Nonadversial peer reviews of policing operations: fostering organizational learning

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This paper sets out to describe and explore experiences gained in the course of ten years with a non-blaming, nonadversarial learning methodology, as applied in the context of the policing of major events, where at the request of a host, peers gather data during events as they occur and a one-sided focus on errors is avoided. This peer review methodology appears to contribute to organisational learning in three different ways: hosts receive informed and constructive feedback, reviewers gain additional experience and insights and the exchanges taking place in the course of or following the reviews (e.g. in seminars) contribute to the identification of good practices and development of professional norms. Experiences show that the interactions taking place between participants also facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation. Interestingly, quite apart from the products obtained through the methodology, the peer review process itself proved to foster reflection and learning.

1. Introduction

In his paper "Suppose we were really serious about police departments becoming 'learning organizations'", Geller (1997) identified a number of obstacles to organizational learning within the police, most of them related to an organizational culture that has a "learning disorder". In high profile crisis-situations, even more barriers to learning exist (Elliot & Smith, 2000). In addition to an organizational culture averse to learning, Elliot & Smith point to (lack of) trust and scapegoating as intertwined and significant barriers to learning from crisis situations and:

> *In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, there will be an inevitable search for culpability and a scapegoating process will take place as the "survivors" seek to ensure their continued survival and project blame elsewhere. This phase is also typified by organisational turnaround and a re-alignment of corporate values and assumptions – or, as Turner put it "full cultural readjustment". It is within such a highly charged and emotive environment that organisational learning is supposed to take place*

Waddington (1994, p. 42) points out the enormous "in-the-job" trouble for senior police officers that may follow public disorder, arising from the threat of having to account for one's actions to superiors or to an independent inquiry. As Waddington (1996, p. 131) states: "*post-disorder analysis is an inherently political process in which various parties seek to reconstruct events so as to place blame on their opponents. It is a process in which the police have traditionally faired quite badly*".

Therefore, even though in theory, accountability and learning can go together, in practice they are often at odds with one another (Guijt, 2010) and there are numerous examples of senior police officers losing their jobs after high-profile incidents (in a recent example, the police chief of Cologne, Germany, was removed following criticism over his handling of allegations

of sex assaults and violence by migrants on New Year's Eve [1]). The tension between accountability and learning all too often leads to considerable limitations for internal review processes (in the form of debriefings or after action reviews) that are supposed to contribute to learning (Elliot & Smith, 2000). Both Adang (1998, p. 126-7) and Elliott & Smith (2000) refer to the year before the 1989 Hillsborough stadium tragedy, where 96 football fans were crushed to death. A year before the tragedy, a near identical set of circumstances had arisen at the same location but tragedy was averted by an intervention from an experienced police officer. However, there was no effective debrief following this near-miss and no learning took place. Combined with latent error and a series of emergent properties associated with the event, disaster resulted a year later.

Aware of the need to distinguish between accountability and blame free organizational learning, the Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) established by US President Barack Obama recently came up with several recommendations to improve organizational learning within police departments, one of them being to encourage law enforcement agencies to implement nonpunitive peer review of critical incidents separate from criminal and administrative investigations (Recommendation 2.3). Such reviews already exist in medicine ("sentinel event" reviews), and other industries such as aviation ("near miss" reviews). Doyle (2014, p. 53) identified the following significant features of the sentinel events approach: the participation of all stakeholders, an emphasis on non-blaming, an approach that is routine and ongoing, findings that are publicly disseminated and an emphasis on being "forward-looking". These features fit quite well with a utilization-focused approach to evaluation as elaborated by Patton (1997), who states that "commitment to intended use by intended users should be the driving force in an evaluation". He argues that the primary determinant of the extent of evaluation utilization is not the level of methodological rigor employed but the extent to which stakeholders take ownership of the evaluation process and actively work to ensure that evaluation findings are utilized.

Doyle (2014) points to six issues that need to be addressed in sentinel reviews to avoid them becoming barriers to learning: system legitimacy (will they nourish public trust in the system and its operators?), resources (will it not take too long and cost too much?), liability and confidentiality (can they be done without increasing liability or compromising confidentiality?), risk management (how to deal with the trade-off between risk-reduction and liability?), leadership and collaboration (how to find innovative leaders that can initiate the necessary collaboration?) and the choice of sentinel events (big or notorious cases might hinder innovative efforts). It is not difficult to see many of these issues as related in one way or another to the need to avoid the in-the-job trouble that Waddington (1994) refers to. The problem is clear: how to overcome the barriers to learning?

To try and deal with this problem, Adang (2006) introduced a non-blaming, nonadversial peer review methodology used to learn from and for the policing of major events (initially international football matches) in several European countries. In contrast with the near miss/ sentinel events approach, that by definition takes place *after* an event almost got out of hand or disorder took place, the peer review methodology does not focus on near misses or errors, but observes and gathers data of actual policing operations *during* events, as they occur. The idea of this approach is to create a safe learning environment based on trust (by using trusted peers) and the avoidance of scapegoating (because the focus is on learning opportunities and not on blaming for any errors that might occur).

[1] http://news.sky.com/story/1618820/cologne-police-chief-removed-over-assaults

This paper sets out to describe and analyse the experiences gained in the course of ten years with the peer review methodology as applied in the context of the policing of major events (sports matches, festivals, political demonstrations). The analysis is exploratory and based solely on publicly available documents: no additional data were gathered. The experiences will be analysed both by using the features identified by Doyle (2014) as important to overcome barriers to learning and, following Patton (1997), identifying whether or not there was evidence of utilisation of the findings of the reviews. It should be noted that this paper solely deals with the *methodological* aspects of the peer reviews. Outcomes that are directly relevant to *policing of events* have no place here and are dealt with elsewhere (e.g. Adang & Brown, 2008).

First the peer review methodology is set out. Next, five different applications of the methodology are described, focusing on the way it is initiated and implemented, on evidence of utilisation (beyond reporting and dissemination) and on experiences of participants. Finally, the question of whether the peer review methodology is capable of creating a safe learning environment that contributes to organizational learning is addressed.

2. The Peer Review Methodology

The description of the basic peer review evaluation methodology as applied to the policing of major events, is based on Adang & Brown (2008, p. 23-28) and Adang (2013).

At the core of the methodology is its voluntary nature: a peer review will only be carried out after a specific request to a designated coordinator by a commander or organization responsible for the policing of a specific event. The request usually arises because the event or the policing operation is seen to be (by the requester) as with “increased risk”, although this is not a requirement.

The main task of the coordinator is to maintain the methodological integrity of the review in all stages of the peer review. The request is preferably made several weeks in advance of the event to be reviewed. Following the request, the coordinator will discuss the specific learning-related questions that the requester/ host would like to see addressed in the peer review. The coordinator checks whether there are not too many questions (a maximum of five), whether the questions can be answered using the peer review methodology, whether the questions relate to matters that fall under the purview of the requester. From a utilization point of view, the coordinator also asks why the requester is interested specifically in these questions. Typical questions include: how does policy or strategy translate into practice? how is (a specific part of) the plan in fact executed? How do different units cooperate or how does the police cooperate with other stakeholders?

Finally, practical details of the review are discussed, this includes organizing for reviewers to have full access to all relevant persons and documents and an agreement that the coordinator can use an anonymized version of the report for analytical and educational purposes. The coordinator also makes clear that a peer review is not a substitute for internal review procedures (debriefings, after action reviews) or accountability mechanisms.

The coordinator then composes a peer review evaluation team consisting of a coordinator, a scientific assistant and four or six police commanders (peers) who, in their own force, fulfil roles similar to that of the requesting host. Prior to the event, practical arrangements and

information about the event is shared with peer review team members. Ideally, peer review team members have previously received a training where the methodology is explained to them and they interactively go through the steps of a peer review from planning to data gathering to discussing observations and writing a peer review report. The training also includes a lecture on observation and interpretation and a practical observation exercise. As the issues the peer reviews deal with are different from one peer review to another (dependent on the needs of the requester), no standard checklists or instruments are used in the course of the reviews.

The peer review itself takes three consecutive days. One day before the event is to take place, the peer review team travels to the place of the event. On this first day, the team is briefed on the planned operation by the requesting commander/host, consults any available documentation and acquaints itself with the city and location of the event (especially "hot spots"). Based on this information, the peer review team develops its peer review evaluation plan, identifying what data need to be gathered to answer the questions, in what way and by whom (the tasks are divided over pairs of team members). The peer review team is also briefed by the coordinator about the peer review rules: safety first, confidentiality, informed consent, no interference with the operation and the need for an open, non-judgmental attitude and demeanour. When team members have not previously been trained, more time is taken for the briefing to explain the methodology.

On the second day, the day of the event, data are gathered according to the evaluation plan. Usually, this includes attending briefings, conducting short semi-structured field interviews with police officers from different levels, citizens and other stakeholders (typically between 30 and 100 field interviews are held during a peer review). It always includes observations of police- citizen interactions. Team members would always be free to go where the evaluation plan required them to go. They are instructed to take notes contemporaneously and not to rely on memory.

The third day is devoted fully to sharing of observations and experiences among team members in light of the peer review questions. The coordinator chairs the discussion to ensure an objective approach and making sure that a clear distinction is maintained between observations and opinions. During the discussion, a draft report is prepared on the spot by the scientific assistant and projected on the wall, for team members to check and comment on. Both the discussion and report share a fixed format:

1. Goal of the evaluation: the peer review questions as determined beforehand;
2. Methodology: documents consulted, briefings attended, time and place of observations made, field interviews conducted;
3. Context of the event: a short overview about the event, stakeholders and the police operation;
4. Overview of events: a short overview of events and major decisions made during the policing operation;
5. Observations related to peer review questions: the information gathered linked to the questions;
6. Conclusions, again linked to the questions, including points of attention and good practices.

The third day ends with an evaluation of the peer review process among the team members followed by their departure.

The findings of the peer review team are shared with the host only after the report is finalized. This takes a few weeks. In this period, the coordinator and the scientific assistant complete the

draft report and send it out to the team members for comments and a final check. After this process, the final version of the report is sent to the host (and to the host *only*), who is given the opportunity to indicate if the report contains any factual mistakes. The report does not contain names of individuals, but only refers to *functions* (e.g. group commander, member of a riot squad). The report also does not contain specific recommendations. The report becomes the property of the host and it is up to her to decide what to do with it.

For the purpose of this paper, five series of applications of the peer review method were analysed (Table 1, 62 peer reviews in total), based on publicly available documents. The different series of peer review applications were linked to one another by the fact they originated from one another and that the author played a role in all of them as either senior adviser (Europe demonstrations) or project leader (the rest), and participated in 30 of the 62 peer reviews (mostly as coordinator).

Table 1: Overview of peer review applications
N reviews: number of reviews held in each series
N hosts: number of different hosts
N police reviewers: number of reviewers that were police officers
N other reviewers: number of peer reviewers that were not police officers (but students, trainers, academics or municipal officials)
Period: years in which the reviews were conducted

	N reviews	N hosts	N police reviewers	N other reviewers	Period	Source
Europe football	13	13	21	6	2005-2007	Adang & Brown (2008)
Sweden football, demonstrations	16	3	34	26	2008-2009	Adang (2012) Hilton & Wessman (2013)
Netherlands football	6	6	22	6	2009-2010	Adang et al. (2010)
Europe demonstrations	10	10	20	20	2010-2012	Godiac (2013)
Netherlands festivals	17	10	53	19	2011-2013	Adang et al. (2013)

Using the sources mentioned in Table 1, the five series of applications are described below by clarifying who initiated the peer reviews and paid for them and how the basic methodology was implemented. Subsequently, using Doyle's criteria, it is addressed how barriers to learning were overcome and, following Patton, utilisation is explored by indicating how useful the reviews were to the hosts and participants.

3. Five peer review applications

3.1 Peer reviews of international football matches in Europe

Initiation

In 2005, the Dutch delegation to the European Union Police Cooperation Working Party (PCWP) proposed internationally composed police peer review teams to contribute towards successful public order management in the context of international football matches in Europe. The PCWP agreed to the proposal. The peer review teams should involve experienced police officers from several countries, made available by their forces, to observe police operations in real time, providing feedback with a focus on continuous learning and

adaptation. The EU handbook on international police cooperation in connection with football matches (EU, 2007) would serve as a benchmark of good practice. A three-year pilot financed by the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs (to cover travel and subsistence costs for participants) was started that lasted from September 2005 to September 2008 and was coordinated by the Dutch National Football Information Point and the Police Academy of the Netherlands.

Implementation

Through the network of National Football Information Points, a pool of senior police officers from 13 different European countries was formed. They had to be active commanders with an open mind and an attitude aimed at learning rather than judging; be willing to work with the methodology of observation and evaluation and have a good knowledge of English (both oral and written). Teams were composed of four commanders, a coordinator and a research assistant (a PhD student). Initially, there was some hesitation to host a peer review, but after the first two reviews, requests were received from nine different countries, including from two countries that would be hosting matches during the 2008 European football Championships later.

In the course of the pilot, two interim reports and one final report were made to the PCWP and seven presentations about the pilot were given to international meetings of practitioners. The overall results of the project were published in Adang & Brown (2008), which contained details on the methodology, the text of nine anonymized peer review reports, an overall analysis of the reports identifying good practices and points of attention of general relevance. The book also contained a chapter on theoretical issues related to the policing of football matches.

Overcoming barriers to learning

As far as *system legitimacy* was concerned, police officers from different countries and police researchers participated in the review teams, the series was made possible through the active involvement of international networks (PCWP, NFIPs). The limited need for financial *resources* was provided by the Dutch ministry, reviewers (and their forces) provided their time which was strictly limited. *Liability* was not raised as an issue. Participants agreed to maintain *confidentiality*, reports were provided as internal working documents representing the combined informed but subjective viewpoints from the review team to be used at the discretion of the host, published reports were anonymized. Relevant police *stakeholders* were on board with the reviews, otherwise they would not have taken place. Police forces from different countries acted as hosts, other stakeholders were involved only via field interviews. Especially in the case of the Swiss cities preparing for Euro 2008, the methodology contributed to *risk management* in an innovative way without invoking issues of liability. *Local leadership* proved to be important: without early-adopting individual commanders willing to stick their neck out, asking to be reviewed, the reviews could not have been carried out.

Utilisation and experiences

The PCWP used the outcome of the peer reviews as input for changes in the EU handbook. Especially for the four Swiss Euro 2008 host cities participating in the project, the peer review reports served as an important check on their preparations. Four months before the tournament was to start, this led to a meeting organized by the national Euro 2008 police coordinator, where points of attention were discussed. Subsequently, the host cities concerned

held a press conference to communicate to the public how they were going to address the findings of the peer review teams.[2]

The experiences obtained with the peer review methodology in this project directly led to the use of peer reviews in the Denmark (not published), Netherlands and Sweden (see below).

Directly after the pilot, an evaluation meeting was held for peer reviewers and hosts (Adang & Brown, 2008, p. 196-199). Hosts indicated that they were happy and satisfied with the system and that many points were detected that needed correction. They appreciated the exchange of ideas and experiences and the focus on being better in the future. Especially the discrepancies that were noted between what was expected of the operation and actual behaviour was helpful. Several hosts indicated that the report served as a catalyst for change, and that they used it for discussions within their force or with other stakeholders. The following quote is typical:

> *I extracted and also established a set of conclusions, which will be sent to all territorial structures, in order to improve their activities in this field of public order management for sport events, relation with the media, the football clubs and other authorities. I also should mention that the Public Relations Service will set a new more adequate approach with the media for a better response to this hooliganism phenomenon. Therewith, we decided to implement a new pilot system on maintaining public order, during the first two rounds of the National Football Championship. Finally, I would like to say one more time, that I considered this Peer Review very important and useful and I hope that in the future I will have the opportunity to be an evaluation team member for another state that will request this kind of mission*

Interestingly, hosts also indicated that not just the content of the peer reviews was useful, but also the peer review *process* itself: the fact that outside colleagues asked questions and observed operations led to increased reflection.

Reviewers indicated that it was hard work, interviewing people, listening, taking notes, but that it was good to go into the field, that it was important to speak to the people (officers, stewards, fans, citizens) in the street, to see the whole operation: "*This is very difficult in the normal job*". Many reviewers experienced it was difficult to first observe, and then make conclusions: "*You need training in order to do that. You also see your commanders in a different way*". Reviewers also talked about a win-win situation and an excellent opportunity to circulate good practices, as evidenced by these quotes: *"I hope they have learned from me but I also learned from the host city. It is very important." "Every time I go, I learn something new that I can adopt in my system. The reviews enable me to make a network for friends. Breaks barriers down, makes 'daily life' easier"*.

According to Adang & Brown, hosts and reviewers agreed that the main success factor of the peer review teams was the peer aspect and the informal, open and utilization-focused way in which the reviews were conducted, aimed at learning from the bottom up and not as an inspection. The element of exchange and the way in which the reviews hold up a mirror, identify good practices and provide encouragement to work with these appeared to be a critical factor of appreciation. The mix between practice and theory was considered to be

[2] https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-pass-euro-2008-security-audit/48878. Not being used to the peer review methodology, the words "audit" and "inspection" are used in this journalistic rendering

important as well. Hosts and reviewers identified lack of information as the main barrier to a widespread use of the peer review system.

3.2 Peer reviews of demonstrations and football in Sweden

Initiation
In 2006 the Swedish National Police Board decided to carry out a three-year project to develop a long-term strategy for knowledge development for so-called Special Police Tactics (SPT: tactics that are used to manage public order). The goal of the project was to increase the competency of the police to work knowledge based in public order management and to improve upon the way in which police were upholding the constitutional right of assembly. In the last two years of the project, the peer review methodology became the main method used in the project. Other activities within the project included the development of competency profiles and the organization of workshops and seminars. All project activities were financed by the Swedish National Police Board, participants to the field studies (as the reviews were called in the project) were made available by their police authorities. It was an explicit goal of the project to connect research, education and practice and to this purpose researchers and police trainers were included in the project group that was formed. The project group included members from the Swedish National Police Academy. A steering committee was formed to oversee the project.

Implementation
Participants from the three largest police authorities received a two-day training in the peer review methodology. Eleven demonstrations and five football matches were reviewed. The project group was given the task to choose which events to include in the reviews. The project group then coordinated with the local commander of the police authority concerned on the specific questions to be addressed. For each review a field study group was composed, consisting of six to eight participants including a coordinator and a research assistant. The reviews were coordinated from within the project group and planned well in advance. Before each review a project group member was present at the preparatory meetings in the police authority. In addition to the individual peer review reports, interim reports, a final report and a handbook on the peer review methodology were prepared for the National Police Board. All reports were distributed and discussed at the workshops organized in the course of the project.

In the course of the project, a total of seven workshops were organized to discuss and learn from the results of the field studies. In addition, two international seminars were organized with police officers, researchers and trainers. A final seminar was held at the end of the project to discuss the project results and identify what had been learnt.

Overcoming barriers to learning
As far as *system legitimacy* was concerned, police officers and police trainers from the three main Swedish police authorities and police researchers participated in the review teams. The reviews were coordinated from the national police board and with involvement of local police authorities. Financial *resources* were provided by the Swedish National Police Board, reviewers (from the different police authorities) provided their time which was strictly limited. *Liability* was not raised as an issue. Reports were initially provided as internal working documents representing the combined informed but subjective viewpoints from the review team to be used at the discretion of the host. At a later stage reports were shared among project participants with permission of hosts. Relevant police *stakeholders* were on board with the reviews. Other stakeholders were represented in the project steering committee

and project reference group and were involved via field interviews. However, the Swedish researchers stopped participating in the field studies (but not the workshops and seminars) because they felt the formal requirement of police officers to report crimes they observe could come in conflict with their role as non-intervening observer during the field studies. The methodology explicitly contributed to *risk management* of future events. The project was initiated top-down from the national police board but would not have been possible without the active involvement of individual commanders, asking to be reviewed, confirming the importance of *local leadership*.

Utilisation and experiences
In the course of the project, the results of the field studies were directly used as input for police education. Project group members participated in the development of courses, peer reviewers participated as tutors and the training material was updated to include the latest developments.

Hilton & Wesmann (2013) provide several examples of ways in which reviewers and hosts took advantage of the reviews and concluded that a more open learning climate was developed. At the concluding seminar, the peer reviews were seen as key to the project's success: they had allowed participants to take a step back and reflect on their activities in an uncomplicated way. The strength of the field studies was that they balanced different perspectives. The studies had created a demand for feedback and strengthened the motivation for development. The exchange among practitioners, researchers and trainers was considered crucial.

Hilton & Wesmann also reported on initial difficulties faced by the project: there was no precedent for evaluating police operations in Sweden and the non-judgmental nature of the reviews was at first unclear. The "peer" aspect, the fact that good practices were identified in addition to development needs and the way in which the field studies were discussed at workshops and seminars contributed to a clear change in attitude. This also led to reviewers, who were at first cautious, to give more critical feedback in response to hosts who came to demand this of them.

Some quotes from Hilton & Wessman illustrate how the reviews were experienced:

"For the first time I was able to stand at the side and see how we actually work. [I have] benefited greatly from that experience; [there was] nothing negative at all". "As a result of my participation in the project I have changed my way of briefing the officers and how I discuss different scenarios with my staff before an event." "[It was] extremely useful to participate in a field-study group. One learned so much by watching others command in one's own role. This in turn affected how one worked at home.". "Between the first and last field study, one could see that we got better and better".

3.3 Peer reviews of football matches in the Netherlands

Initiation
The Dutch police chief responsible for coordinating the policing of football in the Netherlands together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to apply the methodology to the policing of football matches in the Netherlands. Coordinated by the Police Academy of the Netherlands and the Dutch National Football Information Point six peer reviews were held in

six different police forces[3]. Through financial support from the Interior Ministry subsistence costs of reviewers as well as the costs of the coordinator were covered. The goal of the peer reviews was similar to that of the European pilot: blamefree learning.

Implementation

This time, the review teams were composed exclusively of Dutch police commanders (four police commanders per review team, with a coordinator and scientific assistant – in this case, a bachelor student). All commanders approached and asked if they would like to act as host, responded positively. In addition to the individual peer review reports, an overall analysis was made that was presented and discussed at a seminar and published together with the six anonymized reports and an evaluation of the peer review process that had taken place.

Overcoming barriers to learning

As far as *system legitimacy* was concerned, police officers from different Dutch police forces and police researchers participated in the review teams, with a coordinating role for the Police Academy. The reviews were initiated with the active encouragement from the Dutch police chief responsible for coordinating the policing of football in the Netherlands and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The limited need for financial *resources* was provided by Dutch ministry, reviewers (and their forces) provided their time which was strictly limited. *Liability* was not raised as an issue. Participants agreed to maintain *confidentiality*, reports were provided as internal working documents representing the combined informed but subjective viewpoints from the review team to be used at the discretion of the host, published reports were anonymized. Relevant police *stakeholders* were on board with the reviews, as was the Ministry of Internal Affairs, involvement of other stakeholders was via field interviews. The methodology contributed to *risk management* of future events, in one documented case during the course of the project itself. The willingness of individual local commanders to be reviewed was crucial, confirming the importance of *local leadership*.

Utilisation and experiences

The police chief responsible for initiating the reviews accepted the recommendations at the advice of his strategic policy advisory group. In at least three cases, hosts had made changes to their operation at their next match directly as a result of the peer review report.

According to the participants at the final meeting, trust in each other, the creation of a safe learning environment, non-intervention attitude of reviewers, a good introduction of the peer review team in the host organization and an open, learning driven approach of the host force are critical success factors for peer review. Those acting as hosts indicated that initially they felt "exposed" and "watched" but that this was inevitable if you want to learn. Compared with the European peer reviews, a respectful and careful non-judgmental attitude of the peer reviewers was seen to be even more important at the national level: the Netherlands is a small country and a lot of commanders know each other. Management of expectations is crucial in this respect: it must be clear that the peer review report is not an all-encompassing audit, but a reflection of the observations and conclusion of the team members. One of the discussion points was that, even though the likelihood is low, it is possible that team members will witness something during a review that is later subject of an (internal or external) investigation. The common view was that, in that case, there is no problem for individual team members to assist in discovery of the truth.

All hosts agreed on the usefulness and practical relevance of the peer reviews: *"A lot of*

[3] At the time, there were 25 regional police forces in the Netherlands

teachable moments and collegial exchanges" and *"In addition to the report and its benefits for the host, the biggest plus is what you learn from each other during these days"*. *"Initially, I thought I was going to help a colleague with my experience, but I took home some insights that I will surely put to use"*. *"I have never been able to talk with colleagues just about my profession and I am very glad that was possible now, thanks to a few days of peer review*".

3.4 Peer reviews of the policing of demonstrations in Europe: the Godiac project

Initiation

The Swedish National Police Board received EU funding for a project to analyse and disseminate good practices for de-escalation and prevention of public order disturbances at political manifestations in Europe. The peer review methodology was central in this project called Godiac (Good practice in dialogue and communication). The purpose of the project included the promotion of (peer review) evaluation of policing major events at a European level and the development of institutional co-operation and networks at a European level between practitioners, researchers and trainers. Project coordination was provided by the Swedish National Police Board. There were twenty partner organizations in twelve European countries involved in the project: twelve police organizations and eight research/educational organizations.

Implementation

Ten peer reviews were held in nine different European countries. For each review, a team of seven to ten reviewers was composed from a pool of police officers, researchers, trainers and legal referents from the different partner organizations. The reviewers were trained in the peer review method. During the reviewers, pairs of police officers and researchers/ others were formed as much as possible. The methodology used during the Godiac reviews deviated slightly from the standard methodology: more time was devoted in pre-event data collection on the context of the event, and on pre- and post-event exchanges between reviewer, in which the teams spent a substantial amount of time establishing a detailed timeline of the event.

In line with the goal of the project, partner organizations requested reviews for political manifestations/ demonstrations where there was considered to be a potential for conflict. Reviews focused on four questions agreed upon in the project and one question from the host. Following the first field study in Germany, there were some apprehensive reactions from activists and parliamentarians on the false presumption that the project was part of a European wide effort to come up with measures to restrict protest.[4]
The peer review field study reports were discussed during several seminars. Results of the project were laid down in several publications, all made available online: an anthology with research papers, a field study handbook, and a booklet with summaries of the field study reports with recommendations for the policing of demonstrations and political manifestations. The field study handbook, aimed at promoting the use of field studies for evaluation of policing major events, incorporates learning points and developments of the peer review method. It contains detailed checklists and guidelines, including safety and insurance.

Overcoming barriers to learning

With twenty partner organizations (both police organizations and research/educational organizations) in twelve European countries the project had a broad representation and *system*

[4] http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34000/1.html, https://benjaminlaufer.wordpress.com/2011/02/26/polizei-erforscht-demonstrationstaktiken/

legitimacy and support. However, the project network was temporary and at the end of the project the network ceased to exist. Financial *resources* were provided via the EU and the Swedish National Police Board who funded project coordinators, researchers and travel and subsistence for meetings and reviews (called field studies in the project). Reviewers from the different partner organisations provided their time which was strictly limited. *Liability* was not raised as an issue. As far as *confidentiality* was concerned, reports were provided as internal working documents representing the combined informed but subjective viewpoints from the review team to be used at the discretion of the host. At a later stage, and in line with the project plan agreed upon beforehand, summaries of the reports were published. *Stakeholders* from police and police-related institutions were actively involved with the reviews. Involvement of other stakeholders took place via field interviews. It is unclear if and how the methodology contributed to *risk management* of future events. The project was initiated by the Swedish national police board but depended completely on the voluntary involvement and commitment of the different partner organisations and individuals within those organisations, especially those volunteering to be reviewed, thus confirming the importance of *local leadership*.

Utilisation and experiences
It is difficult to infer from the published sources what the learning effects have been. The project reportedly contributed to the spread of dialogue teams in the UK (especially Liverpool). Regarding Hungary, Hajas (2013) posits that the Godiac project has changed the Hungarian police, in some direct and some indirect ways:

> *As a result, Budapest does not seem like a besieged city during every political protest or other such public demonstration. The commanders and chiefs of police have learned from experience that high-profile crowd management is not the only viable option and instead used crowd management solutions that were flexible and that respected fundamental rights*

3.5 Peer reviews during festival events in the Netherlands

Initiation
After some incidents had occurred, the Board of chiefs of police in the Netherlands felt the need for a long term study into the policing of festival events to develop, identify, validate and exchange good practices. The Dutch police chief responsible for conflict and crisis management in the Netherlands tasked the Police Academy of the Netherlands to execute a project to increase insight in and dissemination of good policing practices that contribute to safe and secure festival events, especially regarding investigative activities, order maintenance and intelligence. The project was financed by the Board of chiefs of police and the Police Academy of the Netherlands. The peer review method was to be an important methodology used in the course of the project, next to dedicated research activities, knowledge exchange seminars and expert meetings. Part of the design of the project centred on peer reviewing a limited number of high-profile festivals across three years, to stimulate organizational learning for each festival and promote exchange of good practices between forces dealing with festivals.

Implementation
Seven different festivals were included in the project, four of which were reviewed in all three years, two in two successive years. In this project, experienced external researchers (rather than students) participated as research assistants. In the third and last year of the project, four

non-police reviewers (municipal officials dealing with festival events) participated in the peer review teams.

The project was characterized by a large amount of exchanges and interaction between researchers, practitioners, teachers and other stakeholders. Once a year a seminar was held for practitioners and researchers, two expert meetings were held with hosts and reviewers, as well as two open conference for festival-related stakeholders. In addition, several informal peer assists (Greenes, 2010) were organized prior to events not subject to peer review, four students wrote their thesis on a topic related to the project. All hosts freely shared the peer review reports they had received with colleagues and welcomed the participation of non-police reviewers in the peer review teams.

The final publication of the project (Adang, 2014) contained an overall analysis of experiences of the peer review teams, the results of the complementary research that formed part of the project and overall conclusions and recommendations. Among the recommendations are more knowledge exchange and education, more involvement of other stakeholders in peer reviews and incorporation of peer review in education and training. In addition to the feedback given in the individual reports, the peer review discussions led to fundamental questions being asked about the role of police at festival events and the coherence between police order maintenance, intelligence and investigative processes.

Overcoming barriers to learning

System legitimacy was assured through participation of police officers and researchers, embedded in hosting police forces, with a coordinating role for the Police Academy and active encouragement from the Dutch police chief responsible for coordinating the policing of football in the Netherlands and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In terms of *resources*, travel, subsistence and coordination costs for the reviews were financed by the Board of chiefs of police and the Police Academy of the Netherlands. Reviewers (and their forces) provided their time, which was strictly limited. *Liability* was not raised as an issue. Participants agreed to maintain *confidentiality*, reports were provided as internal working documents representing the combined informed but subjective viewpoints from the review team to be used at the discretion of the host, published reports were anonymized. In the course of the project, hosts agreed of their own accord to share reports between them. Relevant police *stakeholders* were on board with the reviews. In the third year of the project, municipal officials were involved in the reviews. Before that time, other stakeholders were already invited to participate in the project seminars. In addition, other stakeholders were included in field interviews. The methodology contributed to *risk management* of future events, in one case during the course of the project itself. The enthusiasm and continually growing interest of individual local commanders to be reviewed confirmed the importance of *local leadership*.

Utilisation and experiences

Hosts and reviewers were unanimous in the value and effectiveness of the peer review methodology as a learning tool. "*The beauty of a peer review is that it makes use of the fact that from the outside, you see other things than from the inside*", as one of the commanders put it. The same commander: "*The beauty is that you enter into a conversation with another professional about how you do things. He asks questions you yourself might not ask. The trick is to jointly look in amazement how things happen and to think about what can be improved. This makes that the peer reviews work better than a regular evaluation*".[5]

[5] https://www.politieacademie.nl/onderwijs/overdescholen/spl/LaboratoriaOpsporing/Paginas/Peer-review-is-samen-leren.aspx (translated from the original Dutch)

The conclusion was also that there is still some way to go: "*There is a great willingness to learn. This also shows in innovations and adaptions based on feedback from the peer reviews. Still, changes are not always implemented. One the one hand, this is partly because other stakeholders are also involved, on the other hand it is sometimes difficult to take leave of old patterns and practices*" (Adang, 2014, p. 198). This last comment confirms once more how, in spite of a willingness to learn, organisational learning and real change can be difficult to achieve.

4. Discussion: Overcoming learning obstacles

The five different applications of the peer review methodology all involved a connected series of between six and seventeen reviews taking place in a one to three year period. In all cases, in addition to individual reports being made, an overall analysis was made of good practices and points of attention that were considered to be of general relevance to the policing of major events. In all applications the peer reviews were the main methodology within a larger knowledge exchange/ knowledge development project, with research activities (very explicit in Sweden, Godiac and Dutch festivals) and a range of dissemination activities such as conferences, seminars and workshops (all applications). The involvement of institutes for police education in all applications made it easier in principle to implement outcomes into police education, although it is not clear in every instance in how far this actually happened. In all but ones of the cases (Godiac), the continuity of the network of institutions/ organisations involved in the peer reviews did not depend on the project.

To summarise: how does the peer review methodology handle the issues identified by Doyle (2014) that need to be addressed to establish a workable approach to learning?

With regard to *system legitimacy*, the peer review methodology as applied now was mainly an internal police affair with involvement from researchers. This was important for creating a learning environment in which participants felt safe. As the example of the Swiss cities shows, the methodology can help "the public to witness the professionalism and commitment of the system's practitioners in action and nourish public trust in the system and its operators" (Doyle, 2014, p. 12) and there clearly seems to be potential for the future here.

With regards to *resources* (issues of time and money*)*, the peer review methodology only required a strictly limited amount of staff time and limited funds: if reviewers are made available by their organizations, basically only travel and subsistence costs need to be covered in addition to the cost of coordinating the review. No blank check is required.

Issues of *liability and confidentiality* could make individuals or organization less likely to participate in a review process. Because the peer review methodology does not focus on errors or near misses, this was much less of an issue and in this respect the peer review methodology clearly differs from the sentinel reviews. Liability was not raised as an issue at all in the course of the reviews. As far as confidentiality was concerned, participants agreed to maintain confidentiality, individual reports were considered to be internal working documents, with the exception of the Godiac project, published reports were anonymized. They were explicitly not presented as a full investigation or evaluation of an event, but as (subjective) viewpoints from the review team. In the Dutch projects, a spontaneous willingness came about amongst commanders to share reports with one another.

Due to its utilization focused approach, the peer review methodology is designed to *get stakeholders on board.* In most applications, this mainly meant stakeholders within police organizations, and mainly police officers as reviewers, but as the example of Netherlands festivals show, there is no reason why other stakeholders cannot be included in review teams, as long as they are credible experts/ professionals in their field and a safe learning environment is ensured[6]. In fact, there is every reason to assume that the inclusion of other stakeholders could benefit the learning effect of the reviews, just as the presence of researchers did. Researchers played specific roles in the peer reviews. The methodology was developed by the author, a researcher, and a main role for researchers was to maintain the integrity of the methodology before, during and after the peer reviews. Researchers also contributed by bringing an outside, non-practitioner perspective to the peer reviews, asking questions on topics practitioners might be taking for granted. During reflections and discussions on good practices, both during the peer reviews themselves as during the seminars linked to the peer reviews, researchers contributed by linking theory and practice. In addition, even though the peer reviews were not designed as data gathering exercises for researchers, the reviews did yield unique field data and, part of the data used for Brown's (2012) thesis on inter-group dynamics in the context of policing foreign nationals were obtained in connection with the peer reviews of international football matches in Europe.

Because the peer review methodology is designed to identify learning needs *before* errors or near misses occur, the methodology actually contributes to *risk management* in an innovative way without invoking issues of liability. Sometimes the main motivation to start with peer reviews is a high profile incident that happened in the past (as was the case in Sweden, where the need for the SPT project was linked to riots during an EU summit in Gothenburg five years previously), sometimes it was an upcoming high profile event (such as the Euro 2008 football championship in Switzerland and Austria). For the implementation of the methodology this makes no difference.

Implementation of the peer review methodology confirmed the importance of *local leadership*. Without early-adopting individual commanders willing to stick their neck out, asking to be reviewed, the methodology cannot establish itself.

Because the focus is not on errors, the *choice of events to be reviewed* becomes much easier with the peer review methodology and can totally depend on the learning needs of the requester. Virtually any event can be a suitable topic for review. Doyle (2014) already mentioned how smaller (rather than notorious or shocking) sentinel events could perhaps yield the most informative accounts. Peer reviews take this thought one step further and all reviews identified numerous learning points, in addition to good practices (this in spite of the fact that in none of the 62 reviews a major incident occurred). Application of the peer reviews to the policing of sporting events, festivals and demonstrations is made easier by the fact that these are discrete events, known in advance, so that the reviews can be planned. Adang (2013) reports that a modified version of the methodology has by now also been applied to review other aspects of police work, such as investigative processes or community policing.

[6] Moreau et al. (2010) and Abramovic (2011) report on a special application of the peer review methodology in Argentina. In a quite sensitive project financed by the Dutch Embassy in Argentina, members of the federal government, federal police and security forces and prominent human rights organizations cooperated with the goal to stimulate a policing of social protest in line with human rights. "*Despite the difficulties inherent to an initiative of this kind, the challenge was far surpassed. The results speak for themselves*" (Abramovic, 2011: 158, translated from Spanish)

Summing up, the peer review methodology seems to be able to overcome the obstacles to learning identified by Doyle. Still, several obstacles for a successful implementation were identified by participants. One of them was the newness of the methodology for both hosts and reviewers (giving training and becoming familiar with the methodology were helpful in this respect), another that for police officers an observer role could potentially come into conflict with their policing duty (in practice this did not present a problem). Participants reported that implementing changes in police organizations was sometimes difficult. Also, in some cases confusion existed about the nature of the peer reviews. Used as they are to audits and inspections, some police officers initially mistook peer reviews as just another form of audit or inspection. It also had to be made clear that a peer review is not an overall evaluation of (the policing of) a specific event or the making of a factual report of all that happened during the event, but no more and no less than the structured feedback of a couple of experienced professional peers holding up a mirror. This aspect proved to be very important and in all applications participants stressed how different peer reviews felt from audits, inspections or other types of evaluation and how this resulted in more openness. In line with Doyle (2014), in implementing the peer review methodology, it thus proved important to *recognize limitations and manage expectations*.

In addition, next to local leadership, it turned out that institutional "sponsors" are needed to furnish the limited, but necessary funds. To be able to conduct a series of connected peer reviews institutional or collaborative commitment is essential as well, as is leadership in the form of coordination of the different reviews, embedding the reviews in other knowledge exchange practices and analysing the reviews, linking theory and practice. Where these are not available, they become an obstacle.

As far as the *utilisation* of the peer reviews is concerned, in all applications, both hosts and reviewers reported learning outcomes and saw the methodology as a win-win. Especially in Sweden and in the Swiss cities that were going to host matches in the Euro 2008 championship significant transformations occurred of the type that usually only take place after a high profile incident[7]. There was unanimous agreement among participants (both hosts and reviewers) that the reviews constituted a safe learning environment. Both the peer aspect and the utilization focused approach were identified as critical success factors. It created the trust that is so essential in ensuring that a blame free culture is developed (Smith & Elliott, 2000) that does not lead to in-the-job trouble.

It is a limitation of this study that it is based exclusively on the perspectives of those involved in the peer reviews (either as hosts or reviewers), as documented during and after the different applications of the methodology. It would be beneficial for future studies to gather additional data and include the perspectives to include the perspectives of other stakeholders (including citizens) as well. The importance of creating a safe learning environment explains the hesitation to involve non-police stakeholders, as it was felt their involvement could potentially lead to participants feeling less secure and less willing to open up. However, actual experience with the methodology clearly diminished this hesitation. Stakeholders (including citizens) that were interviewed in the course of the peer reviews almost invariably reacted positively to the fact that they were interviewed because the police organisation concerned wanted to learn.

[7] See also previous note regarding application of the methodology in Argentina

5. Conclusion: a workable approach to foster organizational learning?

In conclusion, the peer review methodology seems to be a promising tool to overcome barriers to learning and to foster the type of organizational learning that Geller (1997) advocates and the Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) wishes for. Not instead of other tools, such as internal review processes or the sentinel events reviews, but in addition to them. The potential of the peer review methodology is due in large part to the creation of a safe nonadversarial, non-blaming learning environment, real time data collection and stringent avoidance of a one-sided focus on errors.

The overview presented in this paper indicates that the methodology may contribute to learning in three different ways: hosts receive informed and constructive feedback, reviewers gain additional experience and insights and the exchanges taking place in the course of or following the reviews (e.g. in the form of seminars) contribute to the identification of good practices and development of professional norms which in some cases become codified. Experiences show that the interactions taking place between participants also facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation. Interestingly, quite apart from the *products* obtained through the methodology, the peer review *process* itself proved to foster reflection and learning. On numerous occasions, both the pre-review dialogue with the host about the peer review questions and the field interviews with professionals in the course of the reviews led to they themselves becoming aware of potential issues or identifying learning points.

It should be recognised that identifying lessons is not the same as learning: the lessons have to be put into practice as well. Several instances of actual utilisation of the findings have been documented where hosts have actively worked to ensure that evaluation findings are utilized in the spirit of Patton (1979). Several examples mentioned in this paper have shown that peer reviews can be transformative and help mobilize the continuous conversation among practitioners, researchers, policymakers and citizens (cf. Doyle, 2014, p. 15). Having said that, the effects documented so far are in the short term mainly and more research is needed into more lasting long term learning effects of the peer review methodology. It would be interesting in future studies to make comparisons with the safety literature on the one hand, where the failure to successfully learn from incidents is seen as an important issue (e.g. Drupsteen & Guldenmund, 2014) and with the literature on peer (or peer to peer) learning as applied mainly in educational settings (e.g. Topping, 2005), taking into account theories on organizational learning (e.g. Argyris & Schön, 1996).

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