

EFFECTIVE POLICE LEADERSHIP

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

New Paradigms for a Novel Context



Edited by

**Rob Elkington • Christopher D. O'Connor
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Effective Police Leadership in the 21st Century

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Effective Police Leadership in the 21st Century: New Paradigms for a Novel Context

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Editors

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Acknowledgments

For Hannah and her dog Kaos.

– Rob Elkington

I dedicate this book to the police officers and civilians working in policing to make transformative change happen. It's hard work, and your dedication to seeing change through keeps me motivated to continue to work with you to help that change come to fruition. The complexity of our current times demands a lot (maybe too much). To only name a few, it requires that those working in policing collaborate with multiple groups, organizations, and institutions, often with competing interests. It requires police services to hire curious people who want to learn more, especially about whether their actions are fair and effective. It also demands that police services are transparent, data-driven, evidence-based, and learning to solve problems that haven't even been envisioned or come to fruition yet.

I'm always struck by the number of people in policing up for these challenges. Teaching me that hard things are not impossible things. This book invites readers to think critically about what policing is and what it could be. I myself am not a trained police researcher. My PhD is in youth transitions from school-to-work but over the last decade, I have been drawn in by the passion of many inside and outside of policing to transform how policing is done in Canada and beyond. I'll be there alongside you helping to create the change we want to see happen. Policing is at a crossroads, and change is only beginning, but let's do big, bold, and creative things.

– Christopher D. O'Connor

I dedicate this book to the pioneers, the trailblazers, and the countless courageous souls who dared to push the boundaries of what was possible in policing and leadership so that others, including myself, could aspire to roles that were once out of reach.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my friends and colleagues, both within the policing world and beyond it, whose insights, encouragement, and shared passion for reimagining police leadership have been invaluable. Our countless hours of discussion, debate, and dreaming about the future of policing have culminated in my contributions to this book as both an editor and author.

I take immense pride in serving as a police officer during a time that, while perhaps more challenging than ever before, is also brimming with unprecedented opportunity. We are at a crossroads in this profession, and the decisions we make today will define the future of policing for generations to come. This book is more than a collection of ideas; it is a mandate to interrogate the status quo, to discard what no longer serves us, and to imagine what could be and boldly take action toward it.

As you turn these pages, I invite you to explore and reflect deeply upon the paradigms and possibilities that lie within. The landscape of policing in the 21st century demands that we confront challenges head-on and seize the opportunities to create a more inclusive, just, effective, and innovative system of public safety. May this book be the beginning of many conversations that lead to real, transformative change.

– Tiffany Castell

I am honored to participate in this very important work. As someone who began serving as a police officer many years ago, I have witnessed the gradual evolution in leadership that has occurred inside the profession over the last few decades. However, in our rapidly changing world, it is critical the evolution of police leadership now rapidly accelerates if policing is to remain a valued societal institution. As one of the largest levers of organizational change is effective leadership, this book provides glimpses of novel leadership paradigms that will most certainly contribute to the evolution of policing that lays ahead.

For this reason, I wish to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the brilliant authors, researchers, and practitioners who submitted their work for inclusion in this anthology. I also wish to acknowledge my fellow editors who expertly facilitated the assembly of these chapters into a cohesive body of work, and the talented people at Emerald Publishing who guided the formatting and publication of the finished product. Above all else, my deepest gratitude goes to the extraordinary Dr. Rob Elkington. More than just our editor-in-chief, it was only through his vision, resilience, and passion for advancing the quality of police leadership that this work was completed. While remaining clearly focused on the well-being of police officers and the communities they serve, he was the steering wheel, engine, and shock absorber that kept this project continually moving forward. It is truly a privilege to know you and to work alongside you Dr. Elkington.

– Les Sylven

Chapter 1

Police Leadership in the 21st Century: An Introduction

Rob Elkington

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Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations. (Drucker & Maciarello, 2008, p. 288)

Abstract

Leadership is a complex construct influenced by contingencies such as context, followership dynamics, and leadership skillsets and mindsets. Police leadership includes an added layer of complexity because of the traditional para-military nature of the police organization and how this rank structure informs police leadership's understanding of what it means "to lead." This chapter addresses the complex nature of police leadership by suggesting a novel definition of police leadership. This novel definition is suggested as a new way of thinking about police leadership. This chapter also discusses the importance of contextual factors impacting police leadership. It concludes with a call for wise leadership as a new paradigm to address the complexity of police leadership in the 21st century.

Keywords: Leadership; Followership; skillful; effective; inclusive

Key Takeaways From This Chapter

Reading this chapter will help shape your thinking about police leadership in the following ways:

- You will define police leadership in the 21st-century context.

Effective Police Leadership in the 21st Century, 1–18

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- You will understand the factors contributing to police leadership effectiveness in the 21st-century context.
- You will reflect on the implication of the police organization as a complex adaptive system.
- You will understand the importance of adaptive leadership and followership in the 21st-century context.
- You will recognize the importance of wisdom for effective police leadership in the 21st-century context.

The 21st century is defined as the age of the Anthropocene. This definition places humanity as the central force shaping the systemic interactions of a global community. Police services are social constructs designed initially to keep law and order by arresting those alleged to have behaved criminally in breaking the law. As such, police services functioned based on a social contract in which the public entrusted the maintenance of law and order to a group of selected and qualified individuals. However, as with any organization, the effectiveness of the police service depends on the leadership, followership, and context dynamics at play. In this chapter, we define police leadership for the 21st century. Building on our definition of 21st-century police leadership, we discuss the essential factors required for effective police leadership in the current context. Once we have identified and discussed the factors required for effective police leadership, we will differentiate the different styles of police leadership and the intersection of contextual wisdom when applying a specific police leadership style. This chapter compares police leadership approaches and suggests an adaptive leadership toolkit approach. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the pivotal role of effective followership in effective police leadership.

Police Leadership Assigned and Emergent

In my work with first responders such as Paramedics, Firefighters, and police officers, I have become keenly aware of the importance of definitions. A definition is crucial because it serves as a mental placeholder that aligns people's understanding. For example, if I were talking to a diverse group of people and stated: "You should strive to be a skillful leader," I might have a range of responses to that statement. What does it mean to "strive"? What does "skillful" mean, and how does one be "skillful"? Finally, what do I mean by the term "leader"? Do I envisage leadership as a set of traits that a person is born with and now leverages to lead effectively? If the person is born with these traits, why should they "strive" or seek to be "skillful" since a trait is innate and thus not something I can work hard to develop or hone, or can I? Indeed, I thus find it helpful to clearly define the term "leadership" and then unpack that definition with the first-responder team I am working with.

Think about this concept for a moment. What is "police leadership"? Is it the formal role of the police chief? Is leadership something police officers enact when they serve and protect the public? Is police leadership the cumulative output of the formal

and informal leaders of a specific police service in a particular location? For example, if we suggest that every police officer is a leader through their interactions with the public, do we create an ontological and epistemological problem for these police officers and, in turn, the public? For instance, if, as a police officer, I view myself as a leader because of my role and interactions with the public, how will that definition and perception of leadership shape how I view myself, how I view the public, and how I make sense of my interactions with the public whom I am supposed to serve, but now engage with as a “leader”? Is it the responsibility of the police officers to lead the public in their interactions with the public, or is it the responsibility of the police officers to serve the public in these interactions? How one defines police leadership determines how one answers these questions. This issue of a clear definition of police leadership is essential because how one defines leadership shapes the leadership narrative one invokes when fulfilling the role of a police officers.

So, how do we define police leadership? Incorporating the UN Sustainable Development Goal number 16, together with elements of the definitions cited earlier, I suggest the following definition of police leadership:

police leadership, both assigned and emergent, of the police organization as a complex adaptive system, serves as an enabling function so that wisdom expressed through the social and human capital within a police service is organized to influence the members of that service to achieve peace, justice, and strong institutions through the ethical and inclusive application of the law.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, definitions are important because they provide a semantic domain for joint engagement. Some things you will notice about this definition:

- It focuses not on a heroic leader figure but on distributed leadership as concertive action (Bolden, 2011).
- It is purpose-driven (Yarlagadda et al., 2017): “... to achieve peace and justice...”
- It is culture-centric (Lumby, 2012) since everything in the service is organized to “influence the members...”
- It is measurable (Davis & Bailey, 2018; Davis et al., 2015): “...peace, justice, and strong institutions through the ethical and inclusive application of the law.”

Over the following few pages, we will unpack this definition to understand how we might operationalize it within a 21st-century Policing environment. This definition serves as the foundation for all that follows in this book and highlights how the authors view leadership. Leadership is not about one heroic individual making all the decisions, autocratically driving the organization forward (or backward!). This definition highlights our belief that organizations in the 21st century are complex

adaptive systems, living organisms, and leadership is assigned and emergent. This means that wise leadership enables the organization to integrate policy, bureaucracy, and administration around a central compelling vision. This conception of police leadership is illustrated in Fig. 1.1 below.

Let's unpack our definition of police leadership and tie it to the various components represented in Fig. 1.1.

Our definition of police leadership does not focus on one individual as a heroic leader, normally designated "the police Chief." This focus is intentional because, in the 21st-century VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) environment (Bawany, 2016; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Bernstein, 2014; Elkington, 2015), a single heroic leader does not have the capacity to anticipate and address the rapidly emerging multiplicity of challenges. The police service needs to adapt its understanding of leadership to a collective paradigm. This collective mindset creates a supportive environment in which followers with leadership capacity and leadership skill might emerge to influence others in the organization to achieve the vision and mission of the organization in novel ways (Vardiman et al., 2006). The police organization requires assigned leaders who take responsibility for certain critical portfolios. However, these assigned leaders form a component of the *leadership* of the police service, not its *summum bonum*. In any police service in the 21st century, an array of individuals possesses unique knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that contribute to the knowledge or "wisdom" of that service. When a police service can leverage the diverse KSAs (knowledge, skills, abilities) within its ambit, it has a vast pool of data to draw on for decision-making quality and accountability. Add to this internal pool of data the enormous array of external data available for access, and the leadership of the police service needs to organize itself to leverage that data for effective decision-making (Elkington, 2015). As Tunguz and Bien (2016) highlight:

When we make decisions with data, we decide collectively because we're all evaluating the facts and interpreting them as a team... More data brings new perspectives, which helps the team further improve their decision-making process and performance... The team owns the decision, not just the team's leader. (p. 69)

The complexity of any decision, and its impact on peace, justice, and strong institutions suggest that it is neither fair nor wise to leave such decisions on the shoulders of a single heroic leader, or even a group of (heroic) leaders. An effective police organization will design for a leadership culture in which bench strength is continually developed with an understanding that the follower of today might be the leader of tomorrow and that followers (can) influence the leadership in positive ways if the organization is designed to support this influence (Oc & Bashshur, 2013). This broader view of leadership as concertive action creates a vast repository of human and social capital to be leveraged to varying degrees (Vroom, 2000) when facing the intensity of a VUCA world (Casey, 2014) in the Policing environment.

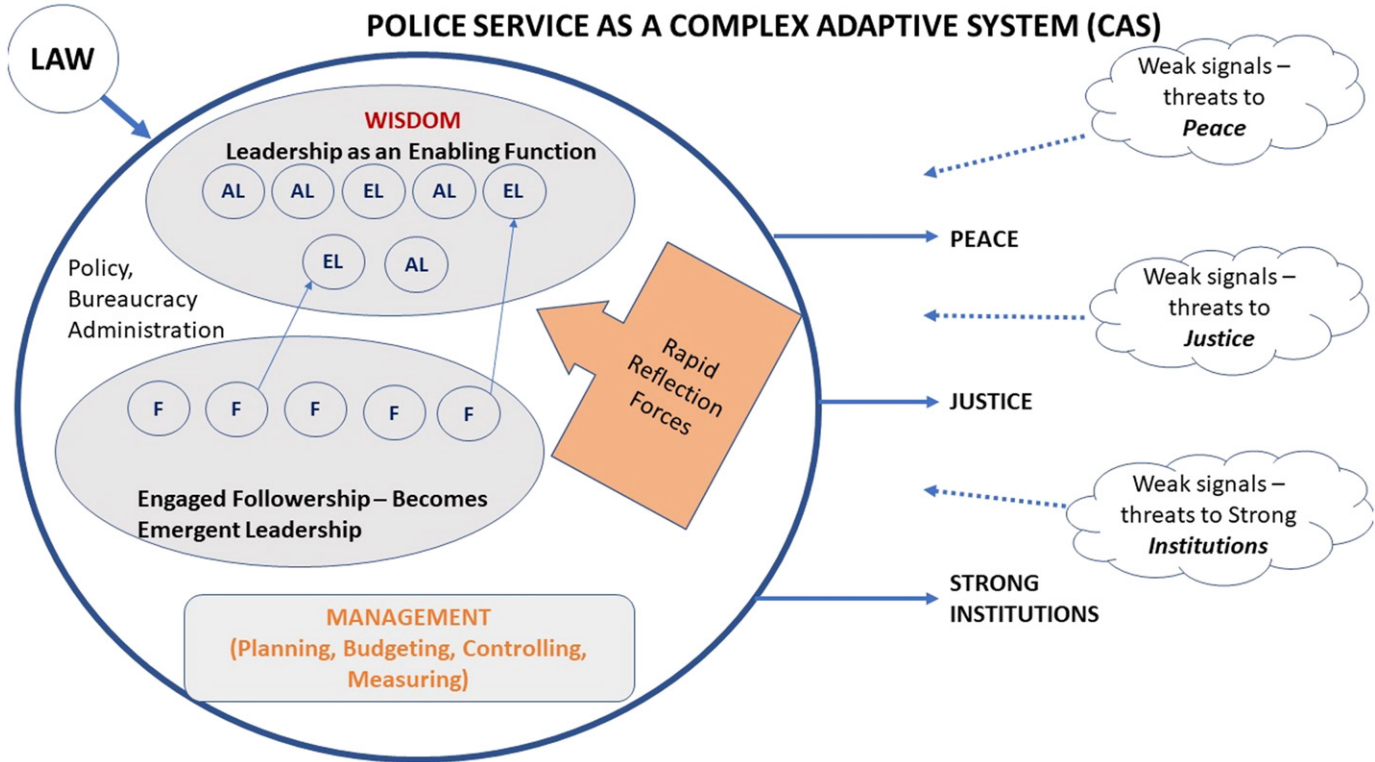


Fig. 1.1. Wise Police Leadership as an Enabling Function.

How do police organizations design for leader formation and leadership development to ensure this requisite bench strength is emerging across the police service?

One of the pivotal advantages of the distributed leadership framework (Bolden, 2011) described in our definition of leadership in a police service is the capacity to facilitate leader formation and leadership development for bench strength across the police organization. Effective leadership is an essential component of organizational thriving in any sector in the emerging context of the fourth Industrial Revolution (Bonciu, 2017; Zucconi, 2016). Leadership, though, is a complex construct that defies simple explanation (Liu, 2015). The challenge to define effective leadership is no less real in the complex and evolving world of police leadership (Can et al., 2017). What constitutes effective leadership within a Policing context? In corporate organizations, one of the critical measures of effective leadership is shareholder value creation (Hitt et al., 2017). Still, in Policing, the measurement of effective leadership is substantively different, namely, the safety of the public (Perez & Barkhurst, 2012). In Policing, elements such as police officer well-being, sensemaking, vision-casting, and change leadership form part of the diversity of interconnecting components required for effective police leadership (Vanebo et al., 2015).

Having established the urgent need for, and the complexity of, effective leadership within a 21st-century context leads to the next question: “How do we develop effective police leadership?” Leadership development in organizations worldwide has moved to the foreground in institutional and organizational priority (Cummings et al., 2013; Feldmann et al., 2013; Forde et al., 2013; Grandy & Holton, 2013; Jarvis et al., 2012; Olson, 2013). As Schafer suggests for police organizations in particular, “Insufficient leadership in Policing can result in significant negative consequences for agencies and their personnel (Schafer, 2009).” Schafer (2010) went on to state:

Despite the popularity of such development initiatives there is an absence of clear and compelling evidence that leadership efficacy can be enhanced or developed, either in general or within policing contexts. (p. 648)

It appears that while leadership development within the corporate sphere has received much attention, there is a dearth of research into what might constitute the most effective mechanisms to develop leadership within police organizations. While it may be presumed that technical skill and proficiency from learning the principles of Policing and applying these in practice equips a police officer for leadership, Katz as far back as 1955 reminds us that technical skill is the baseline and that effective leaders need to develop both human and conceptual skills to lead effectively (Katz, 1955). It should be self-evident that technical skill or leadership within policing by seniority might not be enough. Perez and Barkhurst (2012) assert:

Police officers are not like other workers. The unique nature of who the police are and what they do, combined with the strength

and solidarity of their ever-present subculture, makes police leadership—the capacity to lead and manage—different from the leadership of any other kind. (p. 2)

It is widely recognized that those possessing leadership potential within an organization need opportunities to develop that leadership capacity to support organizational health and growth (Vardiman et al., 2006). What does this leadership development look like within a police organization? How do police organizations structure themselves for effective leadership development and organizational learning (OL)? (Schwella, 2014; Sugarman, 2010; Vanebo et al., 2015).

Leadership development is significantly more contextual than leader formation and seeks to develop interpersonal capacity as well as social awareness and social skills (Schyns et al., 2012). This social awareness or social intelligence (SQ) is highlighted as a critical skill for the modern police officers “because a high SQ is often wanting in bureaucracy (especially police work) today (Perez & Barkhurst, 2012, p. 133).”

Leadership development is also emerging as an organizational priority because many organizations face an increasing shortage of leadership talent (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Vardiman et al., 2006). Nahavandi (2015) quoting Stern (2011) reports that:

It is, therefore, not surprising that organizations and individuals devote considerable resources to leader and leadership development. By some accounts, the large U.S. companies spent over \$125 billion on employee learning and development in 2009. (p. 310)

This is no less true of the police service, which exists as a complex adaptive system (Perez & Barkhurst, 2012). The need for effective leadership in Policing is quite evident, given the range of accounts of police officers and police organizations failing to serve the public with professionalism and integrity (Schafer, 2009; Vanebo et al., 2015). Pivotal to this assertion that leadership development should be a focus of all organizations in general and police organizations in particular is the belief that leaders and leadership can be developed through effective leader formation processes (Burgess, 2018), and leadership development initiatives and programs (Elkington et al., 2017).

With this in mind, it is helpful to highlight the distinction between *leader* development or leader formation, which focuses on human capital, and *leadership* development, which focuses on social capital (Grandy & Holton, 2013; Vardiman et al., 2006). Leader formation seeks to enhance the leadership capacity of an individual by improving the individual’s self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation (Burgess, 2018). Police organizations need to attend to the dual development pieces of leader formation and leadership development. It may also be pivotal to the success of any police leadership development initiative that both skillset and mindset are addressed as core leadership attributes. This blending of skillset and mindset is essential in the 21st century because we have come to understand that organizations are living entities (Dervitsiotis, 2005). In this context, organizational leaders are agents (Solow & Szmerkovsky, 2006, p. 53) within this living organization that

functions as a complex adaptive system (Gabriela, 2012; Solow & Szmerekovsky, 2006).

It is because of the nature of the police organization as a complex adaptive system that police leaders are not insulated nor isolated from the many internal and external forces that impact the police service. It is evident, as stated earlier, that most police organizations comprise diverse elements, and can thus be deemed to be “complex” (Barlatt et al., 2012). One of the critical implications for leadership when viewing the police organization as a living system is that leadership work becomes inherently relational and situational (Kennedy et al., 2012). Leadership development needs to take account of this situational and relational reality by strengthening the leader ontologically (leader formation) as well as enhancing the leadership processes functionally (leadership development), thus strengthening the leader’s skillset and mindset (Kennedy et al., 2012) while structuring for leaders to emerge and contribute to the leadership processes within the police service (Vardiman et al., 2006). Thus, the leaders and leadership of these ever-changing organizations need to develop the same capacity for change and learning (VanderKaay, 2010). As Dervitsiotis (2005) asserts:

As a living system, a human organization evolves over time as a continually adaptive system... Traditional leadership’s usual response to ‘hold things steady’ trying to maintain the same strategy in periods of rapid change can be disastrous. (p. 928)

To be effective in a VUCA context, a police service needs to design and sustain an intentional development pipeline ensuring that every person in the service is developing and has the opportunity to influence decisions and outcomes in meaningful ways when their expertise and passion warrants and supports such influence. Fig. 1.2 below (Elkington & Castell, 2023) suggests a sample development pathway for Policing organizations. The intensity, complexity, and breadth of this development pathway is contingent upon the resource availability and partnerships of a police service, something we discuss further in the description and discussion of Fig. 1.2 below.

Fig. 1.2 (Elkington & Castell, 2023) renders a police leadership development model. Any or all of the elements included in the model will support effective police leadership. This is true because an articulate, systematic police leadership development program creates a culture of leadership. In addition, the mentoring process (should) create psychological safety and psychological bravery to enable emergent leadership’s contributions to Wicked problems that emerge in a VUCA world and threaten to undermine the effectiveness of the police organization and its leadership. The formal education expressed in the Certificate in police leadership (CPL), the Graduate Diploma in police leadership (GDIPL), and the Master of Criminology (MCrim) contribute to the professionalization and standardization of police leadership. The professional development workshops and mentorship programs build crystallized cognitive ability, which incorporates problem-solving skills, social judgment, and social skills. It also helps develop stronger technical skills (Northouse, 2022). The output of such a development