Intent and execution in the construction of performance stories by police services – the annual reports of the police services of Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Chicago and London compared.

Gordon Marnoch, University of Ulster
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Dr. Gordon Marnoch, School of Policy Studies, University of Ulster, Newtownabbey, Northern Ireland. BT37 0QB

gj.marnoch@ulster.ac.uk

Introduction

Annual reports play a significant part in the process of governance. In addressing performance, the annual report will typically convey a sense of organizational identity, record achievements and explain key public service processes. The annual report is a resource for both government ministers running departments and politicians responsible for conducting oversight over performance delivery. Typically annual reports draw on a wide range of data and purport to be the most comprehensive account of an organization’s performance. (Halachmi, 2002).

Drawing on exploratory work carried out on health services organizations and their annual reports (Marnoch, 2008), the paper examines performance storytelling in respect of police services. Rather than comparing the substantive records of service recorded in annual reports, an analysis has been conducted to discover evidence of intent and provide an appraisal of how effective the execution of the story telling has been. Intent is in part influenced by the general social and political context in which the police service is delivered. Police services will typically fulfil a statutory reporting obligation to a higher authority such as a central government department through the publication of an annual report. The current dominance of new public management (NPM) approaches to measuring performance is of great significance in influencing how police services construct annual reports. It is not clear however, whether NPM is used as a model for police services to rationalise their performance efforts or alternately used in a supporting role for a story that owes more to police leaders’ intuition than calculative managerialism. There is also a technical writing challenge associated with executing the telling of a performance story in an annual report. It is quite likely that a story which is intended to be informed by NPM principles fails to materialise on paper.
Annual reports and police services

For the reader of annual reports wishing to inform themselves about the performance of a public service organization the 'story' is of crucial importance. The reader is likely to be a politician or member of a police board with an interest in conducting oversight or perhaps even a member of the general public. To attract and hold a reader's attention the annual report needs to be more than just the sum of its parts. There needs to be a plausible plot connecting the various performance claims that are made together into a unified story. It also needs to be written in language that readers enjoy or will at least tolerate. Narrative devices such as providing the occasional surprise in the story will also help maintain the reader's attention. There are a long list of reasons why decide not to continue reading a novel. We may consider the plot to be dull, too complex or implausible. Perhaps the characters were unconvincing or the language used too dull. Similarly we can begin reading an annual report from a public service organization and fairly quickly identify reasons for putting it aside. Politicians generally have fairly short attention spans when it comes to absorbing material which can assist them scrutinise performance.

The telling of the performance story with respect to policing is particularly hard to do successfully. (Loveday, 2005) Like nearly all public services there are 'multiple bottom lines', making results difficult to measure in unambiguous terms and even harder to reconcile in a performance story. Police services are in a position of having to balance out the resources they will commit to a particular crime problem. Are violent crimes more important than traffic safety for instance? Consequently with such difficult trade-offs having to be negotiated, performance stories will often be inherently difficult to tell. (Carter, Day, & Klein, 1992)

For students of public administration it is also readily apparent that the annual report has usefulness which goes beyond the actual facts and figures presented between the covers (or more typically in a PdF document nowadays). The annual report represents significant research material since it constitutes the 'official' performance story, the version of events that the organization wishes to convey to the public, the media and the political world. The story is typically constructed through reference to a set formula which determines what is included and crucially what is left out in the annual report series. The formula will tend to take a form which reflects a mixture of statutory reporting requirements, NPM reporting habits and institutional habits. The resultant document should be considered however as a best attempt in the circumstances prevailing, rather than a perfect rendition of the intended story. The annual report may in short be a poorly executed story which fails to hit the intended target or misconveys the story with adverse results for the way in which the organizations performance is perceived. As an artefact of new public management the
annual report is often a good example of the ‘unintended consequence’, an attempt to broker legitimacy gone wrong. The execution of the story can misfire for various reasons including presentation, mismatch between content and readership expectations, a lack of logic to the elements of the story or poor use of language.

The term ‘intent’ is used here to identify the conscious efforts an organization makes to present a story based on representing elements of performance it wishes to be made public. This will typically be executed through a mixture of narrative and empirical evidence, typically presented in the form of performance metrics. It is not always clear what sort of aims the performance story tellers had in constructing the report. Complicating matters police service annual reports are invariably the product of an editorial process involving a number of stakeholders. The notion of a single narrator with a story to tell about performance is usually implied by the device of including an introduction where the chief of police ‘signs off’ the report, usually with a ‘letter’ to the reader accompanied by signed photograph. However, none but the most gullible of readers would take this to mean that the chief of police has actually composed the annual report. In reality the annual report produced by a large police force is a task that involves a call for contributions from different sections of the service, which will then be turned into a more or less coherent performance story by in-house communications specialists. In these circumstances pinning down ‘intent’ becomes an act of interpretation. At the bare minimum annual reports fulfil a statutory obligation for the police service to report to an oversight body or the public at large. It was also anticipated that intent would be influenced by the need to tell the performance story in terms that are to at least a certain degree compatible with NPM.

**Annual reports examined**

The four police services were chosen to allow for performance storytelling to be compared in a diverse range of social and political circumstances. (City of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Chicago Police Department Superintendent Jody Weiss, 2007; Metropolitan Police Service and Metropolitan Police Authority, 2008; New Zealand Police, 2008; Police Service Northern Ireland, 2009) It was anticipated that the analysis would indicate different intentions in the telling of performance stories. On even superficial inspection it is clear that the individual performance narratives were also executed very differently. It is also important to consider the extent to which the global adoption of new public management and the diffusion of standard governance schemes have impacted on the delivery of policing in the four locations under examination. (Table 1.) The paper will therefore compare annual reports to look for evidence of patterns of convergence and differences in performance storytelling, for example in the range of performance metrics utilised or the narrative structure employed. It
will also be possible to identify the extent to which unique external political and social circumstances are evident in the intent behind the performance stories told. The four police services and their annual reports were picked in an effort to examine contrasting polices services. There is no claim made that they are representative of police services in for example OECD countries. It is the case however, that the police services under examination are all large scale and have developed in the context of governance framework with common roots. (Kempa, 2007)

Table 1. Number of police officers in the four police services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CPD</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>MPS</th>
<th>PSNI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of officers</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population served</td>
<td>2.9 million</td>
<td>4.3 million</td>
<td>7.5 million</td>
<td>1.75 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) operates in what is typically described as a ‘post-conflict’ political context, where a history of communal violence and terrorist activities directed at the police and army has a major impact on the context in which the performance story is told. The PSNI was established in 2001, as a response to the acknowledged failure of its predecessor the Royal Ulster Constabulary, to win the support of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. In both Chicago and London the police services operate in circumstances where the allegedly unlawful or unprofessional behaviour of officers has been the subject of intense political attention over a number of years. Both police services have been the subject of a number of high profile inquiries, involving accusations of racial bias and excessive use of force. (The video recorded antics of Chicago police officers feature prominently on websites such as YouTube). The New Zealand Police by way of contrast have, at least in recent times, remained relatively free of controversy. New Zealand is however, a country which thoroughly embraced new public management in the early 1990s, which may be evident in police services performance storytelling. While the CPD has its innovative moments, it is generally thought to be an ‘old school’ police service. The MPS claims to be a highly innovative police service as does the NZ Police. The PSNI in different circumstances expressing innovation wishes to make claims about a new approach to delivering police service to the people of Northern Ireland.

The four police services operate in different governance systems but are all subject to oversight. In Northern Ireland a complex governance system was established which places the PSNI under the oversight of both a Policing Board drawn from the Northern Ireland Assembly and the community and the independent Office of the Police Ombudsman, which is empowered to carry out investigations into policing on behalf of the public. At present
responsibility for policing has yet to be devolved from Westminster to the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont. Powers are expected to be transferred during 2009, also providing a further point of oversight. (Ellison, 2007) The Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) both report to a city police authority/board in a governance model found across the developed world. The New Zealand Police (NZ Police) reports to the New Zealand House of Representatives.

NPM and police service annual reports

It is important part of the current exercise to examine how influential NPM concepts have become in constructing annual reports and influencing intent, particularly in the sense of placing pressure on police services to use performance metrics. A classic NPM performance story will rely on performance metrics and present a calculative account of successes. In NPM there is an assumption that we can summarily categorise performance into inputs, outputs and outcomes. However, in the case of police services some further consideration and explanation is needed in assigning metrics used in performance stories to particular categories. Inputs are fairly straightforward tending to be expressed in cash, equipment or manpower terms; outputs on the other hand are less straightforward. In the annual reports reviewed the bulk of outputs refer to recorded crimes, arrests and convictions. The data is typically presented as a record of output, reflecting the performance of the police service in reducing crime. Traditionally crime and arrest figures have also been presented as outcomes of policing. (Moore & Braga, 2003) This ‘works’ for the police on the basis that a reduction in the level of recorded offences implies a stronger performance by the police in this area. However, this is a dubious claim in many instances. For example the New Zealand Police record the number of ‘drugs offences (cannabis) in their annual report. The number of offences per 10,000 people fell from 45 to 34 between 2004 and 2007. Should this be attributed to the efforts of the New Zealand? Is it necessarily a socially positive change? It is quite conceivable that cannabis offences fell because other, perhaps more damaging drugs, arrived in New Zealand and attracted users. The statistics do in fact record that offences associated with ‘new drugs’ rose. It is also possible that the fall in recorded offences reflects a different attitude to possession of cannabis by police officers. No suggestion is being made that the New Zealand annual report is trying to ‘pull the wool’ over the readers eyes. Missing from the performance story though are process indicators associated with the particular offence, which would explain why cannabis offences are falling. For instance if the police had used resources to disrupt the supply of cannabis and in doing so raised its price in the market for illegal drugs, this could be recorded in a narrative or performance metric. It
is questionable to what extent the emphasis on crime figures is sustainable as an indicator of performance given that particular crimes may be falling or rising due to socio-economic factors. For instance, in the current recession cases of recorded fraud are apparently rising in the United Kingdom. Metrics of a different sort are needed to indicate the attribution of a movement in recorded offences to specific policing activities.

Outcome measures should refer to end goals. The end goals of policing are not always obvious. In practice outputs and outcomes tend not to be differentiated with the same degree of systematic certainty as in for example health care and as already noted there is a tendency to treat crime figures as representing outcomes. As an alternative end goals can be conceived in terms of crime related quality of life indicators. Survey generated figures on the public’s ‘fear of crime’ may serve as outcome indicators. While this is a significant contribution to measuring performance it is still the case that establishing genuine links between outputs and outcomes in policing is rather hard. (Drake & Simper, 2003) For the purposes of the content analysis conducted for this paper the key qualification used for identifying an outcome metric is that there is a clear link between police outputs and ends which have a positive public value. To clarify, a record of murders whether increasing or decreasing over time, with no apparent relationship to deployment of policing resources, does not count as an end outcome. On the other hand a recorded reduction in road traffic fatalities, which it is being claimed is attributable to a recorded change in policing tactics qualifies as an outcome.

Annual reports and transparency

Another aim in the current study is to examine the likelihood of annual reports adding to the transparency of police services. Annual reports may contain masses of potentially useful information for end-users to examine and draw conclusions about the level of performance being achieved. The annual report is part of the transparency boom but here again some caution needs to be exercised. In this current phase of the transparency era it is now clear that the whole business of publishing information, allowing free access to information only secures a vantage point for potential scrutinisers. It does not guarantee that the opportunity will be used. Sometimes this will be enough, with the opportunity to gaze on the workings of the public service organization producing a tangible return in the form of better behaviour and results from anxious public servants. This is what Heald (2006) refers to as the intrinsic value of transparency. Here it is not really necessary for the outsiders to become actual watchers and interpreters of the subject’s behaviour. An annual report in these circumstances would fulfil its function simply by facilitating the possibility of inspection regardless of the quality of the story told. On the other hand, if transparency is expected to have an instrumental value, in the sense that readers use information to call a halt to
ineffective activities or ask the leaders of the organization under review to devote more resources to actions that make a positive impact, then the annual report needs to be constructed in a form that provides access to relevant information. In this case the quality of the performance story becomes crucial.

Methods

A content analysis was used to collect data relevant to the performance stories being told through the four annual reports examined. ‘Classic’ content analysis operates on the basis that the words and phrases mentioned most often are those reflecting the most important messages in a communication (Holsti, 1969). A word based count was conducted of common NPM concepts and terms appearing in the reports; however a lengthier content analysis recording the frequency and type of performance metrics used provided the basis for most of the conclusions drawn in this paper. It is logical to think that the number and type of performance measures employed in each report will in all probability have some influence on the impact the report makes on its readers and should therefore be recorded. Attention was also given to comparing the construction of the stories evident in the four annual reports. In this respect the approach adopted is an adaptation of traditional narrative analysis of works of literature. (Corvellec, 1997) Specific attention was paid to comparing the messages provided by the reports ‘narrators’ (chief of police in all cases), presentational features particularly the use of visual images and summarising the story content and format. A comparison was also conducted of the readership which reports are seemingly directed at and also the language employed to tell the performance story. Finally an appraisal was made of the quality of plots used to unify the information provided and create a performance story.

Analysis of the four annual reports

Narrator

Annual reports typically begin with a introductory message often in the form of a signed letter from their senior executive. This formula is used in all the reports examined. The message may be used to establish key elements of the performance story to be told and can also contain narrative suggesting tone and mood. In the cases examined the police chief (jointly in the case of the MPS with the Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority) there is evidence of the message being used to acknowledge existing narratives concerning policing, for example in the Chicago report the Superintendent announces the creation of a Bureau of Professional Standards in response to misbehaviour by police officers, the MPS message notes the rising number of young people being murdered in London. Sometimes the message will be used to introduce what the chief of police has identified as a positive
development, presumably in an attempt to encourage a new narrative. For example in New Zealand the message contains references to a newly launched initiative to detect and deal with child abuse, while the PSNI Chief Constables message contains a reference to a worsening financial situation given the demands made on the service in relation to ‘legacy issues’, which includes inquiries into murders which took place 30 years or more. The intention is to acknowledge selected ongoing issues and introduce new issues, presumably in an effort to influence future narratives.

Presentation
The New Zealand Police Annual Report has a relatively engaging visual presentation featuring a number of photographs depicting police officers engaged with members of the public drawn from different sections of society or carrying out duties such as stopping cars. The cover is based on a photograph of a male police officer laughing with a female Maori child in front of what appears to be a market stall. The report has a ‘designed’ look with italicised text and text boxes used extensively for effect. The PSNI report uses photographs of visibly relaxed looking police officers on various duties. The Chicago report has a front cover based on photographs of police officers (all male) marching with a kilt attired pipe band, carrying flags and accompanied by a cavalry style procession of mounted police. The visual appearance of the report is heavily reliant on photographs. The photographic content contains a number of examples which invoke a police service with ‘working with the community’ based approach to policing, but in contrast to the New Zealand and PSNI reports also depicts a ‘harder edged’ police service. For example one photograph shows two white police officers taking details from two black men in what appears to be an arrest. (Race plays a significant part in the performance story told by the Chicago Police Department as discussed below). Another photograph depicts a heavily fortified prison or police station, similar in appearance to police stations in Northern Ireland which have been the target of terrorist attacks over the past four decades (images entirely absent from the PSNI report). While three of the annual reports reviewed use visual images to convey a mood and send messages to readers, the Metropolitan Police Service Annual Report contains no photographs. Through drawing comparisons it can be concluded that the New Zealand and PSNI reports are using photographs to promote a ‘police service as part of the community’ mood, while the intention of the Chicago Police Department is clearly aimed at reminding the reader of the coercive force carried by the CPD through the heavy symbolism of visual images employed. The Metropolitan Police report is more neutral in terms of the mood and symbolism of its visual presentation.
Content and format
The New Zealand report at 129 pages is by some way the longest of the reports examined. The PSNI Chief Constable’s Report is by contrast the shortest of those reviewed at 12 pages. The Chicago Police Department and Metropolitan Police Service reports are of similar size at 76 and 61 pages respectively. All four of the annual reports contain a mixture of narrative accounts and statistics. In three of the annual reports a similar format is employed to organise the performance story. In the MPS report some 50% of the total length, 15% in the CPD report and over 80% of the PSNI report are used to provide a narrative celebration of achievements and draw attention to events the police service has been involved in. The intention is to convey a story of a police service which is engaged with events that readers will identify with and show how full of new ideas it is. Examples include ‘crime busting’ moves against selected criminal targets but also innovative actions and events such as the CPD’s child car safety seat inspection initiative and the hosting of a ‘asset forfeiture summit’. The MPS report is noticeably more influenced by new public management rationalisations of policing, including for example, a story about the introduction of ‘front counter’ service improvements and a ‘quality call back’ system to seek the public’s views about the service they received.

Target readership
Alone among the four documents examined, the PSNI report is clearly aimed at the general public. The newsletter format report is sent to every household in Northern Ireland. This is a strategic decision on the part of the Chief Constable and Policing Board and explains why the PSNI report is much shorter than the others. The PSNI report passes the ‘would you read this over breakfast’ test, which is not even a remote possibility with the New Zealand and CPD annual reports which have the least inclusive readership in mind. The MPS report might just pass the test at a politician’s breakfast table.

Language
While not alone amongst the public services in this respect, police services have a tendency to employ acronyms and codes extensively in their operational communications. (Researchers interviewing police officers frequently notice this tendency). This manner of referring to activities could create a barrier to outsiders attempting to scrutinise performance. The reports examined have all been written by communications staff and are largely free of such problematic terms. In relation to understanding the intent and execution of performance story telling a content analysis was conducted on the four reports to determine the extent to which they utilised concepts and terms associated with NPM. This is significant in suggesting police services compliance with an external demand for ‘conventionally told’
performance stories. (NPM it is argued is now the norm in the control of public services in
the United Kingdom, United States and New Zealand). A word based search was conducted
on the text contained in the four annual reports under review. (Table 2.) The words used for
the search were chosen to reflect current preoccupations in the sphere of public services
governance.

Table 2. Use of concepts/terms associated with NPM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NPM international terms</th>
<th>CPD</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>MPS</th>
<th>PSNI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targets</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joined up</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted score¹</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NPM ‘old favourites’ did indeed feature heavily in three of the reports, but as anticipated
the CPD report is notably free of the terms and concepts in question. The CPD is, it can be
argued, a more traditional and NPM resistant organization than the other three services – at
least on the superficial level revealed by use of language – and almost certainly also in a
more fundamental way related to how it conceives performance.

Content analysis of use of performance metrics

The political context in which all four of the police services operate would, it could be
anticipated, demand a certain level of evidence to be presented in the form of performance
metrics, although a degree of institutional independence could also be expected to be
reflected in reporting practices with respect to empirical evidence. Content analysis shows
that the CPD and New Zealand reports contain by far the highest numbers of performance
metrics of the four documents reviewed. When the respective volume of the report is taken
into account, then the CPD report stands out as the performance story that is most reliant on

¹ The weighted score is based on the ratio between uses of words and the length of the report calculated in
number of pages.
performance metrics. The MPS report perhaps surprisingly, is by some way the least dependent on performance metrics to convey its story. The newsletter style of the PSNI report did not mean that the writers ignored performance metrics in their efforts to explain and justify performance. Looked at in a little more detail there are other important observations to be made before conclusions are drawn on the intent and execution of the four performance stories examined with respect to metrics and quantified evidence.

Table 3. Analysis of categories performance metrics presented in the four annual reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CPD</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>MPS</th>
<th>PSNI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output/process</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted score(^2)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CPD report contains very little in the way of trend data. Only 4% of the total metrics included track trends and of this set only 14 out of 26 are based on a run of at least three years. (Table 4.) By contrast the NZ Police report almost always provides trend data. The MPS and PSNI figures are less impressive. Trend data tends to be highly valued by politicians attempting to conduct oversight.

Table 4. Analysis of the provision of trend data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CPD</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>MPS</th>
<th>PSNI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trend data provided</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 2 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% presented as trend</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CPD report and its account of performance are heavily reliant on what might be called ‘traditional crime and arrests figures’. A considerable range of crimes are reported but there is little effort made to identify particular categories of crime which have received strategic priority. Only three metrics could be classified as outcomes in the CPD report. The CPD report is alone in sub-totalling crimes and arrests by race and district. The PSNI report while not so markedly dependent on traditional crime figures is similarly lacking in detailed input and satisfactory outcome metrics. Traditional crime and arrest figures can be categorised as

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\(^2\) The weighted score is based on the ratio between uses of words and the length of the report calculated in number of pages.
indicators of process or output in the sense that they capture the reactive element of policing, on the other hand they give little clue to the relationship between actions and outcomes and are hence contributing little explicit evidence in respect of performance, if this is taken to mean how well resources are used in pursuit of stated objectives. (An exception to this is the manner in which traffic policing and investments in camera surveillance is reported by the CPD. Here some sense of tactics is conveyed. This is in sharp contrast to the lack of any insights offered into for example the policing tactics used to tackle ‘hate crimes’, ‘alternative policing’ (community policing) and ‘domestic violence’ in a section of the report titles ‘Directed Policing Strategies’.

Some of the criticisms which can be made of the CPD and PSNI reports are remedied in the New Zealand and MPS reports. The NZ Police and MPS reports have the highest proportion of outcomes metrics. The difference in the quality of performance evidence is marked with a far more varied set of output/process metrics provided in addition to those referring to the standard categories of crime and also by the inclusion of some narrative explanation of policing tactics in relation to selected.

**Performance plots**

If annual reports are to make an impact without considerable interpretive effort on the part of their readers then it is reasonable to expect they will need a unifying plot to link performance ‘incidents’ together. The NZ Police and MPS both use a ‘golden thread’ plot in constructing their performance stories. The concept of the golden thread has been promoted by the United Kingdom Audit Commission to encourage understanding of the need to explain a chain linking government set targets from central down to local and individual practitioner levels. Golden threads allow objectives, targets and indicators used at different stages in the policy delivery sequence to be linked in a consistent and easy to follow fashion. Ideally frontline practitioners such as police officers, should be made aware of how their efforts are contributing to strategic aims through reference to the golden thread. (Audit Commission, 2005) The NZ Police use a fairly light touch to link narratives dealing with selected policing outcomes and key interventions back to ‘government goals and justice sector outcomes’. The purpose is to align detailed incidents of performance to national policies, which it could be assumed is something a parliamentary readership would find useful. The MPS, perhaps under pressure to acknowledge competing central government and London-wide policies, have an altogether more complex plot running through their narrative account of performance. The plot tries to link together Metropolitan Police Authority (the London wide governance body) ‘critical performance measures and targets’ to internally MPS created metrics recording service delivery. Reference is made to four ‘strategic outcomes’ and ‘seven key areas’, but then later in the report a set of performance metrics are introduced under the heading ‘the critical 12’. The story also includes narrative accounts of various initiatives such as ‘Safer Neighbourhoods’ and ‘Capital City Policing’, all of which make it hard for a plot to be established. There is no golden thread her and the report is undoubtedly losing impact as the basis of a narrative that will shape public discourse over policing in London. A member of the Metropolitan Police Authority with an engagement in the thread (golden or otherwise) of accountability might well be in a position to make the connections.
between the various narratives of achievement against plans and targets contained in the report, but is highly doubtful that an averagely informed parliamentarian would be able to make sense of the story. It can be assumed that an ordinary member of the public will not be motivated to piece together the narratives of performance achievement referred to into a unified whole.

It might initially be concluded that the CPD and PSNI performance stories are a plotless aggregation of statistics and narrative accounts of events. The CPD and PSNI do seem to have largely rejected the idea of organising performance metrics and narrative accounts through a plot. Both reports contain substantial sections devoted to telling the reader about events that took place during the year. In Chicago this included disparate subjects such the arrest of a particularly active burglar, the establishment of a information centre and operation ‘double wrap’ against the drugs trade in a particular district. The PSNI report includes details of an ‘international operation’ against organised crime, a new record checking system used in relation to safeguarding vulnerable groups and a explanation of the progress of the Historical Enquiries Team. (Re-examining unsolved cases from the Northern Ireland ‘troubles’). No attempt is made to claim there is a thread to the events described. Plots are a device for placing a coherent story into public discourse. There are various possible reasons why the CPD and PSNI do not attempt to link performance achievements together.

The CPD may be inclined to feed the Chicago political system with readily interpretable statistics for which there is an existing appetite, rather than attempt to construct a more complex performance plot, hence the number of crime statistics compiled on a race and district basis. Police services are led by individuals with highly developed political instincts. In Northern Ireland some sort of similar political intuition to that seen in Chicago probably explains the lack of an attempt to construct a unifying performance plot. In Northern Ireland it is still something of a novelty for the police to be engaged in dealing with what could be termed ordinary crime. It is not appropriate perhaps for the PSNI to be promoting a calculated NPM story about performance. Instead there is more to be gained in celebrating its emergence as a regular police service dealing with difficult but non-political crime issues.

Conclusions

The review conducted of the selected annual reports shows that intent is not always influenced by NPM rationalisations of performance. The NZ Police Annual Report stands out as a best example of the NPM performance story. In the context of New Zealand politics the closeness of fit achieved between the performance story and NPM ideas about how to measure performance must be regarded as a success. On the other hand critics could point to an ‘over-framing’ of performance made inevitable by the adherence to a strict NPM approach to what works. The MPS Annual report is intended to be constructed along the same lines but for the reasons identified it fails. The report in question lacks a plot and key NPM components such as sufficient trend data and outcome metrics are also missing. There are insufficient performance metrics to work out whether the MPS uses resources to best effect. This is a failure of execution and the report will have unintended consequences if readers fail to find the evidence they expected to be presented with and consequently question the legitimacy of the story they are provided with. The PSNI and CPD annual reports we can conclude are not really intended to be NPM derived performance stories in
spite of certain initial evidence to the contrary. The execution of the respective performance stories presented in the annual reports should not be assessed in terms of an NPM model of performance. With knowledge of local political circumstances intentions may become clear as is the case with the PSNI report. The intention behind the PSNI newsletter style report is logical when it is realised that a calculated approach to performance is not seen to be needed at this point in time. The ‘story’ despite the lack of adherence to a recognisable rubric may well be the right for the political circumstances of establishing PSNI as a regular police service. We could conclude that the CPD report dumps an avalanche of data in a plotless pile, which readers are likely to leave alone for the most part. Is this poor execution which means the report misses its point? Alternately is the huge volume of statistics requiring expert interpretation a deliberate attempt to overwhelm would be readers? Do the writers of the CPD report realise perhaps that the public discourse over policing in Chicago is not ready for an NPM rationalisation of performance and provide material that will be picked up by the local media without indicating very much about actual performance?

Instrumental transparency is not being realised when reports lack trend and outcomes metrics. Even where such data is provided in reasonable quantities, it is still difficult to find clear evidence on what works in policing. A useful recommendation to oversight bodies would be for them to specify the need for evidence of causality and the key sets of inputs, outputs and outcomes referring to specific policing activities which would need to be provided in police service annual reports. An evidence base would then begin to build up. This might initially cause challenges in sense of challenging the incremental deployment of resources by police services but in the longer term would legitimise actions in a way that is not possible at present.

References


