for and some degree of actual experience of running an open system of policing where the views of community members are actively sought by police leaders. Given the impossibility of ‘de-coupling’ shared leadership from an open-system community style of policing, this is a significant finding. Legitimacy in the form of recognition and approval of an open system by both partners is a fundamental building block for shared leadership. Given the support expressed by respondents for an open system of policing there is an evidence base for amending promotions criteria to identify future leaders who can achieve high ratings in delivering shared leadership.

Viability is also greatly dependent on the shared leadership pact being supported by knowledge of ethnic minorities served on the part of police officers and the attainment of good working practices in relation to communications. Cultural differences are recognised as a problem in police–community relations and the reality is that finding a workable means of engaging with minority ethnic community representatives is still an aspiration. Both police and minority ethnic community representatives tended to be very aware of the continued presence of low-quality cross-cultural communication and general lack of cultural awareness as obstacles to successful policing.

The study identified some important institutional barriers to the development of appropriate knowledge and communications between police leaders and minority ethnic communities. In relation to developing and maintaining a context specific knowledge and skills base, evidence suggests that continuity in police–community relations may be an important factor as identified in previous studies (Foster et al. 2005). Police services traditionally rotate officers, a practice adopted to diminish the possibility that relationships become ‘personalised’ or even corrupt, thus undermining the integrity of the police. While this is a practice which can be readily justified in terms of operating a closed system, it presents an obstacle to the development of social relations between police and community of the depth required by an open-system approach. In their review of post-Macpherson diversity training Rowe and Garland (2007) drew attention to evidence suggesting that there is a tendency to treat such exercises as stand-alone interventions with insufficient attention paid to reinforcing the message through, for example, appraisal processes. This is a significant finding since there is undoubtedly a need to recognise accomplishments associated with shared leadership in appraisal and promotion.
processes if it is to become viable in institutional terms. Police officers who are successful leaders in traditional command and control settings may not achieve the same success in community policing shared leadership contexts (Fiedler 1996, Lumb and Breazeale 2002).

Competency-based approaches to selection and development will need to be modified to take this into account. The demands of shared leadership may mean that not every police officer necessarily has the personal resources to operate in minority ethnic community settings. This conclusion in itself will demand institutional changes in the way police officers are deployed.

In so far as diversity training is a solution to problems associated with leading police services in minority ethnic community settings, then there is recognition centrally that this needs to be more informed by inputs from minority ethnic communities (Home Office, Association of Police Authorities, Association of Chief Police Officers and Centrex 2004). Moreover, even when a satisfactory list of relevant skills is compiled with an appropriate input from the communities served, there then lies the problem of constructing an effective, well-resourced training programme. In this respect there may be certain merit in standardising the training of police officers in respect of various competencies (Rowe and Garland 2003). However, in the case of training officers in leadership skills required for working with minority ethnic communities, ‘one-size fits all’ programmes may prove inadequate given the significant differences that exist in relation to the cultural norms associated with different minority ethnic communities. In addition, it has to be considered whether for example the Somali community in Liverpool has the same values and needs as Somalis living in other British cities. Aspects of the local Liverpool environment including the pattern of interactions with other minority ethnic minorities living locally may be significant and training in cultural awareness should consequently be designed to take this into account.

Shared leadership on the basis of the research conducted would appear to have a legitimacy grounded in mutual recognition and approval of key principles. The implementation of a shared leadership approach places considerable demands on the police services to reform working practices, appraisal and promotion schemes. It may prove something of a mistake to rely on formal diversity training programmes to create a circumstance where open-systems policing and shared leadership become viable. Wider institutional changes are required.

Notes
1. The definition of ‘police leader’ used in the article refers to police officers who hold the substantive rank of Sergeant, Inspector, Chief Inspector, Superintendent or Chief Superintendent in a UK police service with specific duties in relation to liaison with minority ethnic groups.
2. A minority ethnic community is defined as ‘a group which is a minority within a particular society and is socially distinguished or differentiated from other and/or by it primarily on the basis of cultural or nationality factors’ (ACPO 1997, p. 1). In this study the subjects are ‘people from minority ethnic communities who meet with the police on a formal basis in relation to community issues’. For inclusion minority ethnic community subjects needed to work and live in the local police areas.
3. Given the issues raised by the evidence collected on shared leadership in this study it is recommended that police services maintain a more formal record of officers with experience of specified liaison duties with minority ethnic community representatives.
4. This is a high-level advisory group in the Metropolitan Police Service that advises the Commissioner and others.

5. While there were some geographical variations in the views gathered from survey, interview and focus groups respondents in the different localities studied, there was not strong enough evidence to suggest that differences mattered significantly in a predictive sense. In other words, while the views of police officers in West Yorkshire and Strathclyde or minority ethnic community representatives in South Wales and West Yorkshire were not exactly the same, the differences were not systematic in any discernable way. Geographic patterns have therefore not featured in the analysis that is presented below.

References
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