

# **Implementing community policing in a centralised criminal justice system: Another French paradox**

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## **1. Introduction**

Community policing has often been presented as the solution to the growing social isolation that characterises policing institutions in late modern societies. The professionalisation of policing, at the same time that it has considerably improved the quality of service provided, has largely resulted in the emergence of an institution that is bureaucratic by nature and to a certain extent, has lost sight of its original mandate to keep the peace on behalf of the community. “Noble” activities such as crime fighting and investigations tend to be over-emphasised, to the detriment of more mundane activities such as conflict resolution and problem solving. At the same time, police services have experienced a crisis of confidence in the eyes of the public, which does not perceive their performance as satisfactory in the light of increasing property crime rates and decreasing clearance rates. Since the 1960s, a growing body of research has offered remedies to this situation, under the umbrella of the term ‘community policing’. Broadly speaking, it involves new strategies of external partnership with civil society and internal adaptation to the needs of the public. However, much of this literature is coming from the Anglo-Saxon world, which usually takes the London Metropolitan Police created by Peel in 1829 as a common point of reference. The fact that police forces in the English speaking world are organised along similar legal and structural principles (such as a high degree of discretion granted to individual officers and a certain level of decentralisation) has almost obscured the fact that many other policing systems that do not necessarily share these features have been in existence for a much longer period of time.

These non-Anglo-Saxon policing systems have nevertheless faced the same kinds of problems as the ones experienced by their English counterparts, albeit for different reasons, and have attempted to implement community policing initiatives suited to their particular contexts. The functional and structural differences mentioned above could not accommodate a direct transfer from the earlier Anglo-Saxon experiences, and as a result, a process of learning by trial and error ensued. In the remaining of this paper, I would like to examine the particular case of the French policing system and share a few thoughts on the challenges it faced when it decided to embrace the community policing philosophy. The French system is an interesting case since it is probably one of the most centralised administrative systems in the world, particularly in terms of policing (Bayley 1985; Brodeur 2003). It has also been opposed to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of policing by many commentators, mostly because of its supposed disinterest to the needs of the community. By studying how it has implemented and accommodated community

policing strategies to local variations, we are likely to learn more on the transition process from one style of policing to another, and on the transferability of the community policing model to different societies.

Before I go any further, I should probably explain to those who are not familiar with the medical theory of the French Paradox its main elements, so that the title of my paper might become clearer. The French, like the Chinese, eat a lot of duck, cooked in a lot of ways. It has always intrigued Anglo-Saxon medical researchers that the French, who eat so much duck (a supposedly very fat meat, bad for cholesterol) and drink a lot of red wine (considered dangerous for the health), also consistently live longer than people who seem to eat a more healthy diet. After numerous studies were conducted, it appeared that duck and wine both contain chemical components that reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, one of the major causes of death in developed countries. This is the French paradox: foods that apparently look unhealthy can in fact help us live longer. I would like to draw a parallel with the community-policing philosophy, showing how a hyper-centralised society can also embrace a policing strategy that is mainly concerned with the local and produce beneficial outcomes for the public.

My presentation will be organized around 4 major axes:

- First, I will outline the structure of the French police and show how the French political and criminal justice systems are related to this institution.
- Second, I will provide an overview of community policing in France and its recent history. I will explain how the reform was designed and implemented at the national and local levels.
- Third, I will outline the results of the first evaluations that have been done of the community policing reform by the French Ministry of the Interior and independent consultants. I will particularly explore the challenges faced by community policing in a centralised state through the two following points:
  - The establishment of meaningful partnerships with other public services and the civil society;
  - The internal organisational constraints, particularly in terms of training and knowledge management, on the effective promotion and development of community policing practices among police officers.
- The adjustments that still have to be made to the initial reform and their prospects of success.

## **2. The centralised structure of French policing**

I will start by briefly outlining the structure of the French policing system. This will be helpful in order to grasp the institutional and organizational environments in which the community policing reform has occurred.

The French policing system can be characterised as a multiple-centralised system. There are in fact two large national police forces. The first one is the Gendarmerie, which originates from the “Maréchaussée”, the first professional police to be created in France in 1536. Its mandate was to patrol the kingdom’s highways and to ensure the travellers’ safety. It was reorganised in 1791 to become the Gendarmerie, a military police force with a civil mandate which is mainly present in rural areas. The National Police was born in Paris in 1667, but its final centralisation is very recent, resulting from a decree passed in 1941 that amalgamated the municipal police forces of large French cities into a single organisation. Up until a few months ago, the Gendarmerie was under the responsibility of the minister of defence, while the National Police was a branch of the ministry of the interior. The new government elected in May 2002 placed both forces under the single leadership of the minister of the interior. However, it is a feature of the French accusatorial criminal justice system that the investigations are conducted by police officers of either forces under the supervision of prosecutors and investigating judges, who belong to the justice ministry.

This tripartite structure presiding over French policing is also one of the most centralised in the world. The National Police, the Gendarmerie and the Prosecutors are all organised in a pyramidal structure, the central services being based in Paris, operational units for each of them being based in the geographical administrative unit, the department. As a result, members of the three institutions work with their counterparts at the local level, but also receive orders from the centre, where their true allegiance lies, their promotion through the ranks depending on it. This organisational schizophrenia was at the origin of inefficiencies that became intolerable for the public at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. So many layers of control, at the national, departmental and local level, prevented the organisation from establishing meaningful operational ties with other social control institutions and members of the public. The response to this crisis has been the implementation of community policing, mainly by the National Police. In the following paragraphs, I will mainly focus my developments on the National Police, as the Gendarmerie has not experienced the same pressure to change its procedures, operating in the more crime-free rural environment.

By the beginning of the 1990s, it appeared that the police did not provide to the population a level of service that could be qualified as satisfactory. Like in many other parts of the world, since World War II, the number of reported crimes has grown exponentially, while the number of crimes cleared by the police has collapsed – down from 36.8% to 26.8% for the past ten years alone (Courtois 2001). In France, the number of misdemeanours and felonies has been multiplied by 7 between 1950 and 1998. Violent crime has also increased sharply, particularly in the urban ghettos where most of the immigrant communities are forced to live. The 1990s have been punctuated by a series of violent riots directed against the symbols of the French state, first of which the police. The fear of crime is also prevalent in France, 40% of the people fearing they will become victims of crime in the very near future (ENA 2000).

One of the main criticisms generally voiced against the French police is its isolation and incapacity to listen to the public's demands and to deal with the types of crimes that affect the citizens most. If the expertise of the French police in the fields of order maintenance and other specialist areas such as investigations and intelligence cannot be contested, uniformed street-level policing has never enjoyed the same level of attention or resources. But the pressure of spiralling crime and repeated public outcries over the impunity of delinquents became unbearable for the government and the police institution, which in the end had to take action. The result was the community policing reform, which had the ambition to make French policing more relevant on the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **3. The community policing reform**

It is in response to the crisis described above that the French government passed in 1995 the law on the orientation and programming of security. This law is based on the concept of security co-production, in which the centralised state shares the responsibility for the provision of security with local and private actors. The outcomes of this law remained mostly rhetorical until June 1999, when the government and the Ministry of the Interior initiated a reform of the police, under the label of “police de proximité”, or proximity policing. This new strategy was implemented gradually: it was initially experimented in five “test sites”, then was extended to sixty-two districts, and was finally rolled out to all police districts (n=467) in three waves, between 2000 and 2002. This new strategy involves about 80.000 out of the 145.000 French police officers (not counting the 100.000 gendarmes whose jurisdiction is limited to the countryside and rural towns with less than 20.000 inhabitants).

This program of community policing revolves around five major operational principles:

- a new territorial organisation that increases the visibility of police patrols at the local level and that lets police stations decide how to allocate their personnel in order to meet local needs;
- the responsabilisation of officers at all levels;
- the multi-skilling of police officers, who must be able to undertake a broad range of tasks;
- permanent interactions with other local actors in order to build strong partnerships;
- a “privileged relationship with the population”, implying a better service to the public (especially victims of crime), a better identification of its needs and a better information about the results achieved.

The reform was not limited to a re-definition of the roles and tasks of police officers. A significant budgetary effort was made initially, with an increase of 5,7% in 2000. However, this effort was not sustained in 2001 and 2002. Most of these new resources were allocated to the recruitment of new police officers and special constables.

These special constables or police auxiliaries are young people who are recruited by contract for a period of 5 years, and whose tasks put them in direct and constant contact

with the public. The training they receive is shorter and more basic than the one undergone by their fully fledged colleagues (2 months instead of 12), they wear a police uniform which is adorned with distinctive features, and they are not granted any of the legal abilities that are required to conduct investigations or to make an arrest. Some cynical commentators compare them to “bodies in uniform” that free up well paid and highly qualified police officers from their most mundane tasks. We will examine later in detail whether these criticisms are warranted, but as a matter of fact, these new jobs have allowed young people from ethnic minorities to gain employment with the police, making the institution more diverse and bridging the gap with a group of the community that has been characterized by its confrontational relationship with the police. These police auxiliaries numbered 16.000 at the end of 2000, representing a significant addition to the 145.000 police officers and gendarmes already in activity.

However, this centrally planned reform has been confronted by a number of challenges. Some of these challenges are intrinsic to the resistance experienced during any change process in large bureaucracies. Others are more specific to the centralized character of the French police. I will only talk about the second group of challenges, as there is a vast body of literature dedicated to the successful implementation of reforms in a variety of organizational contexts. With the second group, I will distinguish external challenges from internal challenges, as these two clusters of challenges involve two different sets of actors and rationalities, although they are connected on many levels.

#### **4. Concerted action and external partnerships: the Local Security Contracts**

The external challenges are probably the first that come to mind in a centralized environment such as the one outlined above. By “external challenges”, I mean the reluctance of other institutional actors to support the police. It is one of the central tenets of community policing that police organizations must rely on institutional and civil society partners in order to resolve the complex social problems that produce, or at least have an effect on crime. However, when all the potential partners share the same high level of centralisation, they derive from it the strength to resist any form of partnership that they do not see as useful or at least beneficial to their own institutional interests. In short, the larger and the more complex an organisation, the more inertia it develops to external stimuli that do not threaten its existence or offer immediate rewards. By definition, the kind of partnerships involved in community policing strategies does not fit any of these two conditions.

In order to overcome this inertia and to integrate the diverse dimensions of community policing and crime prevention, a new administrative framework was instigated at the end of 1997 by the central government in order to facilitate the development of inter-institutional partnerships that would also be able to integrate the major actors of the civil society. This new tool follows contractual principles, which explains why this administrative innovation goes by the name of Local Security Contract, or CLS in French. The aims of the CLS are to encourage the co-production of security by offering the different actors mentioned above a platform to identify, discuss and negotiate a joint

response to the problems of all kinds that negatively affect communities and the quality of life in their immediate environment.

One of the strengths of the CLS is that it acknowledges for the first time the fact that crime problems and minor incivilities<sup>1</sup> can not be systematically delimited along administrative boundaries, whether these are geographical or functional, in order to suit the state apparatus. For the first time, the centralised state is attempting an exercise in partial devolution, encouraging its crime control agents to organise themselves at the local level and to collaborate with local political, economical and social actors. To this day, more than 700 CLS have been signed in France, with a growing number being under way. They involve the police and their rural counterparts, the gendarmes, judges and prosecutors, corrections officials, educators, health and social services managers, mayors and town councillors, community groups, housing authorities, public transport operators and many more.

The idea behind the CLS is to integrate the preventative, repressive and educational activities of all the actors involved in order to develop a collective intelligence (Tiévant 2002) and provide a holistic response to crime problems. Once a territory and the parties to the contract have been identified by the representative of the state (the Prefect), a diagnosis of the local problems is commissioned to a consulting firm or a group of academics who possess an expertise in the fields of criminology, sociology, political science, economics, public administration, ethnology, etc. It must be noted that the territory in question is variable from one district to another and can be a town, an entire county or a transport network. Sometimes, it can even be a number of adjacent neighbourhoods if the problems they experience are specific. The diagnosis provides the radiography of the situation prior to the contract, addressing issues such as crime rates, incivilities, school attendance levels, urban decay and fear of crime. The effectiveness and efficiency of existing strategies are assessed, in order to detect opportunities for improvement and to determine priorities.

At this stage, the consultants also identify the local actors that should be involved in the CLS and consult them during their diagnosis, in order to secure their participation early on. At the end of the diagnosis, all the actors meet and together negotiate a set of objectives, strategies and deadlines that are best suited to the local environment. The contract represents this mutually-agreed action plan, and the engagement of each participating institution to channel its resources and pool them with others toward its completion. Tools that will allow the evaluation of each institution and collaborative strategy's performances are also designed at this stage of the contract, so that all parties can monitor the progress made.

The strategies or partnerships that are usually considered range from the implementation of community policing, to a better service to victims, to preventative measures targeting youth delinquency and recidivism. Among the practical actions undertaken, are projects such as an information newsletter seeking to foster a better understanding among parties

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<sup>1</sup> We will define incivilities as behaviours and incidents that are not strictly unlawful, but which are disturbing enough to elicit among those who experience them a sense of insecurity.

of their respective mandate and activities, a prevention program that seeks to offer recreational activities to young people in order to keep them off the streets, one that addresses the issue of attack dogs bred and sold on the black market to be used as weapons by drug dealers, or again the establishment of regular meetings and a co-ordinated approaches to crime by the national police and its municipal counterpart. In order to ensure that the obligations to the contract are met, a permanent steering structure is established, and reports regularly to all the parties and the community.

The link between the CLS and community policing is not obvious, and in centralised states, two such policies can easily be implemented at the same time without any sort of co-ordination, if they happen to be placed under the responsibility of two different ministries. In France for example, such a situation occurred in the 1980s, when the police organisation attempted to reform its operational philosophy within the portfolio of the Minister of the Interior, while a national crime prevention strategy was established under the umbrella of the Minister for Urban Development. These two efforts to provide better security to the French people were less than successful, partly because their fragmented administrative approach exacerbated differences between the two bureaucracies and duplicated sparse resources instead of encouraging a synergy to emerge.

But in order not to repeat the policy failure experienced in the 1980s, the government decided to provide a financial incentive to the districts which had demonstrated a firm commitment to the CLS, facilitating the early move to community policing and allowing the recruitment of police auxiliaries. However, this was not sufficient to avoid some of the pitfalls that can be attributed to a long established tradition of centralisation. If the policy placed the emphasis on partnership, it must be said that some partners were more equal than others in the CLS process.

Not surprisingly, the institutional heavyweights such as the local representatives of the police and the justice ministries were overbearing and had a tendency to talk more than they listened, ensuring that their interests took precedence over their partners' interests. Episodically, there was also a blur between the primary objective of the CLS, which is to target local crime priorities and to bring the police closer to the community, and the tendency of each participant to see this process as a political game that could negatively impact on their organization's standing and future resources if not played well, placing the interest of the institutional structure to which they belonged ahead of the needs of the citizens. When this was the case, the CLS and the notion of partnership became an empty shell with little practical implications for the public. For example, the community policing reform was at the origin of some misunderstandings between the centralized police hierarchy and the centralized judicial hierarchy, which was not kept informed of all the details of the reform and its implications for the workload of prosecutors and other judicial officers (Mouhanna 2002).

The implications for each institution in terms of reputation and image are quite high, and none of them wants to be seen failing in the eyes of the public. For example, studies show that high expectations were often created by the police among the community. However, they were rarely followed of any visible effect, generating among the population a sense

of frustration and dissatisfaction. The outcomes were contrary from the ones desired, the public coming to trust the police even less (Ferret 2001). This example illustrates the risks associated with community policing and the fact that not all potential partners might be willing to share them with the police. Also, some partners have a lot of difficulty seeing themselves as partners of the police, mostly for ideological reasons: social workers or teachers for example still perceive crime problems through the outdated lens of the repression/prevention dichotomy. For some of them, who see the police as the oppressor of young people and ethnic minorities, entering into a partnership with the police would be unethical. These people tend to review their moral position when they become the victims of crime themselves. To their credit, prejudices run also high among police ranks, where social workers are seen more as enemies than as potential partners.

However, when institutional-formal partnerships were complemented by informal interpersonal relationships, evaluations showed that the CLS achieved their objectives and that the partnerships became productive and sustainable. The consequences of a positive individual experience also created a transfer and diffusion effect, whereby public servants who had participated in a successful partnership, at the functional and personal level, were eager to promote the model when transferred to a new district. Where it happened, this combination of institutional and interpersonal engagement produced a grid model of partnership, where all partners forge direct ties between themselves, by contrast to the star-shaped model that prevailed in past experiences. This old model was fuelled by the centralist tradition, where the police and the justice ministry controlled the flows of information and the decision making process at the centre. Here, we witness the emergence of a partnership ecosystem, where cross-linkages appear to respond to particular problems and needs.

Moreover, this interlaced structure, whose effectiveness is enhanced by the existence of interpersonal ties, facilitates the transfer of information across institutional boundaries at all levels of the hierarchy, augmenting the situational intelligence that is so essential to the success of community policing. The exchange of information and knowledge improves on three fronts: quantity, quality and timeliness, and speed. Quantity derives from the multiplication of contact points, both formal and informal. Quality and timeliness spring from the common understanding of problems (situational intelligence) and from the adaptation of the information exchanged according to these criteria. Finally, speed is the result of interpersonal relationships, which allow information to overcome institutional barriers and to reach its intended recipients without having to go through the bureaucratic paperwork maze. As we have seen with informal relationships, the enhanced use of information does not depend solely on the existence of structural ties between the police and its partners. The participants to these partnerships must develop new skills, especially in the field of communication and problem solving, in order to fully realize the potential of community policing. In simpler terms, community policing is not only a new way of thinking about crime control and prevention, it is also a new way of doing it.

Before we progress to another section, one last comment must be made on the concept of partnership. If it is slowly becoming almost second nature in the various institutions that are responsible for the provision of security to enter into partnership relationships with



other state institutions, very few initiatives actually encourage a direct implication of the public. A culture of secrecy persists in the organisation and police officers are very often unsure of what can be told to the public, but if a dialogue is to exist between the police and the public, both parties must be able to exchange information directly on a variety of subjects. Very often, it must also be said that many police officers are not very well informed of what is going on into their own organisation, making it even harder to communicate effectively with the public. Another point that could be improved is the association of the public to the measure of the police effectiveness and efficiency.

## **5. Promoting community policing competencies and police training**

The transition to community policing did not happen just because the National Police management team decided so, and a huge effort in terms of recruitment and training has been made, in order to equip police officers with the practical tools to translate the community policing philosophy into reality. The purpose was to empower them to access, create and transfer knowledge about the community policing principles. The means was to offer re-designed training packages, both to new recruits and to experienced police officers.

However, it appears that some significant problems remain. One of the basic tenets of community policing is that a police force must reflect to a large extent the ethnic composition of the population. However, in France, the number of young officers recruited from ethnic minorities and rough neighbourhoods is still minuscule, because of these young peoples' low academic scores, compared to their middle class counterparts who join with university diplomas<sup>2</sup>. As we have seen above, many of them have been recruited as police auxiliaries, but their salaries are low, their career prospects are limited by the short duration of their contracts, and they do not really have all the powers of a fully fledged police officer. Special preparatory classes have been established in a few high schools attended by ethnic minorities, in order to correct this imbalance, and the entrance tests have been simplified<sup>3</sup>, but it will take a long time for the trend to be reversed. This difficulty is augmented by the national recruitment and promotion systems, which do not take into account the needs of the local communities and make it almost impossible to adjust the ethnic composition of a police station to the community it serves.

The contents of police training must also be adapted to the new philosophy of community policing, in order to make police officers more aware of the diversity of the population and its needs. Courses in criminal law and procedure, weapons training and drilling exercises are complemented by courses in communication, conflict resolution, sociology of delinquency, and ethics, just to name a few. It is also usual to invite external consultants to teach in these subjects, in order to bring a different perspective to the students. In France for example, more than 10% of those teaching police recruits must come from outside the police organisation, but finding them is not always easy.

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<sup>2</sup> 48% of the recruits selected had spent at least two years in higher education institutions before joining.

<sup>3</sup> To the dismay of police associations that feel this will lower the standards and affect the professional image of the police.

Changing and updating training programs almost overnight has also been problematic for an organisation that trains thousands of recruits each year in 14 police academies. Trainers, who have taught for many years the police doctrine must learn, understand and teach new procedures and practices. As you can imagine, this can be a traumatic experience and these are not the sort of changes than can happen in a day.

Moreover, the training problem is not circumscribed to new recruits, as all operational officers must also be exposed to the new ways of doing policing. The continuing education program that accompanies the community policing reform is costly, both financially and in terms of human resources taken off the streets to attend training. The middle managers must also be taught the principles of community policing, if the reform is to succeed. In France, too often, it became apparent that the training issue was not perceived as a high priority, leaving it to those on the street to work it out on a case by case basis.

This training issue is certainly not one to be taken lightly, as the values of community policing are to a certain extent the exact opposite of the values consistent with traditional policing, which put the emphasis on crime fighting and criminal investigations. In comparison, community policing and its low-key, preventative approach to crime problems is not seen as real police work. Police officers tend to be sceptical and to adopt a cynical attitude toward community policing strategies, arguing that they have been doing it for years (implying that they do not need to be told or taught how to do it), or that they hardly see the benefits of investing their time in doing what is not in their eyes perceived as being “real” police work. A proper and comprehensive training package must be assembled to change this perception among experienced and less experienced police officers. It will facilitate the emergence of a new organisational police culture, oriented toward problem solving and work in partnership with civil society. Otherwise, the resistance to the reform will be so strong as to virtually empty it of its meaning. The task ahead is daunting for centralised forces which are staffed by hundreds of thousands of officers, if not millions, but on the other hand, the effort is worth it, ensuring a nationwide improved level of service to the citizenry. This is a situation where the limits of centralisation are cruelly felt and must be compensated by local adaptive strategies: the officers’ motivations to change their working practices according to the new philosophy rely on incentives that differ from one individual to another or from one station to another.

At the organisational level, the engagement of middle management officers or lack thereof proved to be a crucial element. The French police comprised for example “true believers” or missionaries who had advocated closer relationships with the community for years and acted accordingly, almost in a clandestine manner (Ferret 2001). When these police officers took the lead and showed their reluctant colleagues how they could benefit from the reform, a favourable environment was created, facilitating the implementation of the new strategies more than any central directive could have. By contrast, when no positive role model was available in their midst, police officers proved a lot more hesitant to adopt the new strategies, and often ended up discarding them as a

fad that would eventually go away, when the central bureaucracy would come up with a new reform.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I hope I have made quite clear that centralised police forces have a lot to gain from community policing programs, providing they show sufficient motivation and do not underestimate the resources they need to allocate to those in charge of its implementation at all levels. They must also acknowledge that a partnership approach is necessary if they want other public services, civil society and community groups to engage with the police on the reform path. There are a lot of direct benefits for the police to the partnership approach recommended above, the main one being the significant improvement of the police image and reputation when positive outcomes are produced. Partners feel respected and acknowledged by the police, and as a consequence are much more likely to provide all sorts of support to the community policing initiative. In centralised states, this is a noticeable change, since public services tend to be disconnected from the public, mainly because of their dimensions. In centralised states, there is no doubt that community policing, if fully implemented, will create some frictions with traditional governance processes. But this is not to say that the concepts of community policing and partnership are antithetical with the concept of a strong state. The case of France has shown how a strong centralised state could realistically bring its police closer to the community, providing sufficient time was left for adjustments. However, one must also recognise that if not handled properly, the design and implementation of a community policing program can backfire, creating among the population unrealistic expectations, frustrating and discouraging partners who do not see how their interests can be accommodated, and finally exposing some weaknesses among the police organisation itself.

The implementation of community policing is relatively recent and it is still too early to evaluate its impact on crime rates. However, there seems to be a slight decline in all types of offences in 2002, after a jump of 7.7% in 2001 and 5.7% in 2000. In 2002, some months saw significant reductions in street crimes, particularly in the National Police jurisdictions<sup>4</sup>. But this turnaround could also be attributed to the organisational reform of the French Police and Gendarmerie following the election at the beginning of the year of a conservative government on a law and order platform. At the perception level, surveys ordered by the National Police for the Paris area showed that for the first three years of the reform, the population did not feel safer in the streets or at home as a result of the implementation of community policing (79% feeling safe in 1999 and 2002, with a peak to 85% in 2000). However, an increase of 6 points was observed in the levels of satisfaction regarding the level of service from people who came into contact with the police (from 66% of satisfied people in 1998 to 72% in 2002). By comparison, only 58% of the people were satisfied of the level of service they had received from the police in 1994 (IFOP 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> - 7.4% in June, - 8.4% in August and - 6.8% in October.

Clearly, centralised police organisations will feel the tension of reform when trying to adopt a community oriented approach and should not expect miracles. If they want to succeed, they will have to acknowledge the changes they have to make to their own structures, letting middle managers decide how best to allocate their resources in order to respond to local conditions. In short, police services will have to become more flexible and open to the outside. These changes will not transform them into fully decentralised organisations, but will nevertheless require some partial level of devolution.

Traditional management theory recognises two kinds of organisations: top-down and bottom-up. In top-down organisations, which have a pyramidal hierarchical structure, it appears implicitly that only the leadership team is allowed to create knowledge and to decide how it will cascade down the different levels of the organisation. Knowledge is explicit and functional, meaning that it is essentially a management tool, used in the command and control format, to convey orders and obtain reports. These centralised police organisations are by definition very self-centred, disconnected and isolated from the communities they are supposed to serve (Pierre and Peters 2000). In bottom-up organisations, the situation is the exact opposite: the concept of autonomy replaces the concept of hierarchy and knowledge is created and controlled by the rank and file. These types of organisations tend to adopt flat structures, and the levels of interactions are reduced to a minimum, each agent being able to decide on his course of action to a large extent. In this system, the diffusion of knowledge and practices is also restricted. This situation fits the de-centralised police agency model found in many Anglo-Saxon countries, and it might be suitable for them, as their numbers rarely go above a few hundred officers. In large centralised organisations, this structure is likely to produce nothing but anarchy and ineffectiveness. Hence, none of these two models seem satisfactory when community policing is considered in a centralised political environment. The challenge here is therefore to strike a balance between the top-down model, clearly outdated, and the bottom-up model, unsatisfactory. A new model must then emerge, which we can name the “information-centred model”, where knowledge is evenly distributed at the top, middle and bottom levels, and is allowed to flow from one level to another in a two-way exchange (Nonaka and Takeushi 1995). It seems better suited to community policing, and to any subsequent reform seeking to make the police more responsive to the needs of the public. If adopted, it can transform the police into a learning organisation that will stay at the forefront of community’s expectations for years to come.

Through this paper, it was my intention to demonstrate the need for more research to be done and shared at the international level on non-Anglo-Saxon experiences of community policing. In my view, it is essential in order to promote more widely the benefits of community policing, while at the same time respecting the values of the societies which are considering this new approach.

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