PROBLEM SOLVING POLICING IN THE POLICE SERVICE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA: THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

William John Boaks

This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University.

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DECLARATION

I declare that, apart from where acknowledged, the following thesis is my own work.

I have not previously submitted this work for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed ………………..

Date ………………..
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ABSTRACT

In 1996 the Police Service of Western Australia embarked on a major and ongoing period of change regarding all aspects of local policing. Part of this program involved the adoption of a number of practices that included an undertaking to pay increased attention to issues such as a customer focus, problem solving, a commitment to developing and motivating personnel, a localised delivery of policing services and improved management practices.

This research was conducted for the purpose of uncovering the factors that create the unique environment of the Police Service of Western Australia and exploring how these might impact upon the manner in which officers conduct their daily duties. More specifically the purpose was to determine if there existed any aspects of organizational culture or structure that have an influence on the ability and/or willingness of officers to carry out their duties according to the processes and procedures of either the problem solving or the problem-oriented policing philosophy.

The research methodology was guided by the grounded theory approach. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with constables, sergeants, inspectors and superintendents as it was considered that these ranks best represented the views of the members of the organization in terms of numbers and those most affected by day-to-day events.

The data analysis revealed the existence of 13 factors that all exhibit negative aspects and collectively create a Basic Social Problem that has been termed “Feeling Vulnerable”. Although all of these factors have been well known for many years, the current research integrates these in a new way in order to produce a model of the organization that demonstrates how they combine to create an environment that is counter-productive to the implementation of a problem-solving or problem-oriented approach to policing by members of The Police Service of Western Australia at many levels.
The Basic Social Process disclosed by the current research has been termed “Controlling By Avoidance”. It is based on four tactics used by officers to control their working environment. The employment of one or more of these tactics by officers is designed to give the impression of engaging with issues while simultaneously exerting control over events in order to prevent the occurrence of outcomes that experience tells them are likely to have undesirable personal consequences. The intention is to create an environment where they hope to be safe from the consequences of problems that will inevitably occur at some time.

As well as providing an explanation for the conduct of officers under the problem solving model the analysis also provides an insight into why the organization has apparently avoided coming to grips with the implementation of the full Goldstein model of problem-oriented policing. This appears to be due to concerns on the part of senior management about the likelihood of a loss of control over subordinate ranks and the personal problems that this would generate for them.

Recommendations are made about the need to adopt the Goldstein model and the steps required to successfully implement this approach are listed.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore various aspects of the culture and structure of the organization in order to determine the impact that these have on the manner in which officers perform their duties within the guidelines of a problem-solving approach.

The Police Service of Western Australia is the major state institution involved in providing policing services to the people of Western Australia. The primary functions of the organization are dealing with crime, traffic management, public order and emergency management. For the year ended 30th June 2005 the agency had a budget of over $650M and employed approximately 4400 sworn officers and 770 public service personnel. (Police Service of Western Australia 2005, pp. 2-5).

Although the organization has adopted many modern business practices in relation to current technology, the majority of the tasks requiring attention are still carried out by people. Therefore, the functions carried out by the organization can be described as labour intensive and it is arguable that the working environment should allow officers to carry out their tasks as efficiently and effectively as the nature of the work and the restraints imposed will allow.

1.1 The Functions of The Police

Since police forces were first established the reasons and justifications for their existence have been the subject of considerable discussion, debate and controversy. According to Finnane (1994, p. 10) this debate centres on two quite different views for the existence of such organizations.

The first view holds that crime is a perennial problem that has been accelerated by the conditions of modern life, such as urbanisation and industrialism, and that police forces were created as a response to rising crime rates. It follows from this view that police forces are essentially a good
thing and represent the successful achievement by government of an effective means of social control in the absence of the mechanisms of a more traditional community life. The alternative view suggests that modern police agencies arose in societies principally divided by class and that they were designed to protect the interests of the privileged classes who held a dominant position. As such they are not socially neutral instruments of a general will to social order but are the creations of specific interests seeking to maintain conditions of privilege in an unequal society.

Finnane (1994) expresses the view that the history of policing in Australia, as in other societies, does much to support the view that the police do in fact function to serve the interests of the powerful both within and outside government.

In addition to this debate about the fundamental reasons for the existence of policing agencies, the principal functions and roles of police forces and the nature of the day-to-day activities of its members have also received considerable attention and analysis over the years.

According to Enders and Dupont (2001), when the concept of the new police was first initiated in London one of the features of the organization was a system of ‘beats’ which required a police officer to take responsibility for a specific area of the city and to conduct regular foot patrols within this defined location. In this manner the officer would become a familiar face to the inhabitants and would be able to perform services intended to advise, caution, console and, where necessary, take legal action.

For some years now police agencies, both in the U.K. and Australia, have been moving away from the practice of allowing officers to use their discretion when dealing with a great range of issues. Ideas such as the so-called “zero-tolerance” policing have created a regime where police have
become focussed on law enforcement rather than public relations and community service (Edwards, 1999, pp. 133-137).

Time spent by officers in talking to people and fostering public confidence can aid in crime prevention, fear reduction and law enforcement but such activities are often neglected in favour of pure enforcement activities that can be more easily measured. This reliance on measuring police efficiency in terms of crime statistics and ‘clear-up’ rates forces officers to concentrate on enforcement activity rather than on their holistic impact on a given community (Enders & Dupont, 1999, p. 10).

When the London Metropolitan Police commenced operations in 1829 a set of General Instructions was issued for the guidance of members in relation to how they should approach their duties (Milte & Weber, 1977, p. 20). The Introduction to the General Instructions issued for the information of members, sets out a number of matters concerning the aims and objectives of the organization and the purpose of the guidelines. The General Instructions emphasise crime prevention and peace keeping as the primary aims and the detection of offenders as a secondary purpose (Milte & Weber, 1977, p. 20). This Introduction also makes clear the use that is to be made of the General Instructions by members when it states:

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\begin{align*}
\text{The following General Instructions for the different ranks of the Police Force are not to be understood as containing rules of conduct applicable to every variety of circumstances that may occur in the performance of their duty; something must necessarily be left to the intelligence and discretion of individuals.}
\end{align*}
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This concept of the acceptance of the use of individual discretion in relation to how strictly officers should be required to apply the General Instructions was first enunciated at a time when the role of
the police was restricted to relatively straightforward matters, such as crime prevention and peace
keeping, carried out in an uncomplicated manner and environment.

The roles and activities of modern police forces have been considerably widened from this original
ideal and now include the more general concept of helping people in times of need and in relation
to unspecified issues. Although at first view one might consider that implementing a full range of
public services would not present any great difficulty, various authorities have recognised that it is
no easy task to provide a clear description of what it is that police should actually do.

For example Milte and Weber (1977, p. 36) refer to the views of the former United States Attorney
General Ramsay Clark as follows:

Too often, when we are confronted with the necessity of stating the idea behind the most
common and essential functions in society, we realise that we have no idea. We do the
things we do mainly because we have done them before, adding new usages to old ones
as our immediate needs change. So it is with civil police. Where among the great ideas do
we find a clearly developed concept of civil police? Not within the dialogue on constitution,
government or law. Where among the great books is there a significant treatment? Not in
Aristotle, Tacitus, Montesque or Marx. Are ideas only manageable for things remote? Are
police activities too close to us, too pervasive in our lives to be encompassed by a
concept? Is the subject too complex, too much like the totality of human conduct to yield
to the constraint of the idea? Or does it involve an inherent variance between form and
function that frustrates all attempts at definition? But if we begin without some notion of
what it is we intend, how can we know where we want to end?
Notwithstanding this perceived difficulty surrounding the task of actually deciding what it is that police forces should be doing, attempts have been made to set out a clear range of activities for such agencies. For example the American Bar Association's Project on Standards For Criminal Justice listed what it considered should be the major activities of such organizations:

Table 1.1 Principal Functions Of A Police Agency (Milte & Weber, 1977, p. 40).

(1) to identify criminal offenders and criminal activity and, where appropriate, to apprehend offenders and participate in subsequent court proceedings.
(2) to reduce the opportunities for the commission of some crimes through preventive patrol and other measures.
(3) to aid individuals who are in danger of physical harm.
(4) to protect constitutional guarantees.
(5) to facilitate the movement of people and vehicles.
(6) to assist those who cannot care for themselves.
(7) to resolve conflict.
(8) to identify problems that are potentially serious law enforcement or government problems.
(9) to create and maintain a feeling of security in the community.
10) to promote civil order and
11) to provide other services on an emergency basis

The aims set out in Table 1.1 above could form the basis of an ideal model of policing. But the environment in which police officers actually operate does not always allow for such a neat allocation of functions.
Bittner (1980, p. 12) presents a more pragmatic view of the world that he believes influences the manner in which police officers actually function. He claims that police work is characterised by two traits. These are that it is a tainted occupation due to the nature of the work and the working class origins of police officers and that it calls for peremptory solutions to complex human problems. Because so much attention is directed against groups within society that are distinguished by factors such as age, ethnic origins and low social/economic status this aspect of police activity in turn has a socially divisive effect.

Bittner (1980, p. 46) provides a succinct definition of the police role in modern society:

The role of the police is best understood as a mechanism for the distribution of non-negotiably coercive force employed in accordance with the dictates of an intuitive grasp of situational exigencies.

This definition contains an acknowledgment that police officers may be required to act in accordance with what they determine to be the requirements of a given situation.

Bittner (1980, p. 9) also asserts that the activities of police officers are further complicated by the adversarial nature of so many situations that they are called upon to deal with and the need to disregard complexity in favour of speedy action.

The methods that police officers use in dealing with the many and varied situations that they are called upon to attend to have received attention over recent years. Much of this has been critical of the lack of the kind of ‘professional’ approach that characterises other occupations such as medicine, law, accountancy and social work.
Brogden and Shearing (1993) (cited in Chan, 1997, p. 232) suggest that professions exhibit impartiality, accountability, specialised knowledge and ethical standards. Manning (1978) (cited in Chan, 1997, p. 233) makes the point that the rhetoric of professionalism with regard to the functions of the police appears to be limited to consideration of factors such as efficiency, technological expertise, high standards in training, recruitment and control over expenses.

Bittner (1978) (cited by Chan, 1997, p. 233) asserts that the absence of models, or even meaningful discussions about what constitutes good police practice limits progress towards this ideal.

In contrasting the situation of policing with that of medicine, Bittner (1978) (cited by Chan 1996, p. 233) states that:

> If we are not willing to settle for having physicians who are merely honest, and who would frankly admit that in curing diseases and dealing with patients they have to rely on ‘playing by ear’ it is difficult to see why we would devote all our energies to try to make the police honest without any concern whatever for whether or not they know, in a technical sense, how to do what they are supposed to do.

1.2 A New Approach to The Policing Function.

As is the case with many occupations, the concept of policing has received much attention over the years from both practitioners and academics from the various social and managerial sciences. This process has produced a great variety of ideas about the ideal forms of policing. According to Scott (2000, pp. 20-24) these have included concepts such Team Policing, Community Policing, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Situational Crime Prevention, Crime analysis and Compstat, Crime Mapping and Hot-Spot Policing and Broken Windows/Zero Tolerance.
In common with most policing agencies in western societies the Police Service of Western Australia has been undergoing tremendous changes over the past three decades. There have been numerous factors contributing to this evolution and this process has impacted a great many distinct areas of police organizations.

One such aspect has been the recognition that aims, procedures and outcomes need to be re-examined to take account of the increasing complexity of modern society, the expansion of knowledge in many areas of professional/working activity, the greater requirements placed on government organizations to be accountable for the functions that they perform and the manner in which these are carried out and an increased public expectation of the provision of a quality service.

These requirements are driven in many instances by various audit commissions that scrutinize agencies such as the police with a view to making them more efficient and effective. The drive for efficiency has resulted in police agencies making improvements in many areas to do with internal systems and procedures. Advances in effectiveness have been harder to achieve for various reasons and this is an area that still requires a great deal of analysis and application in order that improvements can be achieved.

Since the mid 1970's concerted efforts have been made in this regard by many innovative police leaders, in conjunction with academics from various disciplines, towards the goal of bringing about changes in how the policing function is implemented. A major force in this drive for improved policing services has been the approach termed Problem-Oriented Policing.
In the opinion of Herman Goldstein (1990), the originator of this concept, the problem-oriented style of dealing with common situations facing officers and police organizations promises enormous dividends in terms of officer's attitudes, morale and output. It also leads to an enhanced public appreciation of the more professional services provided by police departments that function in this manner.

Goldstein (1990) advocates a revolutionary change in approach that is needed in order to come to grips with policing issues, including the occurrence of criminal matters. This approach argues for increased attention to the underlying conditions leading to crime and disorder, greater input from interested community groups and the involvement of all levels within a police organization in this process of creating solutions.

Goldstein (1990) emphasises what he sees as a fundamental flaw in the thinking that accompanies attempts at reforming and improving the performance of police agencies. This is that the focus is on aspects such as the structure, staffing and equipping of police organizations in the expectation that this will lead to improvements in the quality of policing. This approach pays little attention to whether or not the police are actually effective in dealing with the substantive problems that the public expect them to handle. Goldstein (1990, p.1) describes this approach as a concentration on enhanced means rather than ends and he argues that, to be successful in meaningful change, police reform requires a more ambitious goal.

This disjunction between enhanced means and neglected ends was in fact highlighted with the attainment of efficiency. Goldstein (1979, p.4) notes that it was one thing for a sloppy and inefficient organization to achieve little but quite another for an enterprise that is a model of efficiency to do similarly badly.
In a paper presented at Cambridge University, Goldstein (1996, p. 2) expanded on what he considered to be the problems generated by the lack of understanding about the real issues facing policing. He considered that there was a failure to probe deeply enough into the complexity of the police role, to acknowledge the reality of what it is the police are called on to do and to refine laws, policies and practices in ways that enable the police to carry out their agreed-upon function in a fair and effective manner.

As explained by Goldstein (1996, p. 2) there is an enormous gap between the public perception of the police role, believed by many to be a simple task, and reality. In practice police officers must constantly adapt, compromise and improvise in order to meet the demands of their role. Police officers are formally held accountable to the standards that are associated with the simplistic perception of their role and this causes serious conflicts for individual officers and their organizations.

There are difficulties that arise from the absence of an accurate method of measuring the quality of police activity and Goldstein (1979, p. 243) comments on these. The prevailing fixation on counting the numbers of arrests, measuring clearance rates or officer response times to calls for assistance does not provide a meaningful assessment of the most important aspects of police activity. This approach is described as being like a private industry that studies the speed of its assembly line, the productivity of its employees and the nature of its public relations programme but does not examine the quality of its product.

This focus on dealing with what are in fact the symptoms of an underlying condition has implications for both the effectiveness of police agencies and also for their standing in any community that looks to them to deal with issues in a meaningful way.
Toch and Grant (1991, p. 6) highlight this situation. They point out that under the traditional approach, when a complaint is received the police respond to that complaint, when a suspect has been identified that person is arrested. Because the underlying conditions creating the situation are not addressed the problem is likely to persist and the police will have to repeat their actions in respect of the situation. The cumulative effect can be destructive if the conditions get worse and the public are left with a perception that the police are powerless to deal with real issues.

Goldstein (1990, p. 14) clearly sets out the major issues that he believes are creating the environment of policing and he focuses on these in developing his views on problem-oriented policing. These issues are:

- The police field is preoccupied with management, internal procedures and efficiency to the exclusion of appropriate concern for effectiveness in dealing with substantive problems.
- The police devote most of their resources to responding to calls from citizens, reserving too small a percentage of their time and energy for acting on their own initiative to prevent or reduce community problems.
- The community is a major resource with an enormous potential, largely untapped, for reducing the number and magnitude of problems that otherwise become the business of the police.
- Within their agencies, police have readily available to them another huge resource: their rank-and-file officers, whose time and talent have not been used effectively.
- Efforts to improve policing have often failed because they have not been adequately related to the overall dynamics and complexity of the police organization. Adjustments in policies and organizational structure are required to accommodate and support change.
The problem-oriented style of policing was fully described by Goldstein (1990) and was a serious attempt to address many of the deficiencies of current approaches to policing that, in Goldstein's view, are limiting the capacity of such agencies to carry out their functions within society.

Goldstein (1990, p. 1) observes that police are required to function within strict limitations in dealing with a very broad range of troublesome situations in society. The importance of this policing activity warrants attention being given to the end product of policing, that is, the effectiveness and fairness of the police in dealing with the substantive problems of society. Goldstein (1990, p. 2) makes the point that the traditional police emphasis on law enforcement actually restricts and undervalues the many other techniques that are available for officers to use in dealing with social issues.

In describing the common wisdom about policing Goldstein (1990, p. 11) puts forward the following points:

- The police do much more than deal with crime, they deal with many forms of behaviour not defined as criminal.
- The wide range of functions that police are expected to perform, including dealing with fear and enforcing public order, are appropriate functions for the police; from the perspective of the community, they may be as important as the tasks the police perform in dealing with behaviour labelled as criminal.
- Too much dependence in the past has been placed on the criminal law in order to get the police job done; arrest and prosecution are simply not an effective way to handle much of what constitutes police business. And even if potentially
effective, it may not be possible to use the criminal justice system in some jurisdictions because it is so overloaded.

- Police use a wide range of methods—formal and informal—in getting their job done. ‘Law enforcement’ is only one method among many.
- Police, of necessity, must exercise broad discretion, including discretion in deciding whether to arrest and prosecute in situations in which there is ample evidence that a criminal law has been violated.
- The police are not autonomous; the sensitive function they perform in our society requires that they be accountable, through the political process, to the community.

In critiquing the state of police management at the time Goldstein (1990, pp. 16-17) also details what he considers to be the major concerns that are shaping police management views of how the affairs of such organizations should be conducted. In his opinion the following factors are influencing the lack of attention to the major problems of policing:

- The diverse, poorly defined, and sometimes overwhelming character of the police job makes it difficult to establish what, precisely, is the end product of policing. Appeals to focus on the end product therefore understandably meet with some confusion and apprehension.
- Police are commonly viewed as palliatives, being concerned primarily with meeting immediate, emergency needs. It follows that greater rewards are attached to alleviating problems than to solving or curing them.
- Many of the problems that police must deal with are unsolvable. This is the very reason they come to the attention of the police. The potential for doing anything about an age-old problem like prostitution or shoplifting is limited. Improving a communication system or establishing a new operating procedure, in contrast, is
much more satisfying. Non-substantive matters are more self-contained with the agency, and the police are therefore less dependent on outside forces for their success in dealing with them.

- The constraints under which police operate in a democracy make police reticent to take the initiative in addressing problems. Many officers view their function as simply doing what is formally required of them, even if it is widely recognised that this may be ineffective.

Goldstein (1990) highlights the requirements of a problem-oriented approach to policing and these relate to both the management of such organizations and the skills that individual officers must have and be allowed to apply. In relation to the first aspect Goldstein (1990, pp. 148-168) states that his approach has implications for every aspect of management and he lists the areas that will require special attention. These are as follows:

- Redefining the role for rank-and-file officers
- Managing the use of time
- A new leadership style
- Developing a new dimension in supervision
- Decentralization to enable officers to capitalize on their knowledge of the community
- Broadening research and planning efforts
- Revising the criteria for recognising performance
- Recruitment and selection
- Training and
- Developing new sources of information and new knowledge
Goldstein (1990) has clearly set out the range of skills and attributes that are required in personnel who are expected to carry out this approach. Although these may appear common sense they are based on concepts that are quite radical for any police service that still functions in accordance with the traditional semi-military model.

Goldstein (1990, p. 148) emphasises that redefining the role of rank-and-file police officers is the most important aspect of the new approach and has the greatest implications for the future of policing. This enhanced role for lower ranking police officers has resulted in an expansion in the range of skills considered necessary to allow police officers to function effectively in the problem-oriented policing environment. According to Goldstein (1977, pp. 265-266) these skills include:

- Being creative
- Being flexible
- Using imagination
- Intelligence
- The ability to function independently
- Problem solving
- Critical reasoning
- Conflict mediation
- The capacity to relate to others
- Sensitivity to problems of urban life and community organization and
- An understanding that the chief task is relating to people

These requirements contrast markedly with the traditional view of the appropriate culture and structure required for an efficient and effective police service. Police forces were strongly influenced by an approach that has been described as semi-military. These agencies displayed a
formal hierarchical structure, rigid management policies, power and influence focussed in the upper ranks of the organization and little scope for lower ranks to have any real influence over their working environment or the tasks that they were expected to carry out. In addition, police activity was largely reactive with no consideration being given to the causes of problems encountered or attempts being made to engage the community in creating solutions to such issues.

In relation to the overall style of management, especially in the United States, Goldstein (1996, p. 4) makes the point that:

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\text{it reflects a skewed preoccupation with the running of the organization, with organizational issues, staffing, technology, information systems, communications and management. It is as if the police had an obsession with efficiency. No comparable investment has been made in understanding the business of policing- the substantive problems the police are expected to handle on a daily basis.}
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Goldstein (1990) advocates a revolutionary change in approach that is needed in order to come to grips with policing issues, including the occurrence of criminal matters. This approach argues for increased attention to the underlying conditions leading to crime and disorder, greater input from interested community groups and the involvement of all levels within a police organization in this process of creating solutions.

Eck and Spelman (1987, p.113), referring to efforts made in the Newport News Police Department in the United States, set out their view of the importance of the problem-oriented policing approach:
Police will never be able to make an improvement in public safety until they start to investigate underlying conditions. Problem-oriented policing holds out that hope that law enforcement agencies will be able to do this. But this will take a long time. The efforts of officers in Newport News represent a modest beginning. As more agencies experiment with this approach, learn how to do it better, and share this information with other police professionals and the public, policing may, in the long-run, be as effective as epidemiology. It is with this hope that we advocate the continued study and development of problem-oriented policing.

However, the situation will not be improved by the common, superficial changes that are usually applied. Goldstein (1990, p. 2) argues that, to be effective, what is required is an approach that recognises the realities of modern policing and allows officers to perform in a more honest, open and straightforward manner that provides a broader agreement about their role and what can realistically be expected of them.

Goldstein (1990, p. 2) explains that an approach that begins with an analysis of each of the many and varied problems that police are required to attend to and a progression towards finding the most effective response will bring about a reversal of traditional thinking about the police role. The existing simplistic notions about the requirements will be replaced with an understanding that policing should consist of developing the most effective solutions to issues, not simply applying the traditional methods based on the application of the law.

Scott (2000, p. v) summarises the manner in which implementing a problem-oriented approach would improve the situation when he states:
Thus, problem-oriented policing draws the police away from the traditional preoccupation with creating an efficient organization; from the heavy investment in standard, generic operating procedures for responding to calls and preventing crime; and from heavy dependence on criminal law as the primary means for getting their job done. It looks to increased knowledge and thinking about the specific problems police confront as the driving force in fashioning police services.

Scott (2000) addresses a number of aspects concerning the attempts that had been made in various jurisdictions to implement problem-oriented policing over the previous 20 years. This work included opinions from several contributors who possessed extensive experience in policing issues in their roles as academics and senior police officers.

At the conclusion of his text Scott (2000, pp. 172-187) poses a number of specific questions to these persons on the subject of problem-oriented policing. The answers to most of these questions contained criticisms of senior police management regarding their failure to provide the environment necessary for the new approach to flourish.

With regard to whether or not problem-oriented policing was still considered to be a viable approach to improving police services all of the contributors believed that it was still applicable.

In this regard Eck (cited in Scott, 2000. p. 172) states:

The police need to get on board with problem-oriented policing, or some of their functions may be taken over by other sectors, leaving only a narrow role of report taking and patrolling.

Kennedy (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 173) observes that:
Most major reform efforts are merely efforts to improve the functioning of that system. The criminal justice system may be suited for individual justice, but it is not well suited for reducing crime.

There is a belief that police organizations have failed to grasp the full benefits of the problem-oriented approach. Sparrow (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 174) observes:

I see how difficult it is to implement, but I see it as critical to improving police operations, and to controlling a whole range of public safety problems. The problem-oriented approach has rich potential, but still, little of that potential has been discovered.

The second question asked which aspect of problem-oriented policing implementation over the previous 20 years most impressed the contributors. McPherson (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 175) comments that:

The concept provides a clear focus on crime and disorder, as opposed to administrative matters or politics. But many police agencies haven't really focussed on this. Few police organizations have really made the organizational changes necessary to support problem solving.

Sparrow (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 176) contrasts the initial early acceptance and implementation of problem-oriented policing at the lower levels of police organizations with the lack of continued progression of this process due to difficulties caused by senior management:
The visible successes have been at the beat level, where problem solving appears as a natural companion to community policing. Compared with other regulatory professions, the police have led the way in the early articulation and implementation of the problem-oriented approach, the police, however, have since run into a specific obstacle, which is their failure to construct the managerial systems that are required to run problem solving at higher levels, and as the core of police operations.

As would be expected, the question about which aspect of the implementation of the problem-oriented concept most disappointed the contributors elicited many comments about management.

For example, Eck (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 177) notes that:

Police agencies have adopted aspects of a problem-oriented approach, but have focussed more on the management of the organization than on trying to understand the problems their officers face.

On the issue of the lack of attention to the requirements by the upper levels of management, Kennedy (cited in Scott, 2000 p. 178) states:

There has been little engagement by police management, and little structural change in police agencies. There is a strong need to improve agencies’ data gathering and analysis capacities. There is a need to get mid-managers more involved.

Reynolds (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 179) comments on the influence of the traditional police culture on attempts to introduce problem-oriented policing. He observes that:

We probably underestimated the resistance of the police, and we should have attended more to changing the culture before seeking complete implementation of problem-
oriented policing. Reactive policing is so much easier. Police officers are trained to prefer order to disorder, and problem solving seems, to some officers, to be creating disorder, to be upsetting the balance of things.

Finally, Sparrow, (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 179) states that:

The practice of problem solving seems to have stalled, partly because it has not been sufficiently distinguished from its frequent companion (community policing), and has therefore been viewed by many police agencies as a question of professional style for beat level officers, and not a challenge for the departmental management structure. So larger problems tend not to get addressed in a problem-oriented fashion. Problem solving can be done at the field level without making systematic or structural changes to the police organization, or to its various administrative and managerial systems.

As explained by Scott (2000, p. 18), merely applying a problem solving approach to community issues or internal situations does not render such actions examples of a problem-oriented approach. Simply making existing practices more efficient without creating some overall improvements to public safety and security misses a vital element of the concept.

Scott (2000, p. 19) also makes the point that just making the organizational and administrative changes required to support problem-oriented policing is not the same as practising the method. Only systematic and well-analysed improvements in policies and practices, those made with a view to enhancing public safety and security, constitute problem-oriented policing. Anything else, regardless of importance, is ancillary.

The above three quotes contain references to the need for new official guidelines on how problem-oriented policing is to be put into practice. The implementation of such measures clearly requires
action by the senior management of police agencies and they carry the responsibility for this aspect of the change process.

Sampson (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 49) relates the two concepts and the managerial implications in the following manner:

Problem-oriented policing is a larger concept than mere problem solving. It has tremendous ramifications for the structure of police organizations.

Over the past two decades the concept of problem-oriented policing has received widespread support and is now applied in some manner by numerous police agencies throughout the western world. Scott (2000, pp. 40-41) has listed 62 police departments in various parts of United States, Canada, Great Britain and Europe that officially apply this approach.

However, although Goldstein (1990) did clearly set out the full requirements for this approach to dealing with modern policing environments and issues, his model has been amended by a number of agencies. There has been a change in the terminology and the approach is now called by some agencies a ‘problem-solving’ approach to policing. Although this appears to be only a minor amendment it is said to considerably reduce the potential of the original model (Goldstein, 1996, p. 1).

Problem-oriented policing requires something more than is provided for by the problem solving approach that is the official policy of the Police Service of Western Australia. Goldstein (1996, p. 1) is quite specific in his criticism of the modified version of his original concept. He says:
...the concept of problem-oriented policing is, in many quarters, being trivialised. It is being reduced to a simplistic four step process for dealing with problems that, unattended, repeatedly require police attention. This narrow interpretation roughly captures a central element of the concept. But lost in the translation is the potential and the richness contemplated in the concept as originally set forth. The value of problem-oriented policing is in its breadth- in its comprehensive nature as an integrated plan that is designed to respond to an accumulation of weaknesses in the basic arrangements for policing in the United States.

The Western Australian Police Service model refers to problem solving. This has become the dominant feature of an approach to policing that has gained a worldwide popularity rivalling that of the problem-oriented approach. As noted by Goldstein (1996, pp. 9-10):

> Although one can now identify some police agencies that are well advanced in implementing problem-oriented policing, the stronger evidence of progress can be found in specific problem solving efforts. This is apparent at the annual national conference on problem-oriented policing, co-sponsored by the Police Executive Research Forum and the San Diego Police Department, where the accounts of individual problem solving efforts have consistently been more impressive than reports on department-wide implementation efforts. A department may showcase a solid example of problem solving even though the department itself can claim little success in institutionalising the concept.

With regard to the departure of the Western Australian model of problem solving policing from that advocated by Goldstein (1990), Scott (2000, p. 45) provides some guidance on the important differences between the two concepts. He states:
In its broadest sense, the term problem-oriented policing, as used by Goldstein, describes a comprehensive framework for improving the police’s capacity to perform their mission. Problem-oriented policing impacts virtually everything the police do, operationally as well as managerially. The term problem solving, which came into more prominent use by other scholars in the mid-1980’s, more specifically describes the mental process that is at the core of problem-oriented policing. Thus “problem-solving” is a more limited notion than “problem-oriented policing.”

Clarke (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 45) asserts that:

The more routine activities of beat-level officers to address recurring problems involving a single location or person constitute "problem-solving." This should be contrasted with more ambitious initiatives by police agencies to carefully study entire classes of problems and to make systematic improvements in the response to those problems.

And further, on the same theme, Sparrow (cited in Scott, 2000, p. 48) observes:

There has been a tendency to simplify and reduce the problem-solving concept, and to focus on particular innovations rather than the systems and managerial behaviours that produce them. This tendency is not unique to the police.

Although some authorities take issue with the changes made, there is support for the application of the modified version. Buerger (1994, p. 30) cites Eck and Spelman (1987) as support for the following observation in relation to a problem solving policing approach:

Problem-oriented policing is a department-level commitment that involves all members of the department. Problem solving can be done at an individual or precinct level without the
full commitment of the department. As a practical matter, since development and
dissemination of the techniques of problem solving have evolved fairly slowly-resting
primarily on the SARA (Search, Analysis, Response, Assessment) method developed
from the Newport News experience -most police departments are not problem oriented,
though many now use problem solving as a tactical tool.

The official structure of the Police Service of Western Australia is still semi-military with all of the
usual features of such a system. As Goldstein (1996, p. 3) noted these are formality, rigidity and
top-down management whereas in reality policing requires flexibility, informality and decision-
making at the lowest levels of the organization.

As many of the officers interviewed for this research explained, The Police Service of Western
Australia has a well developed system of rules and regulations that must be obeyed together with
a well resourced system of internal investigations that is able to detect, when required, breaches of
these many and varied procedural requirements. It might be argued by proponents of such a
system that it is necessary in order to prevent mistakes and provide guidance to all officers. There
is an alternative view that sees the proliferation of rules and regulations as an inevitable outcome
of the semi-military model and Bittner (1978) is cited by Chan (1997, p. 42) as observing that:

What sorts of rules and regulations exist in such a setting are in some ways less
important than that there be plenty of them and the personnel be continually aware that
they can be harshly called to account for disobeying them.

This acceptance of the need for strict obedience to official guidelines is instilled in police officers
from their very first days in a police service and serves to de-emphasize the application of any
form of discretion in relation to carrying out their duties. As Toch and Grant (1991, p. 59) explain:
The structure of police departments is military and training stresses limitations and constraints. New officers are enjoined to 'play it by the book' and their 'book'- a hefty departmental manual - is a compendium of mandates and prohibitions.

The existence of such a combination of factors raises the possibility that a certain number of officers might be disinclined to step outside official guidelines in attending to situations in any manner that could be construed as 'novel.'

Although the above comments were made with reference to the situation in the United States they were delivered at a conference in the United Kingdom dealing with crime control and it is argued that they are applicable to the situation in Western Australia.

In his major text detailing the important requirements for the implementation of his problem-oriented approach to policing Goldstein (1990, p. 156) deals with many features of police organizations that he considers have a bearing on the concept. This analysis includes consideration of the senior management of police organizations and their impact on the successful implementation of the problem-oriented approach. In describing his view of the senior management style required he states:

Police leaders committed to problem-oriented policing must be prepared to adopt a flexible management style that gives much greater freedom to command officers, supervisors and rank-and-file officers. If they are to be effective in working on problems, officers must have sufficient freedom to make contacts in the community, to explore alternatives, to make some decisions for themselves, and even to make mistakes. In this type of atmosphere, a high value is placed on fostering creativity, on mutual respect and
trust among co-workers, and on open communication regardless of rank. Supervisors, rather than devoting most of their time to controlling subordinates on behalf of top management, are encouraged to be facilitators, helping rank-and-file officers carry out their broadened roles.

When first advocated, this new style of management was totally at odds with the traditional thinking of senior police personnel and the traditional ethos of many such organizations in regards to the management of personnel.

Acceptance of the existence of this conflict in managerial styles is reflected in the comments of Hoare, Stewart, and Purcell (cited in Goldstein, 1990, p. 54) who observe that with regard to the situation in London:

> The present structure of the Metropolitan Police is probably out of step with the approach, and its adoption would involve risk taking and the abandonment of some of the traditional expectations of line managers. The “Problem-Oriented Approach” is more a matter of attitude than skill, and is an idea which would have to be progressively assimilated rather than being imposed.

In their 1984 work, Hoare et al (cited in Goldstein 1990, p. 54) list the characteristics of the Metropolitan Police that made the adoption of a problem-oriented approach difficult. These were:

- The process may be seen as being in opposition to the centralised policy making which is likely to dominate a force as large as the Metropolitan Police.
- The organizational structure, and its expectations of management may be in conflict with local problem solving.
• A Chief Superintendent’s degrees of freedom are likely to be insufficient to support radical initiatives.
• As a result of rapid personnel movements, the divisional management team is so instable as to defeat long term problem solving.
• Management communications are designed by ‘line’ or ‘territory’ - not by problem.

The then Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Newman, accepted these observations and he initiated steps to overcome the perceived obstacles.

The current research has highlighted several characteristics of the present day environment of the Police Service of Western Australia that reflects some of the negative aspects of the Metropolitan Police that existed in 1984. These are the perpetuation of centralized control, the absence of true devolution of operational decision making, restrictions on the degree of freedom that can be practised by a local police district commander, frequent movements in various levels of management due to the pursuit of personal aspirations and communications that are limited by the constraints of rank and power.

This lack of commitment by the senior management of police agencies around the world to a full and concerted effort intended to implement the ideals and practices essential to the problem-oriented policing approach is a clearly recognised issue.

In relation to the manner in which senior officers treat lower ranked personnel, Kelling, Wasserman and Williams (1988, p. 2) discuss the disadvantages of the existence of an authoritarian management ethos and the manner in which this approach contributes to the genesis of an alienated officer sub-culture:
First, use of individual discretion has been driven underground; creativity and productive adaptations go unrecognised and un-rewarded. Second, police departments often fail to tap the potential abilities of their officers. An ethos of ‘stay out of trouble’ which has developed in many departments stifles officers who are otherwise resourceful and abets officers who ‘perch’ in their positions. Finally, a police culture has developed that maintains values that are alien to both police departments and communities. This police culture is characterised by suspiciousness, perceptions of great danger, isolation from citizens and internal solidarity (the blue curtain).

This emphasis on close control over the activities of many levels within a police service is an issue in Australia. Brown and Sutton (1997, p. 22) comment that:

...definitions of professionalism which stop short at preoccupation with internal procedures and controls also seem to overly restrict officers’ abilities both to use their own time effectively and to tap resources for law enforcement and for crime prevention latent in communities. At the worst extreme, over emphasis on controls can result in officers’ following procedures blindly, making decisions on the basis of limited information and simply reacting to events after they have occurred. No matter how professional in the traditional sense, reactive rule driven police are unlikely to possess the resources, the initiative or the confidence to confront such problems and devise solutions.

In summary it can be seen that the perpetuation of the old style of approach to policing rather than a complete implementation of the new ethos generates poor outcomes such as frustration amongst officers, ineffective performance at many levels, a public perception of an unprofessional organization and an opportunity cost generated by not fully utilising the skills base of employees.

The question of the confusion between the Goldstein approach of problem-oriented policing and the Western Australian version of problem solving policing requires consideration of the reasons
for the lack of application by senior management to the implementation of the Goldstein philosophy and the consequences.

Brown and Sutton (1997) consider this situation in their analysis of a joint exercise between the Melbourne University's Department of Criminology and the Victoria (Australia) Police Drug Squad to develop a problem-oriented approach to drug law enforcement in that state.

As noted by Brown and Sutton (1997, p. 23), national, state and territory governments in Australia had for many years endorsed the principle that harm reduction should be the priority when dealing with both licit and illicit drug use in society. This approach holds that, in relation to various proscribed substances, the usual police tactics of arresting dealers, seizing drugs and suppressing drug trading and consumption are justified only if they can be shown to have helped minimise the negative health, social and economic consequences of drug use.

With regard to the situation considered by Brown and Sutton (1997, p. 28), despite agreement by the police to this approach, and extensive planning setting out a range of strategies and outcomes, this project failed due to the inability of the police, particularly at senior levels, to implement this new approach and to desist from using the data generated for the purpose of applying traditional measures of arrest and seizure of drugs as the major outcome of the project.

Goldstein (1990, p. 163) recognises this attachment to outcomes that reflect traditional policing responses. He states:

> Officers have been schooled to place highest priority on preventing crime, on preventing minor incidents from escalating into more serious problems. But the systems for rewarding officers continue to reflect the traditional expectations of both the community
and the police administration. They place a high value on crimes solved, arrests made, traffic tickets issued and especially heroic actions carried out in the face of personal danger.

The primary outcome of the analysis by Brown and Sutton (1997) was the conclusion that entrenched aspects of the organizational culture and structure of the Victoria Police Force worked against the successful implementation of a problem-oriented approach to the police role.

The culture is one of being reactive and incident driven coupled with an unwillingness to consider alternative strategies of dealing with situations outside of traditional policing methods such as arresting persons engaged in monitored activities, however remotely, and seizure of drugs.

As Brown and Sutton (1997, p. 28) observe:

However, just as managers found difficulty with the idea that problem identification and solution would largely replace response-based planning, rather than operate as an adjunct to it, so too they found it difficult to conceive of an approach to crime that relegated traditional policing activity to just one among a range of possible police strategies, each of which would be required to demonstrate effectiveness.

In relation to the extent of this approach within the Victoria Police Force, Brown and Sutton (1997, p. 27) comment:

When considering organizational change that requires whole-of-organization shifts in thinking, the scope or extent of what might be termed ‘problematic’ cultural
understandings and practices can be seen to reach into the highest levels of management.

The structural aspects of the Victoria Police Force that were found by Brown and Sutton (1997) to create problems related to the hierarchical and paramilitary nature of the organization, the location of authority at both the most senior management and street level officers, limited real power at the mid-levels and a structure that has been shaped by, and supports, a response-based approach to issues.

The findings of Brown and Sutton (1997) concerning the Victoria Police Force are reflected in those of the current research findings about the Police Service of Western Australia.

The effects of the existence of such an environment on the way in which police officers develop their approach to their functions is an example of the operation of learning theory. Schein (1985, p. 312) maintains that culture contains the stable solutions to a group’s problems of external adaptation and internal integration. A group-based learning process transmits culture, either through positive reinforcement of successful solutions to problems (‘problem solving’) or successful avoidance of painful situations (‘anxiety avoidance’) (ibid: p. 174)

Chan (1997, p. 233) argues that understanding these different modes of learning is important for understanding police culture. Whereas problem-solving learning is considered to be positive and rewarding, anxiety-avoidance learning is negative and defensive and is often one-trial learning. Chan (1997, p. 234) also points out that many aspects of police culture seem to have been developed as anxiety-avoidance mechanisms rather than innovative problem-solving strategies.
Brown and Sutton (1997), in describing the problems encountered in the Victoria Police Force, refer to a recurrent theme in critiques of police organizations concerning the impact of their hierarchical and paramilitary nature. They point out that, traditionally, police departments have managed to combine highly rigid arrangements among their members with very loose controls over the relationship between individual members and the public. In effect police culture develops in an environment paradoxically characterised by high levels of individual discretion in the exercise of police power, but with very little scope at the lower or midlevels for changing the broader focus of police activity.

Chan (1997, p. 44) observes that, although police forces are usually organised along the lines of a militaristic bureaucracy, police officers exercise very wide discretion at street level and their decisions are invariably made with little or no supervision.

In relation to the degree of control that can be exercised over the activities of police officers Van Maanen (1983, p. 277) explains that:

In particular, because police tasks at the lower levels are ill defined, episodic, non-routine, accomplished in regions of low visibility, and are dispatched in ways that most often bypass the formal chain of command in the organization, control over the work itself resides largely in the hands of those who perform the work. In this sense, police agencies resemble symbolic or mock bureaucracies where only the appearance of control, not the reality, is of managerial control.

In cases where official policy conflicted with the practical requirements of what a police officer should ideally do in any given situation a problem arose. Although this situation has long been widely recognised by commentators such as Goldstein - indeed it is one of the basic grounds on
which he promulgated his theory of problem-oriented policing - police officers were still left to confront the issue.

As noted by Goldstein (1990, p. 47), there was frequently no rational basis for many of the decisions made by police officers, other than the officers' own personal experiences. Such decisions were rarely questioned or analysed unless a complaint was made. In that event, the officer's version might be coloured by his or her desire to avoid being blamed for a particular outcome. Hence, problems and ‘solutions’ were rarely analysed in a productive manner.

Toch and Grant (1991, p. 60) referred to this anomaly when they observe that:

To ignore outcomes is tantamount to labelling a surgeon a professional because he has gone to a good medical school-never mind what he does in the operating room.

1.3 The Official Style Of Policing In Western Australian:
The Delta Program.
In 1994 the Police Service of Western Australia embarked upon a major reform package that was named The Delta Program. This was intended to implement major improvements in the style, standards, systems and services of the organization. Since that date the agency has based its existence and purpose on a service delivery philosophy. Under this premise the recipients of this service are customers to whom the Police Service of Western Australia must provide a wide variety of services.

The official endorsement of this new approach to policing can be clearly demonstrated by reference to the Police Service of Western Australia's own documentation. Furthermore, these individual concepts are clearly stated to be interdependent. Under the Delta Program of wide-ranging reforms, the first publication setting out the organization's new approach to policing,
“Purpose and Direction” (1994), has the sub-title “Better Policing Services.” The organization’s mission statement changed in 1994 from the previous one of ‘To Preserve the Peace Within the Community of Western Australia’ to ‘In partnership with the community, create a safer and more secure Western Australia by providing quality police services.’

In 1994 the then commissioner described the above document as a blueprint designed to guide members of the organization in providing better policing services to the people of the State (Police Service of Western Australia, 1994, p. 2).

This focus on service delivery has in turn been coupled with a business approach to the affairs of the Police Department. The range of customers includes both internal recipients, that is various sections within the organization and individual officers, and external recipients, other government departments, business enterprises and individual members of the public.

The Department’s acknowledgement of a commitment to these concepts is reflected in the name of the organization itself. In 1994 the name was changed from the Western Australia Police Force to the Police Service of Western Australia. At first sight this change may not seem to indicate anything major but this subtle alteration did in fact herald a change in philosophy of great significance.

It was to be accompanied by the introduction of numerous alterations to the style, standards, structure and systems of the entire organization and the manner in which personnel at all levels approached their functions and duties. These were in turn operationalized into a wide range of elements, features and approaches required of the new organization and its personnel.
The functions set out in Table 1.2 are very similar to those that have been set out for the Police Service of Western Australia from time to time and include a reference to the need to address ‘problems.’

Of significance in relation to this present study is the publication “Purpose and Direction: Better Policing Services” (1994), which contains a great many references and terms that reflect this approach. For example, under the heading “What is our business”, the core functions of the Service are stated to be:
Table 1.2. The Core Functions of the Police Service of Western Australia

Source: Police Service of Western Australia, *Purpose and Direction* (1994, p. 3)

1. Prevention and control of crime
2. Maintenance of the peace
3. Traffic management and road safety
4. Emergency Management Co-ordination
5. Assisting members of the community in times of emergency and need.

The role of the police now is to employ a variety of methods designed to address any behaviour or activity that is likely to come under one or more of the above areas that are defined as constituting legitimate activities for police officers.

As noted by Enders and Dupont (1999, pp. 10-12), the void created by the concentration of modern police agencies on enforcement at the expense of the more traditional role of the constable on the beat is being filled more and more by private security companies. They suggest that unless public policing authorities are prepared to change their ways they should prepare for a slow demise.

It is argued in this thesis that the requirement to attend to matters calling for an even greater degree of interaction with the lives of members of the public has coincided with a great increase in concepts of accountability and fault finding occurring after the event. As the research will demonstrate this has been counter-productive in producing a marked reluctance on the part of officers to become involved in their work for fear of adverse consequences.
The argument is advanced in the following sections that modern police agencies which operate with a problem solving or a problem-oriented approach should allow members greater discretion to decide what is an appropriate response to a given set of circumstances. It is also argued that commentators ought to refrain from post-mortem deliberations that culminate all too often in criticism of the course of action chosen by the officer concerned.

This approach was first spoken of in the mid 1990’s and formed one of the foundations of the Delta reforms that were instituted in 1994. Implicit within such an approach is an acknowledgement that the end user has a legitimate right to have his or her demands for service delivery satisfied. Moreover, it is expected that the service provided will be delivered in a timely and professional manner.

Attributes of the new style of policing are detailed under the heading “Statement Of Strategic Intentions” (Police Service of Western Australia, 1994, p. 4) and are listed below. As noted above these individual intentions are themselves seen as being interdependent:

1. CUSTOMER FOCUS
To understand community needs and priorities through greater consultation and communication to enable us to demonstrate commitment to satisfying those needs with professionalism and integrity.

2. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
To position ourselves within the local communities and state-wide as a leadership body, which not only delivers certain services, but ensures the effective contribution of other organizations with the necessary skills and resources to meet the safety and security needs of the community.
3. LOCALISED SERVICE DELIVERY
To develop actions plans and tactics based on local knowledge, experience and contacts, reflecting the different needs and priorities of local communities within Western Australia. Responsibility and accountability for the success of police activities at a local level will rest firmly with local management.

4. PROBLEM SOLVING
To become increasingly more proactive in our approach to policing throughout the state by focussing attention on the causal factors of incidents requiring police attention rather than merely dealing with incidents as they arise.

5. MANAGERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY
To ensure that decision within our organization is based upon responsibilities, measurable outcomes and explicit expectations. Accountabilities will be clarified and documented within an effective performance management system.

6. EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES
To maximise the efficient allocation and use of financial, human and physical resources towards the achievement of local, regional and statewide objectives. Appropriate levels of support, both technical and other, must be made available to enable informed and effective decisions to be made.
7. COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPING AND MOTIVATING OUR PEOPLE

To develop and motivate our people by increasing the quality of working life, empowering front line staff with the knowledge, confidence and ability to make decisions, continuously improving the training and education facilities and opportunities available and revising policies and procedures to foster innovation, creativity and effective decision-making.

A careful analysis of these Strategic Intentions reveals a clear commitment to a number of important policing and organizational philosophies. The concepts detailed under the headings of Customer Focus, Community Leadership and Localised Service Delivery are clearly based upon the community policing approach whereby policing activities are based upon a clear input from the community about what it requires in the way of services. The ideas expressed under the headings of Problem Solving, Strategic Partnerships and Commitment To Developing And Motivating Our People would appear to be based on the problem-oriented policing approach.

The local model requires individual officers of all ranks to analyse incidents and devise and implement plans designed to deal with causes rather than symptoms of problems. In particular the last of the Strategic Intentions deals with an approach that is intended to encourage officers to be innovative and creative in the execution of their duties. In fact the section entitled “Statement of Common Values” (p. 12) under the heading “People” states “we will value and develop our people, our most important asset”. As will be discussed in more depth in the following pages these are vital characteristics of a learning, problem solving organization.

In relation to a problem solving approach to policing, the department has accepted many of Goldstein’s views. In addition to the above documents, issued under the umbrella of the Delta Project, a report entitled “The Community Policing Crime Prevention Practices Review” was published by the Police Service of Western Australia in December 1998. This document clearly
spelt out the need to apply a problem solving approach across the whole of the Service. It also pointed out that the concept is poorly understood and that the philosophy detailed in the Purpose and Direction document was not being applied.

In that same year the Police Service of Western Australia published a document entitled “Achievements and The Way Ahead”. This document reiterated the organization’s commitment to the adoption of a local level, problem solving approach. It also stated that local ‘chiefs of police’ now have control and responsibility for all resources in their area and the authority to use these in creative and innovative ways to meet local needs (p. 2).

A report entitled “Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?” was issued by the Police Service of Western Australia in 2000 and was based on the results of a survey conducted among local members. It dealt with how well the organization had progressed in implementing the Delta reforms and one of the issues covered was the movement towards the adoption of a problem solving approach.

In 2000 The Western Australian Government issued a document entitled “Safer W.A.-Together Against Crime.” This advocated a partnership approach to crime prevention between the community, the police and the state and local Government. This document made the point that, while it was not the aim to prescribe how communities should address particular crime problems, it did strongly recommend the implementation of a problem-oriented approach.

In New York the Police Commissioner made a positive commitment to the implementation of this philosophy. Brown (1991) set out his aims for converting the operations of the entire Police
Department to this approach and these were clearly and extensively articulated in the publication entitled “Policing New York City In The 1990s - The Strategy For Community Policing.”

This 67 page document makes numerous references to factors such as the need to institutionalise problem solving in all aspects of policing, for problems to be identified at the lowest level, for police officer creativity to be recognised and encouraged and for managers to permit subordinates to take reasonable risks in their efforts to solve problems.

The New Zealand Police (2002, p. 10) issued a document entitled “Strategic Plan To 2006,” that sets out various Key Themes, including the requirement to implement a problem solving approach. This document states that:

> Problem solving will continue as a key operational strategy and will be enhanced through creation of a resource that can be focussed on targeted national problems and crime prevention.

Many of the police agencies in Australia have issued similar strategic statements setting out essentially the same goals and methodologies. For example, “The Queensland Police Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008” (p. 9) states that:

> The Queensland Police Service bases planning, Operational Performance Reviews and day-to-day operations on the problem-oriented policing model developed by Professor Herman Goldstein.
The Victoria Police strategic action plan is entitled, “The Way Ahead-Strategic Plan 2003-2008.” This document makes the point that “Intelligent policing is a pro-active, problem-oriented response to crime and community safety” (p. 10).

In relation to developing a working culture that encourages innovation and creative problem solving the document mentions a number of aims. These include, “Introducing a reward and recognition system that encourages innovation and high performance” and “Ensuring there is a more positive focus to the discipline system while maintaining our commitment to tackling unethical behaviour” (p. 13).

In South Australia the local agency there has published a document entitled, “The South Australia Police Future Directions Strategy 2003-2006.” This explains what are termed the Key Management Areas and the third of these is Problem Solving. This section details various Priority Actions designed to bring about the achievement of this goal. These include incorporating the problem solving approach in training programmes, enhancing and supporting problem solving for ‘front-line’ police, applying the problem solving methodology to all aspects of service delivery and rewarding officers for using the approach (pp. 24-25).

In addition the South Australia Police (2002) have issued a “Pocket Guide To Problem Solving” that contains the interesting reminder that “There are no failures in problem solving. There are only successes and attempts” (p. 5).

The Police Service of Western Australia, in common with many other such organizations, exhibits a number of well-known characteristics. These are factors such as the existence of a distinct rank structure, an emphasis on adherence to laws, rules and procedures, a formal disciplinary/
investigation function, a merit based promotion system and a service delivery philosophy. These and other aspects of police agencies are so commonly known and have existed for so long that they are almost defining features of such organizations.

1.4 Research Aim

Although many of these factors have been well known for many years the point is made in this thesis that previously these were considered more or less in isolation from each other. The aim of this research is to uncover the full nature and range of these factors that impact upon officers and the manner in which they interact with one another in terms of a fully descriptive model of the organization. This will aid in the process of understanding organizational performance and in predicting future conduct.

The existence of these factors could have a bearing on the manner in which police officers carry out their official functions, including the application of a problem solving approach. If such an influence exists then it would be useful to understand the nature of this aspect of organizational affairs and to be able to devise methods to deal with any adverse consequences.

As explained above the Police Service of Western Australia has taken steps to implement a problem solving approach to policing and has based a number of policies on this decision. The first stage of this current research is based on accepting the existence of the local version of problem solving policing and ascertaining whether or not successful implementation is affected by the culture of the organization.

The second aspect that will be considered will be the question of whether or not the culture of the Police Service of Western Australia has had an impact on the implementation of a full problem-oriented approach to policing.
CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH

In this chapter the research problem is described and the research process is explained and justified.

The major task of the project is to explore the nature of the police organization and the manner in which employees (police officers) function within the confines of that entity with particular regard to the implementation of a problem solving policing approach to the variety of tasks that they are called upon to perform on a regular basis.

Such an inquiry would seem to be warranted by virtue of the possible conflict between the creative, independent and freethinking style required by the problem solving approach and the possibly more restrictive environment that officers face as a result of organizational factors such as the rank structure, an internal disciplinary system and the existence of the many rules and regulations that govern activities.

The purpose of the research project was to explore and describe police officers’ perceptions about their working environment and their interactions with it. The intended end-result is the generation of a substantive theory about the operations of the Police Service of Western Australia that will provide an insight into the functions of police officers as they attempt to conduct their daily duties within the confines of the organization.

The research is intended to achieve three outcomes. The first aim is to generate a descriptive model of the organization based on factors that working police officers consider the most important. The second is to explain the impact that this model has on officer behaviour. The third is
to provide a basis for predicting how police officers are likely to behave in the future, in relation to a problem solving approach, given the continued existence of similar circumstances.

2.1. The Research Requirements

The problem described above arises as a consequence of the personal view of the policing environment that each officer holds and the processes and strategies that they employ in dealing with various issues that arise within the context of that environment. The purpose was to gauge whether or not officers are able to deal with various situations that arise for consideration by using a problem solving approach. The aim was not to uncover the process by which officers developed whatever particular outlook they may have. It was confined to establishing what these opinions are and how they impact on an officer’s approach to their policing duties. Therefore, the research method needed to be one that was able to uncover these personal viewpoints and provide an explanation for behaviours that officers exhibit. In this manner it should be possible to develop a theoretical explanation for police officer behaviour that could be used to predict how officers would react to various situations that they are faced with.

As a further check on this model, research was also conducted to ascertain how officers actually approached problem solving within the environment that is The Police Service of Western Australia.

A qualitative approach seemed the most appropriate and in particular the methodology known as grounded theory as this allowed the generation of theory grounded in the actual experiences of officers as detailed by them during the research process.
2.2. The Issues/Research Problem

Given the features of the Police Service of Western Australia described above and the manner in which officers are expected to carry out their daily duties, the issue that arises for consideration concerns the possible influence that any such organizational factors might have on the behaviour of officers.

This gives rise to three fundamental questions that need to be addressed. These are:

1. What are the major features of the organization that influence an officer’s behaviour?
2. How do officers react to these influences?
3. What impact, if any, do these factors have on the implementation of a problem solving/problem-oriented policing approach to issues?

2.3. The Research Questions.

These questions can be re-phrased as follows:

1. What are the common (shared) problems that police officers believe they face in carrying out their functions within the framework of The Police Service of Western Australia?
2. What strategies or processes do officers employ to deal with these issues?
3. What are the consequences for the implementation of a problem solving/problem oriented policing philosophy?

2.4. The Research Process

An examination of the research questions posed above will reveal that what is required is, firstly, an examination of the personal perceptions that officers, individually and collectively, have about the nature of the issues that they face in their working environment. Secondly, there is the
requirement to uncover the strategies that officers employ in their attempts to deal with the organization. Finally, there is the question of the impact that such procedures might have on any attempts they might make to implement the practices of problem solving policing.

The research methodology applied to this situation should, ideally, result in the production of a theory that provides the following:

- A description of what is happening in this particular context or setting.
- An explanation that attempts to give reasons why particular events occur in the way that they do, and
- A basis for predicting what is likely to happen in the future given equivalent or comparable circumstances.

Considering that most of the relevant data for such an inquiry concerns the unique view of the world that each officer might hold, the research process applied needed to be one that could deal with accessing and analysing such information.

Bearing in mind the existence of factors evident in this current research such as the personal view of individual officers and the manner in which reality is created and dealt with by them, a constructivist paradigm appeared to be most productive. It permitted me to obtain data from the sources in a free manner and devise a substantive theory grounded in the data generated.

The following table provides more detail of the features of the constructivist paradigm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology:</td>
<td>As the research is to focus on the perceptions of employees relating to their interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>with the environment that is the Police Service of Western Australia, the ontological assumption is aligned on the basis of realities being constructed by the officers involved in the research project. These are not objective realities but subjective. The phenomenon under investigation does not lend itself to empirical observation where things can be measured ‘as real and external to the individual’ but as a product of the individual’s consciousness (Collins, 1998), (Cresswell, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology: Interpretivism</td>
<td>Leading on from the determination of the ontological assumption, the epistemological assumption regarding the nature of knowledge is interactively linked. As employees’ perceptions cannot be considered as ‘object,’ nor can their perceptions be simply ‘acquired’; the researcher will be required to directly interact with employees. This action will move the paradigm choice away from that of scientific enquiry. (Collins 1998) (Cresswell, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology: Qualitative</td>
<td>The research question seeks to understand from a police officer’s perspective and to seek the meaning of such perspectives. This can only be elicited and refined through interaction between researcher and police officer utilising qualitative methods to focus on the process of meaning construction and clarifying what and how meanings are embodied in language and action through prevailing inductive logic (Schwandt, 1994, Cresswell, 1994).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Paradigm Choice Assumptions Adapted from Bouy (2002, p. 64), “Employees’ Perceptions as Recipients of Change: A Case Study”.

The constructivist approach to research dictates a qualitative methodology. Leininger (1985, p. 5) describes this process as:

Methods and techniques of observing, documenting, analysing and interpreting attributes, patterns, characteristics and meanings of specific, contextual or gestaltic features of the phenomena under study.
Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 17) provide a description of this approach that also contrasts it with the quantitative methodology. They state:

By the term qualitative research we mean any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.

A constructivist ontology mandates a qualitative methodology. Such a process of discovery requires an acceptance that reality is subjective and conditional in the mind of the subject of the research. In addition there is a need for close interaction between the researcher and the participants in any study undertaken.

This approach places requirements on the researcher that are described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 18) in the following terms:

The requisite skills for doing qualitative research, as you will later see, are these: to step back and critically analyse situations, to recognize and avoid bias, to obtain valid and reliable data, and to think abstractly. To do these, a qualitative researcher requires theoretical and social sensitivity, the ability to maintain analytical distance while at the same time drawing upon past experience and theoretical knowledge to interpret what is seen, astute powers of observation and good interactional skills.

The following table provides a fuller description of various aspects of the qualitative approach and contrasts these with those of quantitative methodology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative (paradigm) methods</th>
<th>Quantitative (paradigm) methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocates the use of qualitative methods</td>
<td>Advocates the use of quantitative methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenologism and Verstehen, concerned with understanding human behaviour from the actor's own frame of reference</td>
<td>Logical-positivism: seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective states of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalistic and uncontrolled observation</td>
<td>Obtrusive and controlled measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to the data: the ‘insider’ perspective</td>
<td>Removed from the data: the ‘outsider’ perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded, discovery-oriented, exploratory, expansionist, descriptive and inductive</td>
<td>Ungrounded, verification-oriented, confirmatory, reductionist, inferential and hypothetical-deductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process oriented</td>
<td>Outcome oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid, ‘real’, ‘rich’ and ‘deep data’</td>
<td>Reliable, ‘hard’ and replicable data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungeneralizable, single case studies</td>
<td>Generalizable, multiple case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Particularistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes a dynamic reality</td>
<td>Assumes a stable reality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Methods.


This study was concerned with the perceptions that police officers hold about various aspects of the organization that employs them. It was not concerned with their thoughts about being a police officer per se. The purpose was to discover their thoughts about their working situation and the strategies that they adopt to navigate their way safely through this environment. It was about an inquiry into the thoughts and feelings of these individuals. The aim was to access their constructed reality by means of an interview process involving cooperation between the researcher and the
subject. For these reasons it is argued that the constructivist paradigm was the most suitable approach for this research project.

2.5. The Methodology

This research was principally concerned with discovering the personal views of police officers about a variety of aspects of the Police Service of Western Australia that they consider to be the most important in the process of formulating their choices about how they will interact with their environment. This very personal approach that individuals are said to adopt in relation to such issues is at the heart of the constructivist view of the world and is the approach that was adopted for this study. This view supports a highly subjective view of reality as it is based on the personal views of individuals.

Guba and Lincoln (1989, pp. 110-111) describe this approach in the following terms:

Realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependant for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less ‘true’ in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable, as are their associated realities.

A number of different methodologies have been devised to facilitate the exploration of situations in line with the constructionist/interpretivist paradigm. Some of these qualitative approaches are ethnography, phenomenology, life histories, conversational analysis and grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17).
Grounded theory is a methodology that was first formulated by the sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their book entitled "The discovery of grounded theory." Essentially the process involves gathering data from a variety of sources, such as direct interviews with people and examination of documents, analysing this data, uncovering the major aspects or themes and then using this information to generate a substantive theory about the processes that are going on within the situation under examination.

According to Robrecht (1995, p. 169) Glaser and Strauss were strongly influenced in their formulation of grounded theory by the work of researchers from the Chicago University School Of Sociology during the years 1920 to 1950. These were sociologists such as Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969) who developed a model of human behaviour that they termed Symbolic Interactionism.

In attempting to explain human behaviour Blumer (1969) based his theory on the following three fundamental premises:

- Human beings react to their surroundings, physical objects and other beings in their environment on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;
- These meanings derive from the social interactions and various forms of communication between and themselves and other individuals; and
- They are established and modified through an interpretive process.

The working environment of police officers involves the interaction between the internal organizational environment of the Police Service of Western Australia, other factors that are generated by an officer's interactions with the public and the personal viewpoint that members develop about this unique environment. As Blumer provides a sound theoretical basis for explaining how people give meaning to their world and how this in turn leads to the decisions that
they make about their actions and behaviours his approach was used to support this present study.

Others writers on Symbolic Interactionism have expressed similar views about the need to understand the personal perspectives of other people before one is able to understand why that person functions in a particular way.

For example, Bryman (1988, p. 52) cautions that:

> Any attempt to understand social reality must be grounded in people's experience and not to do so may result in the portrayal of a fictional world.

This view is supported by Morris (1977, p. 48) who states that, in order to understand social settings or situations, the researcher must see them from the perspective of those being studied i.e. “reality as it appears to them.”

The idea expressed by Thomas and Thomas (1928, p. 6) includes a reference to the importance for individuals of the effects that follow from particular events:

> If people define situations as real they are real in their consequences.

Grounded theory provides a powerful method of uncovering and explaining the two main strands of this research project regarding the working environment of police officers. These are, firstly, the shared view that officers have about those aspects of the structure and culture of the organization that they must contend with and, secondly, the methods and strategies that members of the group implement in attempting to deal with these issues.
A substantive theory that deals with this phenomenon can then be used to provide insight into whether or not police officers are able to deal with the application of a problem solving approach to their functions.

2.6. Grounded Theory Method

The methods and procedures of grounded theory can be used to build a substantive theory that is relevant to an aspect of a given social situation that is under investigation. It is based upon a process of the discovery of fresh theory derived from or grounded in data gathered during the research process as opposed to the verification of existing theories. Theory development proceeds by the use of the processes of interactive data collection and analysis. The elements of the theory are allowed to 'emerge' from the data.

This process complements the purpose of the current research, that is seeking an understanding of organizational forces and their effects from the perspective of those directly involved in the situation.

In common with other qualitative methodologies the information used comes from the analysis of rich, in-depth data sourced from small samples. This is in contrast to quantitative methods that involve sample selection based upon statistical processes. A grounded theory is generated in a defined manner and has specific attributes. As explained by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 23):

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One
does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.

On the question of how this process operates, Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 24) describe this methodology in the following terms:

The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon. The research findings constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation, rather than consisting of a set of numbers, or a group of loosely related themes.

With regard to the question of whether or not this process is capable of producing theories that meet the requirements of sound scientific analysis, Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 31) observe:

Its systematic techniques and procedures of analysis enable the researcher to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing 'good' science: significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizibility, reproducibility, precision, rigor and verification.

The phenomena that are studied relate to phenomena encountered by individuals and groups in their daily experience. In relation to this situation, Heaven (1998, p. 63) cites Abrahamson (1983) as observing that grounded theories:

…relate directly to people’s real-life experiences and their shared interpretations of the meaning of these experiences which provides the most abstract generalisations that are possible about the ways people construct their reality.
The methodology can be used to generate substantive and formal theories about phenomena of interest. The major difference between the two forms of theory arises from the range of situations that are investigated when formulating the theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 174) describe the differences in the following manner:

Note that any substantive theory evolves from the study of a phenomenon situated in one particular situational context. A formal theory, on the other hand, emerges from a study of a phenomenon examined under many different types of situation.

In relation to the process of generating a grounded theory, Strauss (1987, p. 5) provides a good description of the overall approach:

The methodological thrust of the grounded theory approach is towards the development of theory, without any particular commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research or theoretical interests. So it is not really a specific method or technique. Rather, it is a style of doing qualitative analysis that includes a number of distinct features such as theoretical sampling and certain methodological guidelines such as the making of constant comparisons and the use of a coding paradigm to ensure conceptual development and density.

The aims of grounded theory are to uncover and describe the two principal features of a given social situation, termed the Basic Social Problem and the Basic Social Process, together with the context and conditions giving rise to them.

The Basic Social Problem can be described as a common issue or issues that members of a group face. In the case of the current research project this could be a shared problem that police
officers encounter as a result of some aspects of their occupation or the organization that they are employed by. If this exists it is not necessarily articulated by those involved. The Basic Social Process refers to the actions that people take in an effort to deal with the identified shared problem.

In order to arrive at one or both of these features of a given situation there are a number of processes or steps that are designed to lead to these outcomes.

Lewis (2001, p. 80) provides a succinct summary of the sequence in which these steps are applied:

The foundations of grounded theory are theoretical sampling, a process by which respondent selection is controlled by the emerging data, and constant comparison, a method for joint data coding and analysis. Using the terminology of Glaser and Strauss (1967), the process of the methodology may be summarised as follows. Incidents of phenomena in the data are coded into categories. By comparing each incident with previous incidents in the same category the researcher develops theoretical properties of the categories and the dimensions of those properties. As the study progresses the focus changes from comparing incidents with one another with comparing incidents with the properties of the category that resulted from initial comparison of incidents. Theoretical sampling and constant comparison processes lead towards theoretical saturation and a reduced set of categories within the boundaries of the emerging theory.

The application of these processes can generate information that will allow the creation of a substantive theory able to provide the three requirements of the theory. These are a description and explanation of a given situation and a basis for predicting future conduct.
2.7. Grounded Theory Modifications

Grounded theory has been applied to a variety of research situations. In particular, members of the nursing profession have conducted a great many research projects into various aspects of the health system.

This methodology has also been used for studies relating to different aspects of management practices within various kinds of formal organizations. For example, in Western Australia, Heaven, (1998) examined the introduction of personnel performance management, Buoy (2002) looked at employees’ perceptions as recipients of change, Brown (2002) considered factors affecting the commercialisation of intellectual capital and Atkinson (1996) researched the perceptions of people using a Group Support System for meetings. Finally, Lewis (2001) considered the role of the clinician manager within the health system of Western Australia.

In support of her decision to use grounded theory Martin and Turner (1986) are quoted by Buoy (2002, p. 79) as authority for using grounded theory to explore aspects of organizational life:

> In the field of organizational studies, grounded theory is likely to interest those concerned with the pilot stages of large scale inquiries, those conducting case studies of organizational behaviour who wish to produce more than an impressionistic account from their inquiries, those interested in features of the organizational world - such as corporate cultures - that lend themselves particularly well to qualitative investigation and those concerned about carrying out the detailed, locally based fact gathering and interpretation essential to conducting excellent research.

Buoy (2002) states further that, as her research was concerned with understanding employees’ perspectives about organizational change, the grounded theory features of discovery, inductive inquiry and the emergent qualities or aspects of the process made it very suitable to the task.
Although all of the above researchers used the grounded theory approach to their area of study, some reservations were expressed about the appropriateness of applying the methodology as fully as has been the case with other research projects, particularly those within the health arena.

For example, Atkinson (1996, p. 108) stated that the ‘complete arsenal’ of grounded theory method was not applied in his work because the features of the research project did not lend themselves to a continuous or prolonged access to the field of study. Atkinson opted to dispense with the coding method of grounded theory and instead used rich description coupled with extensive quoting of participants’ speech.

Lewis (2001) provides a detailed argument based on the views of various authors and authorities concerning the possibility of limitations to the full application of grounded theory to organizational issues and management issues.

With regard to the implementation of a grounded theory approach within a formal organizational environment Lewis (2001) (citing Whiteley, 2000, p. 85) states:

That there are constraints within the organizational environment that render the ‘pure’ form of grounded theory unachievable. Organizations, as a consciously created social structure, have meaning inherent in their systems and processes. Organizational structures and processes inevitably compromise the notion of the negotiated role that is central to symbolic interactionism and, hence, grounded theory. Roles are created by the management of the organization and are reflected in job titles associated with organizational structure diagrams, job descriptions and performance appraisal systems. In grounded theory, the core requirement is for theory to emerge from the data. Associated
with this is the notion of suspended preconceived ideas. Whether this is achievable in the labelled environment of the organization must be challenged.

Although Lewis (2001, pp. 84-85) acknowledges that sociological models have been applied in attempting to understand organizations, she cites Burrell and Morgan (1979) in questioning the extent to which this is appropriate. Lewis (2001, p. 84) states that:

The contrived nature of organizations and the notion of a created purpose -together with the impact of power and authority within the bounded environment of the organization - create unique dynamics. It may be argued that grounded theory, developed within the discipline of sociology, does not recognise the possibly different nature of the business organization. The question remains whether or not the requirements of grounded theory methodology, designed for use by sociologists, can be met in studies of organizational behaviour.

With regard to the process of applying grounded theory to organizational situations Lewis (2001, p. 85) refers to the limitations on action that are the result of the situation whereby roles within organizations are constrained by management practices and outside influences such as legal requirements. Any theory generated is likely to be influenced by the requirements for the role that extend beyond the individual and the position.

Finally, Lewis (2001, p. 86) argues for the application of grounded theory to studies of organizational processes despite these reservations. She refers to the views of Whiteley (2000) when she argues that:

The theory as well as the symbolic interactionist perspective, on which it is based, are important milestones in the development of interpretive thinking and research. Although
‘pure’ grounded theory can and should be considered a benchmark, it should be recognised that ‘pure’ grounded theory conditions cannot be met in all circumstances. Grounded theory should be the descriptor for research conducted under such circumstances.

Although the above sets out clear details about the application of a ‘pure’ grounded theory method there are instances where this process has been modified to take account of specific research requirements. One such area that is relevant to the current research concerns the application of grounded theory to inquiries about formal organizational structures such as The Police Service of Western Australia.

The current research has the following features:

1. It is situated within the context of a large, formal organization
2. The organization exhibits clearly prescribed rules and regulations
3. Employee roles within the group are clearly defined and
4. The purpose is to generate an understanding of employee behaviour

These factors supported my view that this current study concerning the nature of the Police Service of Western Australia and the functions of its members can be considered to be an example of organizational research. As such it is subject to the above factors concerning the type of information that was discovered during the research.

2.8. Researcher Details

The use of a qualitative approach to research involves an acceptance of the notion that the researcher may have an influence upon the situation under review. This possibility requires consideration by the researcher in order to overcome the possibility of personal biases having an
due influence. This process serves to make the researcher more conscious of the potential problems and better able to take preventative steps.

In 1996, at the commencement of this project, I was aged 49 years and I had a Bachelor of Arts (Justice Studies). I was a detective sergeant and had been in the Police Service of Western Australia since 1978. I had served mainly in the Perth metropolitan area but had some experience of country policing.

I had become acquainted in a professional capacity with a number of other officers. I had not been associated with the disciplinary branches of the police service or senior management. During the early stages of this research, including the data acquisition phase, I was not actively pursuing promotion.

A major consideration when doing grounded theory is the concept of theoretical sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1990, pp. 41-42) define this skill as follows:

Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. One can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending upon previous reading and experience with or relevant to an area. It can also be developed further during the research process. Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't. All this is done in conceptual rather than concrete terms. It is theoretical sensitivity that allows one to develop a theory that is grounded, conceptually dense, and well integrated, and to do this more quickly than if this sensitivity were lacking.
Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 42) also make the point that this quality can be enhanced by personal and professional experience and by consulting various sources of literature about the issue under consideration.

In addition, my educational, professional and private study of texts and journal articles and other literature on the topic had provided further exposure to various ideas about the issues likely to be raised by others during this research project.

While such factors can operate to provide a researcher with an enhanced level of sensitivity to the data generated during the research process, they can also be the cause of problems such as premature closure of inquiry, imposition of personal viewpoints and presumptions of outcomes that are not supported by the data.

Howe and Eisenhart (1990) referred to such issues in pointing out that the researcher's personal experiences and knowledge of a given situation can be both a strength and a weakness. While theoretical sensitivity can be enhanced, this may come at the expense of a bias that might influence the interpretation of data and any findings that result.

There are also conflicting views about the stage at which a researcher carrying out grounded theory research should consult the existing literature on the chosen subject area. In arguing against this practice Glaser (1978, p. 31) observed:

It is hard enough to generate one's own ideas without the rich derailment provided by the literature in the same field.
Stern (1985, p. 153) cautioned against too early an exposure to the literature when using the grounded theory approach in stronger terms when she observed that:

The research may lead to pre-judgement and effect premature closure of ideas and research inquiry, the direction may be wrong and the available data or materials used may be inaccurate.

The above cautions in relation to the use of existing material do not preclude references to such data. Some prior exposure is inevitable and in fact can be useful. As noted by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 50):

You will come to the research situation with some background in the technical literature and it is important to acknowledge and use that, as we will explain below.

Bearing in mind my existing exposure to a range of ideas about the topic, it was inevitable that I would bring to the task established opinions about issues. Therefore, it was most important that I kept this in mind and implemented measures to deal with the possibility of bias.

During this current project I took steps to ensure that interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner only with regard to introductory comments at the commencement of each interview, and that subsequent questions were confined to seeking clarification of respondents comments and that my own ideas did not override the issues arising from analysis of the data.

During this research I was a serving police officer at the time of conducting the interviews for this project, having spent 22 years in various sections of the organization. Although holding the rank of detective sergeant at the time, my background and situation placed me in a sound position in relation to encouraging other officers to participate in the research project.
I considered that I was well placed to make a conscious effort to abide by the constructivist paradigm in ensuring that what was 'discovered' was the subjective view of reality held by employees and not my own. This was a skill developed during my occupational experience as a detective.

In addition, my personal experience over several years as an investigator served to develop sufficient expertise to permit me to conduct the kinds of interviews required for this type of research.

2.9. Data Collection Methods

The purpose of this research was to uncover the views of individual officers about aspects of the organization that they considered to be of importance in regard to their approach to their work. Therefore, the most appropriate method of data collection was considered to be in-depth interviews conducted between the researcher and a single interviewee.

This process was augmented by consideration of selected literature consulted principally after the interviews had been conducted and analysed. This sequence is in accordance with grounded theory practice that considers that going to the literature before conducting data gathering and analysis has the potential to introduce findings inconsistent with the results of the data.

Interviews play a central role in the process of collecting data for qualitative research methods such as grounded theory. The process of conducting in-depth interviews is an effective method of gaining access to the interviewees' subjective meanings and interpretations that they give to various aspects of their world (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).
In relation to the purpose of interviews for qualitative research, Patton (1990, p. 278) explained:

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind (for example, the interviewer's pre-conceived categories for organizing the world) but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe.

In the context of this research I considered that unstructured interviews were the most appropriate form in relation to obtaining data about the research problem. According to Kidder (1981, p. 187) such a process is intended to elicit responses:

...that help to bring out the affective and value-laden aspects of respondents' responses and to determine the personal significance of their attitudes.

The actual format of the interviews conducted took the form of commencing with a request for general background and history in The Police Service of Western Australia, more or less as an icebreaker, and then an initial question designed to lead the respondent into talking about whatever they considered to be important. This question was in the form, 'Tell me what is important about life in the Police Service of Western Australia today.'

With one or two exceptions this question resulted in interviewees talking freely about issues that concerned them and me simply asking questions intended to encourage officers to explain or elaborate on comments made. When respondents wanted clarification about what I was seeking the initial question was re-phrased in a manner that was intended to be non-directional and this was effective in all instances.
By virtue of length of service I had become reasonably well known to a number of other officers who had progressed to senior management positions. I considered that I was able to contact and communicate with these officers relatively freely. My rank of sergeant made me the peer of other officers at that rank in the sense of not holding any superior position. In addition, due to occupying minor administrative positions and working closely with junior officers, I considered that I was better placed to relate to their experiences and encourage a free flow of ideas during an interview process.

2.10. Sample Selection

As the selected method of data collection was one-on-one interviews there were a number of issues to be addressed in relation to the selection of officers suitable for this process.

The choice of suitable candidates was facilitated greatly by the nature of the research problem in that the inquiry centred on employees from a single organization. Although these officers worked in different locations, eventual selection was based partly on their location within the Perth metropolitan area as this made access much easier.

As the Police Service of Western Australia covers the whole of the State, some officers have a mixture of country service and capital city policing experience. The current research was not intended to explore any differences in outlook that might result from service in these different locations. Consequently this factor did not have a bearing on sample selection although the majority of the officers selected did in fact have experience of country service.
Although the gender of officers was not an aspect under consideration during this research it was nevertheless considered. The Police Service is a predominantly male organization and at the time of this research females comprised only about 8% of the total number of police officers.

This research did not sample female officers because it was not intended to be representative of the organization but a selection of officers of all ranks from the majority, male population in the service. In addition, due to the very small numbers of female officers holding commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, there existed a real issue in relation to preserving their anonymity. Therefore, all of the officers interviewed were male. As will be explained in Section 2.12 this fact was principally due to the nature of the researcher’s association with those officers selected for inclusion.

The process of selecting prospective interview subjects began with a consideration of the general nature of the research problem. From this process it was decided that officers from most ranks should be considered with a view to obtaining impressions from members who could be expected to have to deal with frontline policing issues on a regular basis.

The Police Service of Western Australia classified all of the members selected for interview as operational police officers on the basis of their training and the nature of their duties.

The Police Service of Western Australia is effectively divided into four tiers. At the highest level there are assistant commissioners, deputy commissioners and the commissioner. They form the senior executive and are responsible for policy and the running of departments and the entire organization.
At the next level down are the junior commissioned officers being superintendents and inspectors who are in charge of districts and branches. These officers are responsible for the implementation of Service policy across the State in accordance with directives from the senior executive, the administration of day-to-day policing operations within geographical districts and many of the tasks associated with monitoring, checking and disciplining the lower ranks.

Below these commissioned officers are the sergeants who are required to perform administrative tasks, supervisory functions including aspects of discipline, as well as performing frontline duties that bring them directly into contact with the public.

Lastly, there are the constables who are required to implement frontline policing and have direct contact with the public.

These considerations were the basis for deciding to limit the interview process to superintendents and below as it was considered that this was likely to be the last level from which views could be obtained that were based on practical policing considerations rather than organizational and political policies.

The final consideration was the extent to which officers could be expected to be forthcoming with full and frank opinions about whatever aspects of the organization they wanted to speak. As noted above, and as will become clear, police officers are often suspicious of the existence of ulterior motives behind the actions of many people.

Police officers place great emphasis on the privileges attaching to rank. This can be an inhibiting factor in that junior officers are often very guarded in their responses to senior officers and senior officers in turn are frequently not in favour of too close an association with a junior member.
I considered that I was well placed to lessen the potential impact of these factors by virtue of mature age and middle rank. My previous association with the officers selected was limited to general familiarity rather than a close working relationship. As such I considered that this would serve to facilitate frank and open discussions without the danger of obtaining views from officers with the same background or thoughts. These personal characteristics were the foundation for building a degree of trust intended to counteract any suspicions that prospective interviewees might have about the situation.

The process of listing potential candidates for interview also took into consideration a number of other factors. Suitable persons were considered from across a range of organizational branches such as detectives, traffic personnel and officers with general duties experience.

With regard to length of service a somewhat arbitrary decision was made to consider only officers with a minimum of about 3 years service. It was considered that a certain period of time would be required to settle into the organization before persons would be in a position to commit themselves to an opinion about issues.

This factor did not eventually play a major role. All interviewees from sergeant upwards had at least 20 years of service. Of the constables selected the most junior had served for three years and the others for a minimum of 5 years.

On this basis a tentative list was made of prospective participants spread across the full range of ranks to be included in the study. For ease of access this was limited to officers residing in the Perth metropolitan area where I also lived. For various reasons some of those initially selected
were not available and the final numbers eventually included 6 constables, 6 sergeants, 9 inspectors and 7 superintendents.

2.11. Interview Process

Before commencing the actual interview process, a number of formal matters required attention and consideration.

Because the research involved human subjects a submission for approval was made to the appropriate Ethics Committee at Murdoch University and this was subsequently granted with the proviso that proper steps be taken to ensure that candidates were made aware of the nature of the project, the role of the researcher, the need for informed consent to participate and the provision of steps to ensure their welfare and anonymity.

This research project involved an interview process that had the potential to elicit comments from serving police officers about the organization and possibly various levels of management. At least some of these comments might be uncomplimentary. It was also likely that a number of interviews would take place within various police premises in which interviewees worked. Therefore it was deemed appropriate for the researcher to seek departmental approval for the project from a senior person.

The question of anonymity was addressed during the data analysis and writing phase by eliminating references to factors such as interviewees’ position titles, work locations, previous history, association with well known organizational anecdotes and any references to persons by name.
In relation to access to staff and police premises this was achieved by means of the submission of a comprehensive report that provided sufficient details of the purpose of the research project and the procedural steps contemplated for completion to allow a decision to be made about the issue. An assistant commissioner dealt with this request and approval was granted.

I personally approached all of the prospective interview candidates to request their participation. A variety of methods was used these being personal visits, telephone calls and by use of the Police Service of Western Australia.’s internal electronic mailing system.

Another important consideration, given the possibility of a high degree of rank consciousness among many officers, was the relative positions of the researcher and interviewees of various ranks. This gave rise to considerations of power and the potential for this to interfere with the notion of free and informed consent to participate.

Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2000, p. 93) had this consideration in mind when they observed:

‘…embedded in qualitative research are the concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants.’

This was of particular concern with regard to officers of the rank of constable. The same problem was not likely to arise in respect of officers holding equal rank and much less likely in the case of officers holding senior positions. In the case of commissioned officers, given the status attached to their senior rank, it appeared almost incongruous to have a sergeant telling a superintendent that he did not have to comply with the request to be interviewed.
Nevertheless all participants were treated in the same manner for the sake of consistency. In order to address the potential for problems all interviewees were accorded the same considerations at each stage of selection, initial approach seeking their consent to take part and also during the actual interview process. The officers selected had an association with the researcher and this was utilised to create an open and friendly atmosphere during the interviews.

Although procedures designed to create a relaxed atmosphere during the interview process were consciously adopted it was, nevertheless, important to preserve and emphasise the point that this was a research project and that the inquirer had to maintain certain standards. This issue was referred to by Robley (1995, p. 46) who observed:

Of particular concern to nurse researchers is the question of to whom is the respondent giving consent, the nurse or the researcher, when the nurse is a more well known entity than the nurse researcher. The researcher role must be emphasised and defined.

Although this comment relates to research involving the nursing profession, the comments have obvious applicability to the current research project.

An important element of grounded theory is the question of when data acquisition should cease. The answer is that this can occur when theoretical saturation is achieved.

Glaser and Strauss (1987, p. 61) defined this term as follows:

Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category.
The decision as to when this point has actually been reached is one to be made by the researcher. It is based on familiarity with the material derived from the interview process and intuition as to whether or not any further information is likely to provide greater illumination about the research issues. As similar instances or meanings in the data occur repeatedly the researcher senses that saturation has occurred (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As described by Scott (2004, pp. 43-44), this process is achieved when no further properties or relationships between codes and categories are being identified even when new descriptive data are added. The additional data contributed to the richness of the description of the categories without expanding codes or adding new ones. At that point a sense of ‘closure’ is achieved.

As will be explained in greater detail in the following section, the major categories that formed the basis of the theory developed during this project emerged very quickly during the research. This assisted greatly in the process of judging whether or not saturation had been achieved, as the researcher was able to quickly identify major categories of interest.

This pointed to the continued use of candidates selected for other reasons with no apparent loss of valuable data, as there was a marked and immediate similarity in the issues identified by the research process.

During this initial contact the nature of the project was explained in basic detail, including the fact that the project was for private university study and not associated with any official aspect of departmental functions. Full details were also supplied about the standard protocols regarding informed consent, safeguarding of candidates identity and their right of refusal at any time to become or continue to be involved in the process.
No persons declined during that original approach but, for various operational reasons, a small number of senior officers selected eventually were not available.

Interviews were conducted at the interviewees' place of employment at times convenient to them. They took place in a private office in order to be away from distractions and to preserve confidentiality. Due to the fact that I was a serving police officer my presence at police establishments did not raise an issue that required explanation.

At the commencement of each interview the important issues of purpose, informed consent and confidentiality were again emphasised.

A decision had been made that the best method of obtaining an accurate version of the interview was to use a tape recorder. This would allow accurate transcribing of everything said during the interview and it would also be an effective means of auditing the material should this be desired at some point in the future.

The security of the tapes and the transcripts was an important issue. All material was initially kept under lock and key at the home of the researcher. After the tapes had been transcribed the researcher downloaded the data onto a Zip Drive disc as a safety measure to guard against possible accidental erasure from the home computer system. This disc was hand delivered to his supervisor who kept it in a secure place. The same procedure was carried out periodically with various versions of the thesis as it was being written.

At the commencement of the interview permission to tape record the proceedings was requested and no persons declined this request. During the interview, with permission, I also made notes of the conversation as it progressed. This was done for several reasons. It allowed me to keep up
with the flow of the interview and provided a means of making notes about issues to clarify or expand on at a suitable point in the interview without spoiling the interviewee’s train of thought.

After the first interview was conducted I re-played the tape and reviewed the notes taken. This provided valuable information about what appeared to be, even at that early stage, some clear indication of major issues likely to emerge from the interviews. This procedure was adopted after each interview before formal transcribing was carried out.

This provided a means of sensitising me to issues that others might raise in each subsequent interview or that might require a prompt. In the event this was little used for this purpose due to the remarkable similarity in the range of issues raised by each officer interviewed. When it was felt necessary to use this information it was simply a matter of raising an issue in a non-directional way.

Due to the apparent consistency of results that the initial data analysis revealed, a decision was made to conduct all interviews in essentially the same format. This decision appears to be a valid one given the uniformity of data categories that emerged from each interview.

The time taken for each interview averaged about 60 minutes with one lasting almost two hours and some others only taking 40 minutes.

As the interview process progressed I gained a sense of when each person had exhausted their store of ideas and initiated a termination by asking if the interviewee had any more issues that they wished to cover, being careful to avoid premature closure. I then terminated the session by thanking each person for their participation and offering to provide them with a copy of the transcript. No persons actually accepted this offer.
2.12. Data Analysis

The current research process was based on the grounded theory method. As noted above, this involves the application of specific procedural steps that involve initial analysis of each line of data, the highlighting and naming of specific concepts, noting the presence of similarities between these concepts and the process of condensing these into major categories.

There is a well-defined sequence that grounded theorists follow when carrying out the coding process. The initial stage is termed first level or open coding and is described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 62) as:

The part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data…. During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data.

Second level coding, or axial coding as Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 96) term it, is:

...a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories.

Schrieber and Stern (2001, p. 70) have described this process as "examining and collapsing codes into categories or higher level concepts."
The process of developing names for these categories is achieved by the researcher using his/her own imagination or, in some cases, utilizing an appropriate term directly from the data, an in-vivo code.

The final stage is third level coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 116) term this selective coding and describe the technique as:

> ... the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.

These are then further subsumed under the heading of a principal or core category, which forms the basis of the Basic Social Problem or the Basic Social Process.

It would appear that many researchers using grounded theory are investigating phenomena that they have not directly experienced. Examples are the experience of dying, caring for a child with a mental illness and persons suffering from a drug addiction.

In addition, the subjects would often be speaking about matters not previously well documented and phrased in non-standard terminology, that is their own words. In such cases this would add considerable complexity to the process, as the researcher is required to apply imagination and insight in order to identify and name the necessary concepts and categories.

The current research unfolded in a different manner and the unique aspects of the situation made the identification and naming of major categories easier than would otherwise have been the case.
The process of data analysis passed very quickly to the task of identification of the core categories at the heart of the Basic Social Problem and Process.

On reflection this situation would appear to be a product of the organizational structure and existing information within this system. The Police Service of Western Australia, in common with almost all western style police organizations, exhibits features such as a rank structure, associated power systems, a rigorous internal investigation system, labour shortages and excessive workloads due to high crime rates. Some of these aspects are almost defining characteristics of the organization.

Many of these factors have been in existence for many years, are well documented and have been discussed widely both internally and in outside arenas. Furthermore, when they are discussed, they are referred to by common terminology, especially by police officers.

This has resulted in a situation where those officers interviewed have been able to discuss issues that are not only of importance to them, but are also concepts well known to others. In addition, the terminology used to refer to such matters is widely understood and accepted. These factors combined to produce a situation where the major categories emerged very quickly from the data.

The current research builds on this foundation and combines these factors in a new way to produce a substantive theory that describes and explains behaviour and enables predictions to be made about future conduct.

The analysis of the data gathered from the interviews commenced at the end of the first interview and continued until near the end of the process of writing the theory as ideas unfolded.
The following table sets out an 8 step practical guide for carrying out this apparently complex process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Get a sense of the whole. Read through all the transcripts carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pick one document (one interview) - the most interesting, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it asking yourself what is this about? Do not think about the ‘substance’ of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>When you have completed this task for several informants make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics and leftovers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organising scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Make a final decision on the abbreviations for each category and alphabetise these codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>If necessary recode your existing data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4. Interview data analysis process.


The first task in the analysis was the transcribing of the tape recording of the interviews. I carried out this task for a number of reasons. Firstly, the cost of getting a professional typist to perform
this function was prohibitive given that there were 28 interviews with most lasting about one hour.
Secondly, there was the question of confidentiality given that all interviewees had been given
assurances that only my thesis supervisor and myself would be aware of their identity. Engaging a
professional typist had the potential to compromise this. The principal reason for carrying out this
function myself was the opportunity it provided to ensure accuracy of transcription, to become fully
familiar with the data and to perform the first level of analysis.

The objective in this research was to identify the characteristics of the police organization that
officers believed had the greatest impact on how they and other officers functioned and how these
factors impacted on a problem solving approach. As was described above, from the analysis of the
very first interview through to the last one, there were very strong indications as to what these
factors were. Because of this I was able to move quickly to the second level of coding by
identifying and naming the major categories.

This process was carried out in a straightforward manner. All of the transcripts were read many
times and notes were made in the margins about the issues and concepts raised. These concepts
were then amalgamated into major categories. In fact, in the majority of instances, the concepts
identified became the major categories. When this process had reached the stage where
saturation appeared to have been reached a note was taken of the page numbers where each
category was mentioned in the transcript.

This information was then transferred to a spreadsheet that showed the interviewees coded
identity on the vertical axis and the name of the category on the horizontal axis. At the appropriate
intersection I then entered the numbers of the pages where comments had been made about that
category.
This process provided an informative overview of the frequency of comments on various issues. It also provided information for the next phase of the analysis, which was to print off the relevant pages and place them into a lever arch file for further examination.

These selected extracts were read through again and the references to the specific topics were highlighted. These data were then further analysed until a full understanding of the thoughts of interviewees had been achieved.

Once this process had been carried out for each category the analysis proceeded to the next phase of integrating the series of categories to form the basis of the core categories of the Basic Social Problem and the Basic Social Process.

This aspect of the process is termed delimiting the theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 110) explain that this process is one whereby the researcher reduces the mass of data and number of categories that have to be considered. The purpose is to assist with the management of what would otherwise be an overwhelming task. This elimination of data commences as the researcher becomes increasingly familiar with the material and is satisfied that theoretical saturation has been reached.

While analysing the data during this last phase it appeared that the categories that had emerged could be separated into distinct aspects of the overall picture.

The elements that formed the basis of the Basic Social Problem could be grouped into two areas according to whether they arose from internal or external mechanisms. Some aspects, such as rank, power, contracts of employment and the fear factor are features of the internal culture.
Factors such as excessive workloads and shortages of staff only affect officers when they choose to perform their duties in the external environment.

These two aspects are connected in the sense that issues arising from activities conducted in the external environment can expose officers to consequences arising from the existence of the internal factors and they are very likely to have negative connotations due to the internal culture and the power that is vested in various levels and sections of the organization. The potential for these consequences to arise generates a perception of unease among various levels within the organization, a recognition that ‘something’ undesirable may happen.

This problem was given the title Feeling Vulnerable” and indicates the general feeling among officers that arises as a cumulative result of the existence of a myriad of things that might give rise to problems or complaints. This core category exhibits the properties of being constantly in existence and unpredictable in terms of when it will arise, the form it will take or the precise manner in which it will be dealt with and finally, with regard to the lack of any real power or ability on the part of officers to control outcomes.

Further analysis of the data revealed information about behaviours that pointed to the application by officers of tactics designed to reduce the possibility of them being held accountable for a variety of events that could give rise to complaints or problems of various kinds.

The data provided by this research suggest that police officers in fact feel very vulnerable as the result of their environment. The actions that form the basis of the Basic Social Process are intended to provide officers with a degree of control over an uncertain environment and allow them to create the appearance of engaging with issues while avoiding, or at least reducing, the possibility of suffering undesirable consequences.
The actual tactics applied in a given situation depend upon factors such as the rank of the officer concerned, the seriousness of the situation and whether or not others knew of the involvement of the officer.

In order to validate the analysis and interpretation of the data and the emerging categories these were discussed during several meetings conducted with a support group of doctoral students at Curtin University. A draft of the theory was submitted to an informed reader for critical review. This person was a former police officer with university qualifications and this review confirmed that the interpretation of the data was valid.
3.1 The Actual Background of Policing

If the principles and operating procedures set out and described in “Purpose and Direction” (1994) had been wholeheartedly and effectively implemented, the reforms should have lead to the development of a vibrant organization where decisions are made at the lowest levels of the organization actually dealing with local problems with such actions based on careful and objective analysis of data relevant to the local circumstances of a particular police district and implemented by confident, knowledgeable officers. As will become apparent the reality is said by many officers to fall considerably short of this ideal.

It is no doubt the case that all formal organizations display characteristics that are unique to their situation and that influence the behaviour of their members. It is also no doubt the case that certain kinds of organization attract a certain type of personality and that the outlook and behaviour of these individuals is then modified or reinforced by the experiences encountered during the period of attachment to the particular group. As noted above a number of studies have set out a variety of organizational characteristics that have been the traditional hallmarks of the semi-military structure of police services and which are now coming to be viewed as being contrary to, or in fact counter-productive to, the successful implementation of modern policing practices.

As this research demonstrates, these undesirable traits are also being clearly demonstrated in the practices of the Police Service of Western Australia and the behaviour of many officers. More to the point, these traits are being indulged in despite clear directions to the contrary contained within various departmental publications. The evidence for this comes from a number of sources that
include departmental publications and the information and views expressed in the interviews conducted as part of the research.

The present study was designed to examine how the existence of various aspects of the working environment of police officers impacts on the service delivery function, with particular attention to the problem-solving component.

The model used in this study is described in detail and expanded upon by the process of dealing firstly with comments made by interviewees in relation to the elements of the official structure of The Police Service of Western Australia and, secondly, by reference to interviewees’ comments about other factors that exist concerning the structure of the organization.

The comments made about the official structure of the organization demonstrate the ways in which officers actually deal with the features of the Delta reforms within the Police Service of Western Australia. The references to the informal structure and culture of the organization highlight the ways in which the working life of officers from many levels within the organization is constrained. The model provides an explanation for why so many things are not working as intended.

As noted above, the elements of “Purpose and Direction” (1994) are interdependent. The model also serves to show how these elements, and the other significant factors identified, interact to create a negative environment for officers.

The grounded theory approach to the analysis of the interviews served to uncover the nature and range of several important factors, the connections between them and how they impact on the ability of officers at several levels within the organization to carry out a problem solving approach to their duties. The analysis essentially shows that the most important features of the Police
Service of Western Australia. according to the views expressed in the interviews, create an
organizational environment that can be described within the terminology of grounded theory as the
Basic Social Problem.

There are two distinct aspects to this that are differentiated according to whether the factors
operate within the police organizational structure or arise in relation to the external environment in
which officers must function

As will be seen this is essentially a negative view of the organizational structure and culture and
creates in the minds of officers a defensive outlook and approach to their duties that is described
as Feeling Vulnerable. This in turn gives rise to a way of dealing with this problem, the Basic
Social Process, that has been given the term Controlling By Avoidance. This description contains
references to officers dealing with the many obstacles and dangers present in their environment
that have to be contended with on a frequent and recurring basis and is clarified in Chapter 5.

It will be argued that this apparent fixation on personal survival creates many barriers to their
functions by police officers in relation to a problem solving approach.

3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT
3.2.1 Rank

Police Services are not unique with regard to their internal forms and structures. A great many
social organizations also have a formal hierarchy that incorporates well-defined levels, powers and
responsibilities. However police services, in common with the military, are among the few
organizations that have rigidly formalised structures based on well defined and obviously displayed
ranks.
The rank system within the Police Service of Western Australia has an impact on many aspects of the organization. For example with regard to the notion of discipline, a senior member made reference to the need for managers/leaders to be able to take heed of the views of lower ranks but retain the willingness to use rank to enforce the hard decisions when required to do so:

A participative approach yeah, let them have some sort of a say in it. You might make the decision but at least you're prepared to listen to what they've got to say and as far as possible go along with their suggestions and input. I think in the main we should be able to have a participative style of leadership but of course there are critical situations that occur where you've gotta be quite authoritative. (C.O)

In response to a question as to whether or not a rank structure was a good or bad thing, another senior officer stated that the concept has both qualities:

Well, it can be both of course. I think that one of the things about rank and power is it creates a fairly disciplined force of people and I think that, no matter what you say about the police service, that the police service is still a very disciplined group of people. Just talking to people on the outside, they are amazed at how, like in universities police turn up on time to lectures and all these things. So that rank structure is actually very good for discipline and, in a job like we're doing where things can get out of control so easily I think discipline is enormously important. The negative thing about it of course is it does stifle communication and it does also leave some scope for, I would call it, bastardry's the wrong word, but it creates some scope for unfairness and nepotism and those sorts of things so they're the negative sides of it. But I think generally, and it's still generally accepted, that some sort of structure, and it doesn't have to be linked to rank, is necessary in a service or in an agency that does the level of work that's as controversial as what we do. (C.O.)
Although this officer acknowledged the risk of less effective communication as a negative feature of the rigid application of a formal rank structure, he considered that this was balanced by the need to be able to apply a command and control style when events become serious enough to warrant this type of approach.

The need to keep the lines of communication open was also referred to by another senior member as a means of preventing and overcoming barriers between the various levels:

Yeah I think, if I’m just getting your point, I think what we need to do of course is, like with our O.I.C.s we have regular meetings. Now the same with your troops, we need to go back now into that level, in the rank and file level, and have, you know, interaction and communication with them more frequently. Get them involved in things that are coming up. In other words, if you’ve got an operation going, get some of these junior people up to say, you know, so that make them part of it and get them involved and I think that breaks down that barrier between your commissioned officers, your N.C.O.s and your troops. So you need to have that communication line opened up and get them involved into the operations and projects. The same when you’re setting your business plans. You know we involve our O.I.C.’s and our people in it. The same when they’re doing their plans at a sub-district level, they need to involve their troops in the planning process.

W.B. What sorts of barriers do you think do exist between the ranks?

I think it’s one of probably communication, communication problem, we need to establish effective communication, lines of communication. (C.O)
Another officer linked the existence of a rank structure with the need for accountability and the existence throughout society of structures designed to facilitate order:

> Well we need, we have to have a rank structure because there has to be accountability and I keep saying the word all the time but you need that rank structure because otherwise, you have a look at the situation that happened before when Mr Falconer decided that coppers wouldn't have numbers, wouldn't wear their numbers anymore, that changed very quickly, it didn't last for very long that edict. And I think that's the only thing he ever changed his mind on because you get into the situation if you haven't got that rank structure and people to know who a senior person is, every one will stand back and leave it to somebody else to take charge of a situation. (C.O.)

The above quote contains the observation that, in the absence of an easily recognized rank structure, officers may fail to take charge of a situation where leadership and control are required. The junior officers quoted later in this section do not support this view about the benefits that arise in practice from the existence of a rank structure. They refer to the avoidance that senior members practise when faced with a requirement to take command and make decisions.

A number of officers referred to the disadvantages created by a rigid rank structure. In particular they referred to the scope for senior people to impose an autocratic style unnecessarily and a reduction in the level of initiative displayed by junior persons who are treated in this manner. As is demonstrated in Chapter 6, this restricted application of initiative has implications for the free and effective implementation of a problem solving approach at various levels within the Service.

In relation to how this strict approach needs to be modified at the upper levels of the organization one senior member stated:
I don’t have problems personally with the rank structure, in fact I think with an organization like police you cannot have just a management structure within like you can in business. In operational times you’ve got to have a defined rank structure. Within the admin side the rank structure becomes semi-transparent, you lose part of that rank. Within the floor here for instance the ranks are not really as noticeable as what they are down on the operational floor and I think that’s deliberate because you can’t work in this sort of environment within the true strength, your true existence of a rank structure.

W.B. Do you treat each other more as equals?

More as equals up here as opposed to, and as a team, as oppose to a rank structure. That’s not saying too you can’t work in teams on the floor. In fact I’m a very keen promoter of a team approach to operational policing.

This officer was of the view that problems can arise concerning the relationships that exist between the lower ranks and how certain personality types can misuse the power that attaches to rank:

Again I don’t know if that’s necessarily a problem. I think where problems come in with the rank structure is how each individual acts at the rank they’re at, i.e. as a supervisor whether it’s a senior conny, sergeant, it all comes down to whether they are people persons or whether they are just people that will use the rank to exert power. Now, if they’re people persons they will work as a team and the rank will be respected accordingly. If they are just using the rank they are in control, they will direct but I think if you’re doing that you’re losing a lot of individual input, a lot of initiative because you are just asking them to do certain things, you’re not expecting from them anything different.’

W.B. Do you think that sort of attitude is present to a level where it is a problem?
The problem in so far as the rank uses power or the rank?

W.B. In the sense that some people in our sort of structure could use their rank to get their way with people as we've just discussed. How widespread is that?

I don't know if it's that widespread but certainly we do have a few semi dictatorial, semi whatever you know, control type people that enjoy the rank and enjoy the control mechanism of rank. I think there's a lot of other genuine ones that are well we're all part of the team and whether I'm the inspector or the superintendent we will still work as that team.

W.B. Is that sort of influence on problems starting at any particular level, perhaps I've asked you this question already, but does that start at the upper levels, lower levels?

I still think the rank in itself, the problems with rank starts probably senior sergeant upwards.

W.B. Going up to what?

Going up right through to deputy commissioner again. (C.O)

Officers described the dampening effect of an autocratic style of leadership on the display of initiative and the application of a problem solving approach by officers:

Problem solving initiative, it has a very dampening effect on all of it.

W.B. What, on initiative?
Yeah, and that's what we're asking, we're asking you to show a bit of initiative and solve the problem before it happens again. And when you've got a boss up there, don't go and give me that shit, get out and do the other job. (C.O)

Another senior member referred to the flow-on effect of displaying an autocratic leadership style and the impact on the willingness of junior officers to engage in a problem solving approach:

It depends, I don't think there's anything wrong and I think you must have a hierarchical structure. It depends on the person inside the uniform. If he's autocratic and if his management team have derived from him that autocratic, generic approach for the whole district, in other words we don't need to talk to the troops, you just do as you're bloody told, you go over here and do this because that's what I'm telling you, then obviously the enthusiasm or the desire to problem solve or do anything innovative is not going to materialise. (C.O.)

The above quote also contains a reference to the modifying effect of personality on the exercise of power. This situation seems to introduce an element of uncertainty based on the personal preferences of people with power over others.

Oppal (1994, p. J-20) referred to the negative impact upon a problem solving approach resulting from the imposition of an autocratic style of management during the proceedings of a commission of inquiry into the British Columbia Police entitled “Closing The Gap - Policing And The Community”. In an address to that inquiry, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police expressed the idea in the following manner:
Combine the suppressing nature of the rank structure with the belief that the RCMP way is the only way of doing things, and it is no wonder innovation and effective problem solving are virtually non-existent.

Senior officers acknowledge the existence of a conflict between the styles of leadership that are held to be appropriate for the operational and non-operational situations that are faced by officers. For instance:

*In an operational sense I don't think it would change things but in a, when they're doing non-urgent operational stuff or managerial stuff it may stifle the input that junior are prepared to offer. That's the trade off of course, you know the more regimented and disciplinary and military, militaristic you become the less of a two way information flow that you tend to get and I think that would be the result of tightening up on respect for rank if you like or formal lines, that would be the result, that might be the result.*

W.B. Right, in terms of a trade-off, given that that has reduced to some extent, have we had a commensurate rise in the amount of interaction between the two?

Yes I think we have, I think we have. I'm not saying that it's necessarily always been a good thing either because a lot of that rise has occurred in forums and in circumstances when it ought not to in my opinion. I think that there are times, as I've already outlined, operationally, where there is really no room for that. But nevertheless I think that we have had greater input or greater two-way flow of information at the lower levels.

W.B. Has that been beneficial?

Not always, no.
W.B. Can you explain that?

I think that you can get the sergeant being questioned in his authority and I don't think that's a good thing in an operational sense. And I think quite frankly you can get, even in a managerial sense, that it's not always necessary to have so much input. You don't need to have a consensual decision every time you want to do something managerially and I think that when you get officers in charge who want to implement something, notwithstanding the wishes of his troops, it becomes more difficult if he's been used to employing more of a consensual style of leadership. (C.O.)

The above quotes demonstrate a clear pattern concerning the styles of leadership that are considered appropriate for different policing situations ranging from a pure command and control function to a style somewhat approaching a democratic decision making process for non-operational matters. These quotes also demonstrate a high degree of awareness that the two styles do conflict and that the authoritarian approach has implications for the free application by junior ranks of initiative and problem solving skills.

Murray (2002, p. 57) commented on the conflict between the autocratic style and the requirements of a problem solving approach to policing. He says:

Whereas community policing requires a policing approach that demonstrates openness, service orientation, innovative/creative thinking and problem solving, these characteristics are not likely to be developed in a traditional managerial environment of command and control. Research has generally shown the traditional police culture at the operational level to be action oriented, cynical, suspicious, reactive and, most importantly in the context of community policing, insular and isolated from the general community.
None of the officers interviewed above have raised or dealt with the relative frequencies with which these types of situation actually arise. A consideration of this aspect of police work would put the question about leadership style into better perspective.

It is clear that police officers traditionally place great emphasis on another officer's rank and link ability, or the lack of it, to the rank. The existence of such fixed ideas is illustrated by the following comment:

> Well Bill, I think that's definite and I think the old adage, the biggest single problem that we see with this organization is the simple one, and I can remember we've all fallen for it. We have, we get some recruits now who are in their forties, even I think there's a fifty two year old who graduated some time back, and immediately they put on the uniform we, they're assigned a number as we all know. And if they've got a very high number we seem to disregard whatever other life skills that person's brought with them and I think that's a prime example. (C.O.)

The existence of this well defined rank structure and its role in enforcing obedience would appear to be an entrenched part of the structure and culture of The Police Service of Western Australia..

Notwithstanding, there exists among some senior officers the recognition that this aspect requires modification. This is reflected in the above references to the extent to which the actual leadership style employed is governed by personalities. However, this capacity or willingness to moderate the influence of rank when appropriate is dependent on personal preference and is not an official part of the organizational ethos.
The dangers inherent in 'bucking the system' were mentioned by a number of interview subjects. For instance one senior officer stated:

Well it can, I suppose that depends on the individual. Now that's always a problem. I don't personally, I've never ever allowed rank structure to influence me either going above or coming from below. As an officer in charge I've always had an open door policy where the troops can come in and discuss any issue they want, they can discuss any decision I've made, they can disagree and on occasions I've changed them because of the discussion. I've, going the other way, I've spoken to senior officers, I've given my viewpoints and opinions on things and I've never felt hindered. However, I've probably done my career or my promotional aspirations no good by some of the things I have done that's probably hindered me by having a say so I suppose on occasions, it goes back to personalities. I know where you're sort of coming from here. Say for instance you've got a particularly high ranking officer who is very, has got his opinions on something, and I've seen this, no matter what you say they're not going to change and it probably does sort of limit discussion and proper decision making process. (C.O.)

Although the commissioned officers quoted above spoke about the need to develop an environment where open communication is practised, many junior ranking officers have a different view of the reality of the relationships that actually exist between themselves and senior members. For example:

I think as you go down the chain they end up with bigger holes in their bums because it just seems to work like that.

W.B. What do you mean by that?
The shafting is far more.

W.B. As you come down?

Yeah.

W.B. Blaming others underneath them?

Yup.

W.B. Sergeants blaming constables?

No I don’t see a lot of that now.

W.B. Inspectors blaming sergeants, senior sergeants?

I see a bit of that yes.

W.B. Superintendents blaming?

I think, I think the problem is that your commissioned people are probably, because they like to distance themselves from everybody, I think that they’ve done a good job of that. I think they should be, it’s the same as working with your teams. I mean I can’t understand in this system why, if I as a supervisor go in and work with my team I can have a cohesive, effective, efficient bunch of people who will not only crawl over broken glass for me but we can get in and we can do our job and we can do it very well and the people in
the street will patch on to that. That's fine. You get to senior sergeant level and all of a
sudden that cohesiveness, no I don't want to get too close, a little bit of distance, until you
get to the commissioned rank where, a bit of fucking distance, a different office, a different
language.

W.B. And is that bad?

I think that is bad, I mean the team attitude, the team, I think the definition of the team is
that everybody that’s in it should be working together. (Sgt.)

Police services around the world are invariably described as being semi-military in nature in the
sense that they impose a command and control style of management on officers at most levels
within the organization. Some of the officers interviewed for this research saw advantages in this
approach in situations where someone is required to take swift and decisive action.

Further on in the research the subject of the need for better interaction and communication
between the various upper and lower ranks arose and one officer offered the following comments
about how this is lacking in reality:

And if you fight them, now, bearing in mind what has happened here before with staff, I
went close, very close because I said a few things I shouldn’t have said. I’m not saying I
was, I’ve got one problem probably and a lot of police officers my vintage probably have,
we tend to speak our mind, I don’t like doing things I know won’t work. I think it’s a
pointless waste in our time and resources to do something that is totally a waste of time.

W.B. Why don’t you, or why can’t you, speak your mind?
You can speak your mind to a certain extent. It's like anything else, rank has its privileges and it doesn't really matter how open or accountable this police force becomes, rank has its privileges. You can go to a certain point as you know and you'll be accepted as constructive criticism. You step one inch over what they consider constructive criticism into personal criticism and you know yourself what happens. People do not accept criticism. They do not accept criticism well, these particular, well, they are inspectors, they have a commissioned rank, they are at a much higher level of position wise than we are and they're a different breed.

W.B. By virtue of what, simply their rank?

Rank, no I'm not saying they're any better than me, I'm not saying any better than you, in fact I know they're not. But, if you overstep the bounds of propriety towards them, towards their rank you will pay the fucking penalty and I don't give as shit who denies it, I know it will happen because I come bloody close and the only thing that saved me probably was I'm unfit for duty, I can't be transferred. (Sgt.)

Later in the interview, in relation to the rank structure and the links to a military system, this officer observed how the actual practices of the organization have not changed despite the inception of the Delta Programme:

If something goes wrong this open organization, which is to breed new ideas and to escalate the junior man to the same areas as the commissioner, fucking shuts its doors, he gets up there and yells his box off at this bloke, this bloke yells his box of at his assistant district officer, his district officer comes and shafts the fucking senior sergeant and the senior sergeant comes and shafts the sergeant and the sergeant looks at the conny's to go and kick their arse. Now that hasn't changed in a hundred and fifty years. In
any organization where there is a rank structure they say that the rank structure of this force allows for open and freethinking. Crap. It's a rank structure, it is military, it is not fucking B.H.P., it never will be. (Sgt.)

In relation to the practical application of this rigidly enforced rank structure on a problem solving approach this officer observed:

Anyway, that's what I'm saying, with the problem solving of this police force it hasn't changed since fucking Adam was a boy. When the shit hits the fan it's who's got the biggest fucking lot of cocky shit on his shoulder as to who wins the argument and that's where it stops and that'll never change Bill because there are too many people in this world or in this Service that spruik, I have seen the light, I have got vision, I know where we're going, they wouldn't have a fucking clue. (Sgt.)

Similar views were contained in a report issued in 1997 entitled “Police Service of Western Australia Practical Ethics Survey” (1997, p .3). In the first section, entitled ‘Present Environment’ this report contains the following general opening comment:

The organization as a whole is strongly influenced by the hierarchical, para-military structure in which the sworn members operate, with seniority, rank and tradition being strong determinants of the ethos and direction of the organization.

The report describes the consequences of this organizational culture in the following terms:

The rank-based hierarchical nature of the organization impacts on areas such as communications, supervision and management style, with openness, receptiveness to staff feedback and constructive criticism reported as the exception rather than the rule in many areas (p. 3).
Goldstein (1990, p. 27) perhaps has similar thoughts when he observes:

The dominant form of policing today continues to view police officers as automatons. Despite an awareness that they exercise broad discretion, they are held to strict account in their daily work - for what they do and how they do it. Especially in procedural matters, they are required to adhere to detailed regulations. In large police agencies rank and file police officers are often treated impersonally and kept in the dark regarding policy matters. Officers quickly learn, under these conditions, that the rewards go to those who conform to expectations - that non-thinking compliance is valued.

Another sergeant, while acknowledging that there is still an element of a para-military approach about the Police Service of Western Australia felt that this was lessening due to the fact that many new officers adopt a more familiar approach to sergeants:

A lot of that is going to depend on the individual right. Some people insist on being called sergeant, if their at that level, some people insist on being called inspectors and you know from inspector upwards yeah that's fair enough, I fully understand that. Either Inspector or Mr is the title, you know, bearing in mind I'm one of the older group, I don't know what the young blokes think about it. But certainly at sergeant level yep, I mean I've seen to a lot of young blokes, particularly when they've come out of the Academy, yes we are para-military but we're getting far less authoritarian, if I could put it that way, or military side of things, things are not what they used to be. But when they come out of the Academy they do, they call you by sergeant or senior conny or whatever and as they've been out longer I believe they deserve the right then to be able to call you by your first name. You can’t do that with an inspector obviously, you've gotta show that certain distinction there once you're at a commissioned level rank, well that's a different thing. (Sgt.)
This officer also found it acceptable that this increased communication sometimes means that senior members are asked for explanations in relation to directives given:

"You can still, well you can still do your job and do your job properly even though you might be on a first name basis. And that comes back to, you can be their mate but you can never be their friend, right. You've always gotta retain that you are a sergeant and what I say goes. Yes, they do question you these days, I don't have a problem with that. Many young blokes these days I don't know whether it's instilled in them from school or not I wouldn't know but many young blokes when you tell them to do something these days they just say well you know, why should I do that. And I don't have a problem with telling them why."

W.B. Presumably because what you're telling them is sensible and there's a good reason for it?

"Yeah, and it's a lawful order, well, lawful order, I mean that sounds very much militarist, you will, you know, crack the whip sort of thing. But there's a reason yeah, there's a reason behind they're asked to do that job and once you explain the reason why they're quite happy with that. (Sgt.)"

A number of the above quotes refer to the similarities between the Police Service of Western Australia and the military in the sense that the adherence to a rank structure is somehow inevitable and proper because it is a ‘para-military’ force. This view is summarised by the following quote from a constable in relation to the degree to which the existence of the rank structure influences officers:
Well it's enormously powerful er, you see the police service has traditionally had a quasi-military rank structure, er where those on top tell those underneath what to do. Obviously it doesn't really work that well in policing because those on top can't help those on the bottom. Oh, those on the, the higher you get in the hierarchy the less able you are to actually serve the public because the more divorced you become from them. But also, you know, with a military style operation you know military leaders dictate what their troops do. If you say charge up that hill they will charge up there. In a policing organization we're totally and utterly reliant on the initiative taken by our own people, the bottom level people. You can't tell somebody to investigate that offence well, you can't tell somebody to look closely, more closely at that car as you're driving past. You can't tell somebody to take the risk that, you know, them people that appear to be in that stolen car might complain because you claim they're racist or something. You can't tell people to take that risk, you're totally reliant on them using their own initiative and their own abilities to do the real work of the police service. And that's where we lose this rank structure.

(Const.)

These comments touch on the conflict that exists between the imposition of the rigid type of approach that is a natural flow-on from the military model and the requirement for police officers to act as independent professionals in carrying out a complex role.

As noted by Meese (1993, p. 3) one difficulty with the imposition of the semi-military model is that:

too often the basic police officer is viewed as comparable to a private in the army, the lowest ranking military person, who has virtually no individual authority.... It is little wonder, then, that those holding the rank of police officer often are regarded as something less than professional and that they are denied individual authority, the
presumption of expertise, and the discretion that normally would accompany professional status.

But while it is clearly the case that what many describe as a semi-military type of system is imposed, officers with experience of the military or a British Police Service contrast the local model with those others systems with regard to the effectiveness of the local version.
For example:

The problem with our organization with its semi-military style of structure is that we don't operate to any sort of military, semi-military, para-military. We have a rank structure purely for salary and that's about it because the responsibility and so-called devolution of authority doesn't happen and so therefore anyone coming in would look at a so-called semi-military establishment that has a rank structure would laugh at us, because we're also talking about quite a few of these recruits are ex-military themselves and they know how a military structure should work. (Const.)

And further on in this interview this officer stated:

W.B. Why do you think that situation exists?

Because I don't, as I said the rank structure is purely a salary based situation, I really don't think that rank structure is, is there for devolution of authority. I really think it's a salary, a salary indicator. And yes you are responsible for more as you go up the train, as you go up the chain, but you don't necessarily, you're not able to exert your authority without checking with a higher authority all the time. I think that's been inherent for a lot of years. I don't think it's something that started just recently but I think this de-centralisation hasn't helped because whereas they were talking about devolution of authority to the superintendents on the outside at the end of the day, yes they are accountable to the people at headquarters or the people, the powers that be but they still are checking for if they're on the right track or can they do this or can they do that. (Const.)

Another officer with extensive military experience as a commissioned officer made similar critical observations:
For the first two years of my training they taught me to be an officer first and that is the same in the army and, to a lesser extent, it is in the air force, at least that is my observation. So I learnt managerial skills first, I learnt how to deal with other people and to readily accept their input and to formulate informed decisions first before I specialised and I learnt my specialisation second. And I must say that it was my personal experience that my specialisation was secondary to being a good leader because that's leadership is about. It is about taking ownership of responsibility. Not only of responsibility to yourself but the responsibility to your superiors and those below you and those in your care. There is a real tangible duty of care that comes with this leadership and responsibility. Now that doesn't exist in the police service. In the police service the culture is you're a police officer first. You deal with the public first as a police officer and any other skills that you get are secondary to dealing with or dealing with the public and being a police officer. If you're a sergeant you're still a police officer first and then, oh by the way, by virtue of time and courses you might have done, you're a sergeant. (Const).

The final comments of this officer refer to the existence of an unwillingness to commit to decisions due to lack of confidence. This is a common theme in the interviews conducted for this research and points to a culture of avoidance when faced with concerns about the outcome of decisions regarding contentious issues.

The comments of a local officer with previous experience in a British police service point to the consequences of a system that varies between the authoritarian and democratic without a formalised and consistent organizational approach:

Well, I would perhaps argue that we are not as hierarchical as a lot of organizations. Certainly we're not as hierarchical as the Australian Federal Police for instance. Or from my background in the British police force, not as hierarchical as that. I don't know whether
that, I think the more structured an organization where everybody knows their role, it's probably easier to live with police environment, probably easier to live with than one which is fairly lax like ours is, in my opinion I don't think we're hierarchical at all. Well we are, obviously we have ranks but I don't see that barrier between the ranks that exists in other police forces in other jurisdictions. (Sgt).

And further on:

W.B. Right, and was there a greater insistence on the, what could you say, the rank structure?

Oh yeah for sure, more rank conscious, procedures were well set in place, I mean everybody knew their spot if you like, it's a bit touch your forelock sort of stuff but everybody knew their place and everybody knew who to go to if they had a problem. They'd go to their supervisor, their sergeant who would go to his inspector etc. It was very, very, very rigid.

W.B. And you're saying it's not so in W.A?

Oh yeah, absolutely.

W.B. Is that a good or a bad thing or does it depend on the context you're talking about?

Well, obviously it depends on the context but I think a rigid structured organization is one that's easier to live within because I think people know their own boundaries. They know their responsibilities, they know what they're supposed to do, they know the boundaries of their own responsibility. And I think sometimes we get a bit confused here about that.

(Sgt.)
The above quotes clearly show that there is a divergence of opinion about the utility of a rigid management style closely linked to rank. Some senior officers see merit in being able to control others without question and some junior members appear to derive some comfort from having clear guidelines to follow. Others question whether or not such an approach can be effective in allowing officers to carry out the functions expected of them.

Many external commentators on the requirements for successful implementation of community/problem oriented policing strongly advocate changes to this aspect of modern police agencies. For example, Reichers and Roberg (1990, p. 111) set out the requirements and skills for this task as follows:

In doing community and problem oriented policing, line officers are asked to attempt to alleviate specific problems, which they have helped to identify by orienting themselves to the needs of the community, with creative and innovative solutions in a fair, just and legal manner. This requires certain skills, including problem conceptualisation, synthesis and analysis of information, action plans, program evaluation and communication of evaluation results and policy implications.

Reichers and Roberg (p. 112) go on to deal with the impact of the traditional style of police management. They comment:

Whether the police organization is equipped to do community policing in terms of its paramilitary organizational structure and autocratic management style is another important consideration. Community policing involves a significant change in the philosophy of policing, towards a more flexible, democratic orientation which requires a concomitant, and fundamental, change in police organization and management - away from a highly mechanistic, centralized approach, towards more of an organic, decentralized approach.
Summary

The views expressed by the officers interviewed point to a rank structure that has some inherent problems. There is a lack of any clear system of rules and protocols that is applied in a consistent manner across the organization for the purpose of deciding the limits and responsibilities pertaining to each rank. Furthermore, officers at various levels are free to apply their own personal philosophy of discipline to those under their command as it suits them.

Some officers with military experience made the point that the level of understanding of discipline in the allegedly semi-military structure of the Police Service of Western Australia is lacking and that officers do not conduct themselves with sufficient confidence when required to act as leaders.

They also have sufficient power to compel compliance from others when they deem it to be appropriate. This system leads to confusion as to the standards that are to be applied and frequently leads to situations where those charged with the responsibility for making decisions avoid issues, defer them to the next level above or take steps that are seen as arbitrary. Although this technique of avoidance allows decision makers to protect their own self-interest and remain free of criticism it does create an atmosphere of confusion and poor decision making.

The lower ranks are often prevented from taking the initiative and the senior members avoid getting to grips with issues that occur for fear of the consequences of failure and any criticism that may come as a result. This element of the organizational climate is not conducive to the implementation of a problem solving approach to the complex issues that officers are required to deal with.

In the Police Service of Western Australia there is considerable potential power attached to the various ranks and this can be used to ensure that others with a lower rank comply with the
demands of the more senior officers. The manner in which this power is used in practice depends on a variety of factors such as the personal circumstances of the officers involved and the situation.

As will be seen from the sample of quotes used for this section of the research, senior officers within the Police Service of Western Australia refer to the importance of a rank structure for dealing with those types of situations requiring command and control. Although it is generally recognised that some policing incidents require a command and control type of approach by senior members there also exists the recognition that an inappropriate or too frequent use of such power can be the cause of confusion and a decrease in initiative among the lower ranks.

It is widely accepted that most police work does not actually involve traditional crime fighting or the exercise of powers under the criminal law. In describing the duties of police officers Bittner (cited in Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1990, p. 47) makes the following observation:

> When one looks at what policemen actually do, one finds that criminal law enforcement is something that most of them do with the frequency located somewhere between virtually never and very rarely.

Junior officers make the majority of their decisions under circumstances where they are not under the direct view or influence of supervisors. The question that arises is whether or not the Police Service of Western Australia is forfeiting the problem solving skills potentially applicable to the bulk of police work for the sake of preserving a ‘disciplined’ body of officers able to react to the few command and control type situations that actually arise.
Those officers occupying the lower ranks speak clearly about the separation that is created between sergeants and constables and commissioned officers and the confusion in the minds of officers of various ranks as to the most desirable blend of free interaction and flow of ideas and the imposition of a rigid structure based principally on rank.

3.2.2 Power

This aspect of the organizational structure is closely linked to the concept of rank. The formal hierarchical nature of the organization specifies that officers occupying various levels will have the authority to dictate matters to others of a lesser rank. This is a strong basis for the exercise of power over other individuals.

As is the case with the construct of rank there is a degree of personal variation among officers with regard to the manner in which power is used as a means of achieving a particular outcome. This factor intervenes in some instances to modify the exercise of power by those who possess it.

One senior officer, a superintendent, clearly understood the advantages of using inspiration and persuasion rather than power but still retained the view that, when difficult or unpopular decisions have to be made, then the leader must be prepared to become more forceful:

Well, the manager and leader has to be prepared to assert himself and to do what needs to be done and ensure his personnel do what needs to be done. That's sort of looking at the worst-case scenario where he may have to use his power to do so. But generally speaking of course you expect a leader to motivate and inspire his people to do what needs to be done rather than to fall back on the use of power and er because people are obviously going to do things to a far greater extent to the best of their ability if they are, you know, appreciated for what they do and they have some sort of an input to what's
happening. I'm not suggesting a democratic style of leadership where they're making all the decisions together but they have a participation in what's going on. I think that's the way to do it. But, nevertheless, nevertheless there are times when the supervisor or manager's going to have to make hard decisions which may not necessarily be popular with everybody but, if it's for the good of the organization or the good of the task's that's gotta be completed then he's got to be prepared to make that decision. (C.O.)

Another officer voiced concerns about what he perceived to be the improper use of power by the upper echelons to manipulate the organization for their own interests:

My, because of the Machiavellian approach of the senior executive in this organization my commitment and enthusiasm and ambition has been totally extinguished.

W.B. What do you mean by a Machiavellian approach by the senior officers?

I believe they're, some of them up there, their focus on promotion is less than ethical. (C.O.)

When asked to be specific about the level at which this attitude became apparent this officer stated:

Commander and above.

W.B. When you say above how far up does that go?

Including assistant commissioners.
W.B. Right, how does that sort of attitude manifest itself?

Within me?

W.B. No, within those other people, what do they do which you object to, what sorts of things?

I think nepotism and cronyism is rife. (C.O.)

In relation to the motives for such behaviour, this officer referred to the self-interest exhibited by senior officers need to control matters:

About fifty per cent, control still comes from above. Particularly, in this particular area where I’m working here.

W.B. When you say above, what, who do you mean, is it a particular rank?

It's just, there's directions coming all the time from the commander and above about how we will do our business when clearly the devolution process is to be effective it should at least be down to superintendent level. Particularly in relation to human resources and fiscal matters.

W.B. Why do you think that that devolution is not being carried out as completely as it should be?

Knowledge is power, they don't want to release the knowledge.
W.B. Right, therefore retain the power.

Retain the power. (C.O.)

In relation to how such matters are handled in practice, one senior officer made the following observations:

*It doesn't work, I mean it would work, it doesn't happen. They've got no damn power devolved to them unless the chips are down and then all of a sudden it's devolved to them.*

*…. And most district officers have complained to me, or the ones that I know, that they don't have the power out there at all. They're sitting out there as a figurehead and doing things but every decision they make is questioned. And why did you do that, no I don't want you to do that, you go this way. Well where's, they don't have the power that they want. They want to be able to run that area, that district and do it their way. (C.O.)*

Knowledge about the existence of this situation and the associated problems is not confined to the upper levels of the Service. Many junior members are only too well aware of the causes and the problems that are generated.

For example one member observed:

*So what's the point in having inspectors. You might as well get rid of them because they can't move, they can't make a decision, they can't do anything without his prior approval.*

*And it also goes further than that because the Superintendent can't make a decision*
about his region without consulting the Commander of the Metropolitan Region so really it's a farcical because no one wants to let go. Everyone wants to hold on to power.

W.B. Right.

Whereas if we had the decentralization and the devolution of power that's supposed to happen the superintendent should make a decision for his own region and therefore be accountable for it. The Inspector, who is paid accordingly, to make decisions should make a decision in his area and, therefore, be accountable for it. And if at the end of the day if he makes a wrong decision that's where his Superintendent can tell him 'well, I don't agree with that, you've gotta change it or it's wrong or let's modify it'. And that's the only the way the inspector is going to learn how to make a decision and therefore the superintendent is allowing the people below him to mature as leaders and to be able to develop their own problem solving and solutions without having to always to run back to him for clarification and agree to it. (Const.)

This officer makes reference here to the consequences of a failure to distribute power and decision-making authority and how it detracts from the proper development of the managerial skills of lower ranks.

The **WA Police News** (1999, p. 4) contains an article about a report that the then Commissioner received from two senior officers from the Strathclyde Police in Scotland. This report, which had been kept secret from the public and the bulk of the Police Service, contained several serious criticisms of the management of the Police Service of Western Australia. The key points were:

- Commissioned officers, particularly inspectors, do not lead but concentrate on administration and complaints against police.
There is a gulf between superintendents and the rank-and-file with insufficient face-to-face communication.

Fear might be a factor in the minds of senior management and a wide range of commissioned officers who appear to contribute little to the organization.

The Police Command Team did not appear to understand corporate working or strategic and leadership issues.

This article also contains comments from a former Deputy Commissioner of the Police Service of Western Australia, that “there have been two levels of accountability in this force, one for the troops and one for the senior command.” It was also said that the report suggested that senior officers “didn't feel like putting their head up to get it chopped off” (p. 5).

In relation to the more productive management style of sergeants and the reactions of their subordinates, another junior officer commented as follows:

Well, because they're working with you at the coalface so to speak so they are aware of the day-to-day problems and things that arise and so they are aware of it themselves and they can see the futility or the stupidity of certain things that are done and they know, they know. (Const.)

This officer considered that sergeants are more in tune with their subordinates than are commissioned officers:

Well because they're, perhaps they're our immediate supervisors so they're not so far removed as to be in a total administrative role somewhere. Their job is part admin but, but er, mostly concerning operational matters I suppose. (Const.)
This situation was said to arise due to the fact that sergeants had to apply different tactics in order to achieve cooperation from their officers:

Because they are the last line coming down the rank structure that get told what has to be done and what has to be implemented and er, in relation to whatever it may be or budget matters or whatever and they have to try, they're the last rank before you hit your senior constables and constables and they have to tell them what's wanted, put up with all the whinges and groans and the 'This is bullshit and this isn't gonna work' and blah blah blah blah so they're stuck in the middle. They're stuck in the middle with the commissioned officer telling them what they must do and below them, in rank structure, the constables telling them it shouldn't happen.

W.B. How do sergeants in that position deal with that sort of problem?

Generally, agree with the troops but say that it has to be done anyway so, there's nothing we can do about it. (Const.)

These comments suggest that the use of power by sergeants as a means of achieving compliance from junior officers is conditioned by the closer working relationship that they must have in comparison with commissioned officers that maintain a greater degree of separation from the lower ranks.

One officer contrasted this management style with that of commissioned officers by saying:

Em, it is, it is because the sergeants have gotta pacify their troops. They've gotta keep them, or try and keep them in a good frame of mind and keep them working and keep their morale up or whatever or if you so to speak I guess if you say that. Where
inspectors, they're removed from that, you don't hear from them, you don't see them. (Const.)

And further:

W.B. Are the sergeants any more ready to seek input from the lower ranks?

Yeah, to a certain extent, they have to and they have to be because if they're not they're not gonna get on with their staff. Because most sergeants are gonna be, they're gonna want to be liked by their staff, respected by their staff, seen to be a fair and just boss or supervisor or whatever. If they become autocratic or whatever it is and just tell them, tell them what will be done and blah blah blah blah then they know that nothing will get done because they'll just say straight away that so and so is a bastard and whatever he tells me to do he can get stuffed, I ain't doin it. So yeah, by and large. Most of the sergeants will bend a bit and will listen to their troops. (Const.)

Finally, in relation to the perceptions of officers about the causes and consequences of the existence of such an approach to rank and power that is not in tune with the Delta reforms the following views of a constable are very clear:

Exactly the same, it appears to be getting more and more the same. They're getting more and more arrogant, ambitious personalities in there. More and more people that appear to be intent on forcing compliance with everybody.

Well what I see is em, okay the Delta initiative, okay if you go to the underlying concepts of Delta when it first started there was some very intelligent, insightful stuff done. But as it become taken on board by the organization those with the power just simply took it on,
applied their interpretations on it and then forced compliance with their interpretations.

Which the underlying concepts of Delta are something totally different to what we’re being applied now. Delta was all about giving the people at the coalface the power and now all we seem to be doing is telling them how to go about their job more and more and totally forcing them to comply with the way Mr X, or Mr Y or somebody else wants the job done rather than looking at what the public want. (Const.)

This officer continued with comments about the lack of autonomy and the ignoring of the basic requirements of the Delta reform project:

Well they talk about empowerment, bottom-up change, local problem solving. That means you give the power to the person with the problem to come up with a solution and you support that. But what we’re constantly doing we are, we’re constantly second guessing patrol/inquiry officers, detectives. We’re criticising their work and we keep loading on more and more paper work and obligations upon them to comply with other things rather than letting them say, you go out and solve this person’s problem. Like I said the underlying concept of Delta was that. Bottom up, you know the most important person in the organization is the man or the woman in contact with the member of the public. The person with that OR for the inquiry and we seem to be constantly ignoring them for other people like the superintendents always want to look glossy and see their photos in the paper and all that sort of stuff and you sort of look underneath what’s happening and really the people we’re looking at are fed up with this.

This lack of willingness on the part of senior managers to devolve power over frontline operational matters down to the lower ranks occurs in other jurisdictions. Henry (1996) claims that similar attitudes lead to a lack of success in implementing Community Policing in New York during the 1990’s.
The then Commissioner, Lee Brown, held the view that every police officer should have broad discretion and authority to pursue problem solving in the course of providing full policing services to their community. Linked to this philosophy was the idea that all personnel and sections above the beat officers should become their support units. These included supervisors, commanders, chiefs and members of specialized enforcement and investigative units. As noted by Henry (1996. p. 15):

This expectation was not only widely perceived as an affront to the legitimate authority of ranking officers and investigators and a complete inversion of the agency’s rank and power structure, but it flew in the face of sound management theory.

Summary
An analysis of the relationships that exist between the various ranks provides a clear indication of the increasing degree of power that attaches to each rank as one advances up through the system. This power is exercised in a progressively more authoritarian manner regardless of the rank of the officer against whom it is being used. For example, although a senior constable has a superior rank and, in theory, more power than a constable, the working relationship between officers of these two ranks is invariably very democratic. Similarly the relationship between sergeants and those below them tends to be characterised by a fairly high degree of consultation possibly due to the close working relationship that exists.

The separation between the ranks and the reliance on the power differential inherent between them is far more apparent in the interactions between sergeants and inspectors/superintendents. There tends to be less informal interaction and that which occurs is often characterised by the issuing of instructions and less personal interaction or discussion.
It then appears that the interaction between superintendents and their immediate supervisors is far more formal and based on the issuing of instructions and demands without a great deal of discussion or negotiation. Depending on the location of a superintendent his immediate supervisor might be an officer of commander or assistant commissioner rank. It is also not unusual for superintendents to receive direct queries or instructions from the deputy commissioner.

As mentioned above, this greater use of the power of rank by senior members is resorted to regardless of the rank and power of the officer being dealt with. The deference and respect that is exhibited by other officers to members in the powerful positions of district superintendents does not protect them from receiving non-negotiable demands and directives from above.

It would seem reasonable to think of the deliberations of the upper echelons as being concerned with policy matters, labour and resourcing issues, budgets and a range of matters heavily influenced by government policy. Any problems or issues that arise in these areas are not as easily disposed of as are those matters occupying the thoughts of the lower ranks.

It could be argued that, given the nature of these greater problems, that the upper echelons should adopt a more consensual style of problem solving. This is clearly not the case in practice. Their motivation appears to be self-interest and the desire to centralise power for reasons of personal gain.

This creates problems for those who are subject to their directives. Local chiefs of police are subjected to frequent changes of policy and direction. In attempting to reconcile these changes with their own plans for their districts they run the risk of appearing to their subordinates to lack
3.2.3 Personal Interest

The primary function of the Police Service of Western Australia is to provide quality, professional policing to the community of Western Australia. All personnel are required to conduct themselves in a manner that will contribute to this principal aim.

The personnel, assets and systems of the department should not exist or be used for the primary purpose of facilitating the internal management of the Police Service of Western Australia, in a way that is divorced from the requirements of the tax paying public of Western Australia or simply for the benefits of police officers with power and rank.

The nature of police organizations appears to encourage a view among officers that personal advancement should be their primary concern.

The following quotes provide an insight into the extent to which the day-to-day management of the organization deviates from this ideal due to the attention that officers at various levels give to considerations of personal advantage.

For example, one officer had views about the factors and consequences that create this environment for those at the very top of the organization and commented as follows:

*I'm not sure, and it's something that I've given a lot of thought to. I think it's probably a series of things. I think the first one is that to take the next step from being one of forty superintendents to being one of six assistant commissioners requires certainly to be adopted by the interview panel which usually comprises either the commissioner or*
certainly a state commander and an AC (assistant commissioner) or two anyway. So I think clearly from a political perspective you have to be accepted by that group, therefore they seek a particular type. I think what occurs is, to get up there where they are also subject to contract and the contract says if your contract is not renewed you will return to the rank of constable. If my contract is not renewed I return to my previous rank. Now that it’s been renewed once that means nothing, I’m still a commissioned office (C.O.)

This officer also made strong comments about the interactions between the most senior members of the organization and the consequences for those below them:

There is too much competition between them to become deputy commissioners because you’re now playing with only ten people, eight people. Eight people are very close to the top and all of a sudden I believe become extremely ambitious and, without exception I don’t think that’s unfair to say, and I think that’s where the difficulty lies. They get so close to the top that they then need, I suspect, they then need to show their strength and show they’re prepared to get blood on the hands and be ruthless and determined to show they can be the leader one day. And I think out of that what we’re seeing is this them and us. We’re still one of forty therefore we’re still a big pool of people, we do not see ourselves in direct competition. I don’t believe that’s the case largely. I think that when it becomes six I think they can smell the blood and I think that’s what, they then, I know that things can be a bit brittle in there between them and we get the fall out. (C.O.)

Officers of all levels are aware of the existence of such personal motives on the part of senior personnel. This focus on promotion as a measure of individual worth is a feature of other police organizations. This issue is addressed by Oppal (1994, p. E-29) with the comment that:
The Inquiry recognizes these legitimate concerns as one more way in which the current hierarchical structure affects morale when it judges success according to rank.

In another submission to this inquiry a representative from the Municipal Police Association stated that:

From the police member’s perspective, the paramilitary structure causes a number of frustrations, the most fundamental being the traditional view that, to be successful in policing, one must be promoted (p. E-29)

An officer referred to the way in which the needs of the public are ignored in preference to personal goals:

It seems to be starting around inspector level and getting stronger and stronger as it goes wider. You know with our current promotional system we’ve gone strictly to a politics based, really, promotion system. The more and more you can convince people that you can use these buzz words and the more and more you comply with the wishes of those above you rather than the actual needs of the public that we’re serving the easier it is to be promoted. And there’s so many people out there who’ve, you can see it, their actual views of the world are changing because they just get so focused on this promotion. (Const.)

There is a clear reference by this officer to the use by promotion conscious officers in positions of power of popular terminology and the creation of the impression but not the reality of real policing action based on the needs of the public.
This officer also spoke clearly about his perception of the extent to which the existence of the contract system for commissioned officers played a role in their behaviour:

Well, their promotion, the way they've got their promotion in my view is political and it's even been more politicised by the contracts they've been placed on. (Const.)

This member describes the consequences of placing officers on contract in the following terms:

Well they appear to be wanting to please the next level up. It's all, all gone towards compliance, it's just been another piece of political pressure that's placed upon the commissioned officers to comply and put in the changes or do the things in the manner that the higher management wants. (Const.)

Finally, in relation to contracted officers' feelings about their positions within the organization, this officer commented:

And, you know it appears that those who wish to get promoted you know they're vulnerable because they are automatically subservient to those who are able to promote them. So you've got that power relationship. If you want to either maintain your position or become promoted you must comply with what I've decided.' (Const.)

This officer touches here on the concept of members feeling vulnerable with regard to their positions for various reasons. This notion, together with the creation of the façade of action, are both important elements of a model that will be developed to describe the police organization.

Since the contract system for commissioned officers was implemented in 1997 officers of various ranks have been observing the behaviour of those subject to these periodical reviews.
One officer described the apparent changes that have been observed as follows:

“Well, what we thought was gonna happen was that once the inspectors, once they got their commissions confirmed, when they were sort of settled in their ways, their back bones perhaps were a little stiffer, then they would have been willing to, you know, go to bat for things that they know need going to bat for. But I think what’s happened is the contract system has just made them more concerned for their own futures on a three year basis. You know, every three years they're on offer in terms of whether or not they're gonna retain their positions or what have you. Or whether or not they're gonna be given the opportunity to go to some lousy place where they don’t wanna go or take the option of snatching their rent. (Sgt.)

There is a widely held view that this high level of self-interest generated by the contract system creates an environment where many senior officers, that is commissioned officers and those sergeants working towards achieving this rank, behave in a manner that is not in the best interests of fellow police officers or the general public.

Many such officers are perceived as being too compliant in the exercise of their managerial and administrative roles. One officer commented:

*Again that was bad managerial policy because I believe in a lot of cases, and I dare say I'm not the only one because I've heard them talk, that people only got promoted because there was the so-called, what they called the Yes Men. And I remember reading a magazine once that was, I think it was B.R.W or one of the business magazines, and they were talking about Yes Men. They were saying that a company that employs Yes Men is*
A commissioned officer spoke about the same possibility of compliance by officers on contracts:

Well it's probably got the propensity to ensure that people toe the party line which is always a bit of a worry. I wouldn't like to think that people would be that narrow minded that because some one has a differing view then they might suffer the consequences of not having their contract renewed. However, having seen the way that things are done that could well happen. (C.O.)

And further on:

They're very attractive to the system because they get told something and they're quite happy to just to toe the line, bang, don't query anything. (C.O.)

The need to focus on compliance with the wishes of the executive of the Police Service of Western Australia in order to avoid career-limiting confrontations is seen as being a common approach.

The problems created are not limited to officers on contracts being compliant with the views of senior members. Many officers believe that the decisions of managers are often based on their own advancement rather than the requirements of leadership and sound managerial principals.

One officer expressed the following concerns:

I think the structure of command, where any commissioned officer is required to have a three year tenure, which upon at the end of that three year tenure requires review, and at
the end of that three year tender a commissioned officer can be reduced to his previous rank, let me just explain that for anybody that doesn't understand this, in so far as you can be a senior constable, make application to become inspector and, if successful be promoted to inspector, should at the end of your three year tender you fail to have met the key productivity indicators your contract can be reviewed and you can be returned to the rank of senior constable. I think that the, I think that that particular thing, or that particular set-up for our commissioned officers puts them under a great burden in so far as they may have some skills that will never be utilised because of this fear of being returned to their previous rank. Perhaps I haven't said that very well but they may be influenced to make decisions that they otherwise would not have made because of this fear that they will be returned to their previous rank. Therefore, what it does is that fear has basically stemmed down the hierarchical ladder. If a particular individual is more worried about being accountable because his three year tenure might be up he might make decisions that are politically favourable as opposed to being good leadership, good management decisions. (Const.)

And further:

Well you've got sergeants that have done between fifteen and twenty years and they will come to a either a decision that they will continue to be a sergeant or they'll be looking for promotion. If they're looking for promotion they've gotta be cognisant of the fact that their task masters are the inspectors and senior commissioned officers and they also must be able to demonstrate a willingness to toe the party line in order to get promotion. This is where this merit based promotion system, in my opinion, falls down. There are, there are instances in any organization where things will and where things will not work but it is the perception, it is the perception my peers and myself that on far too many occasions decisions are made for career purposes not for management obligations. (Const.)
This officer described the kind of circumstance under which such a managerial approach can have undesirable consequences:

> What I'm saying is I think there are, the system is letting the junior constables down in so far as that the management are influenced to make decisions that are in line with good profit keeping, that are in line with good business management skills, as taught in the business schools and our universities today, as opposed to recognising that there must come a time when the cost/benefit analysis of an emergency provider, or an emergency service provider, must, you must be able to put your hand up and say stop, I can no longer perform the function that you require with the monies that you are providing, monies and resources you are providing me. If you wish me to perform this function you will need to provide me with better resources and money. And I don't, it is my perception and my observations from other people that I have worked with that they are not of the belief that the hierarchy will support that. That they are more interested in ensuring that their three year tenure is looked after. (Const.)

When this officer was asked if there was a link between tenure and decisions about matters such as budgets he commented:

> It is, they are not in my opinion able to exercise their own free will without fear, ill will, malice or prejudice. They are influenced, there is an external bias towards, sorry, an external influence to their decision making process. (Const.)

Within these quotes there is a strong reference to the tactic of the avoidance of tackling issues in a manner that would be conducive to solving problems. Many officers are viewed as taking the much safer path of compliance with those wielding power over them.
One commissioned officer contrasted his situation as a person not on contract with that of other commissioned officers:

> Yeah, I think there’s good and bad over that. I mean there is a difference for sure. Certainly the younger ones are more willing to try new things also they’re trying very hard to make sure that they get a further appointment, those that are on appointments and I think that has a very big key mark right. What I feel that is lacking though is a maturity to go with it and I mean maturity not in their age but maturity within the organization i.e. looking at the whole corporate picture and not their own insular little area. (C.O)

This officer also referred to the purpose for which the organization uses the power of contracts over officers:

> Personally I’ve no objections to anybody being on contract for the right reasons. If it’s work based performance I fully appreciate dead wood in any organization. If it’s performance based then let it be performance based rather than with the way the contracts are driven and the expectations of the organization. Roughly, they’re used more as a controlling mechanism not a learning mechanism. (C.O.)

In relation to the level within the organization from which this control emanates this officer stated:

> Well, I mean the head, I think it comes from the top end down but, and whether it’s correct or incorrect it’s a matter for the individual but from what my personal observations have been the individuals are reacting because they are in fear of not getting their extension of that contract. Now when you’re in fear of that, one you’re not performing to level or performing as well as you are, particularly you notice that in the last year, I’ve noticed that this year with certain inspectors coming up for their third year have sort of started
panicking and thinking shit I’m not going to get my next one. So they’re trying too hard to be the right person and it’s killing them, literally. And I believe that that is because it is viewed as a constraint and as a controlling mechanism. So in other words you can path somebody to think your way whereas people that are not on contract, I use myself as a good example, I’m not likely to change, to say no it’s not the way to go and to, I haven’t got that fear of my contract behind me affecting the decisions I make. (C.O.)

On further reflection this officer considered that officers on contracts were ‘influenced’ rather than being controlled:

I wouldn’t say necessarily used for that purpose I think that there’s an inferred use that and you see it by the way people treat each other that there is this more than the use of control. You know you’re aware I’ve got to do an ability report on you at the end of the year, now you know, if you don’t do this, this and this you know.

W.B. In relation to that controlling.

Influence. (C.O.)

In relation to some of the ways in which this attention to self-interest is exhibited this officer made the following observations:

I don’t know that you can pin it down that way, I think again it comes within your internal cultures, there’s some that sort of, I think it comes down to two things, one, lack of time, we rarely get bosses that visit these days, they don’t have time to talk the troops, they’re trying so hard to protect their arses they haven’t got time to come down and protect somebody else’s. That type of thing. They’re trying so hard to get the brownie points up that their own goals and aspirations sort of fail to recognize anybody else’s goals and
aspirations. And I don't know if that's necessarily at any level because within each of
those levels you've got those that work together and those that are save yourself
orientated that just progress themselves. (C.O.)

This officer spoke about a practice engaged in by other officers who are seeking their own
advancement:

No, I think I see a lot of what do you say, flash in the pan type ideas that seem to come
through, they all sound good so they put them up and they get the brownie points but they
never come to fruition because there's really no substance to them so at the end of the
day it all sounded great or looked good on paper but there's nothing tangible now to show
that that idea was even worth the time of day. (C.O.)

In relation to the type of behaviour generated by the existence of contracts another commissioned
officer - also not on contract - made the following observations:

I think that the contract generates a self-centred approach. You're always conscious of
the fact that how am I going to look it's coming up to renewal of contract. You're more self
centred and anything that could create sort of ripples on the water you're jumping on, it
generates that distancing themselves from the area and blaming other people and things
like that. They don't want to take responsibility because it doesn't look too good when they
come up for renewal I don't think, and that sort of thing. I think it's definitely that we can
see a lot of examples, particularly with superintendents, that they'll back away from their
responsibilities if they can and distance themselves or else try and make every post a
winning post in making them look good, to hell with everyone else. (C.O.)
These themes were echoed by another non-contracted commissioned officer in his observations about the manner in which the contract system generates self-interest and poor decision-making:

"But there has been some decisions made which really, to me, are bad decisions and they've been brought about by this fear of upsetting the apple cart and going over budget, or, and I think it is compounded by the fact that they are under contract and they do feel vulnerable. Because the threat is there, well if you can't do it under budget we'll get rid of you and get someone else who will and, yes, it is an underlying factor and I can see where the young blokes are coming from. Cause I have seen some what I consider to be some very poor decisions based on that. (C.O.)"

And further on in relation to competitiveness and poor evaluation of projects, he observed:

"Yeah, I'd take that from two sides, I'm conscious that a lot of people that are very promotionally orientated are thinking of ways of being, of making change for the sake of change. And they're putting in these initiatives. Now I've seen many of them never been evaluated, never been followed through once the blokes moved on 'cause he really had no intentions. All he wanted to do was get something up and running to show that he had another star. Now I'm sure that had he not been under that pressure to be, he wasn't so keen on the next promotion he wouldn't have probably taken some of those initiatives on board. And if he did so he would have done them a lot better. And I am critical of the fact that when people put these things forward that they're not properly scrutinized because we are not ones for following things through. You know, we say oh that's a good idea, but we never ask for the proof at the end of the day. Now, what evaluation did you do and what was the bottom line at the end of the period or is it still running. These sort of probing questions aren't being put to them, the aspiring applicant and I feel that's encouraging this let's think of another idea and let's put it in there. The troops are saying"
oh here's another one and I question the integrity of the person putting that in. And I think
that's probably too widespread. Now, down the bottom, I don't know about the inspector
and the sergeant level because he probably doesn't see any threat but a senior sergeant,
with a sergeant's got some good ideas may see him as a threat because he might be
better than him and they've gotta compete together, and I think that could be, I've heard
or I've seen some instances where good ideas haven't been given the light of day
because of that competitiveness between the two.

W.B. Well that's the nature, in the nature I suppose of a competitive promotion system.

The system has created dog eat dog. (C.O.)

These comments again highlight the prevalence of the two themes of a feeling of vulnerability and
the creation of the illusion of productive activity. Furthermore, the organization does not test for the
existence of these false impressions of activity.

Another non-contracted commissioned officer made similar observations about the manner in
which senior officers conduct themselves and the impact on junior members:

It certainly causes the people on contract some concerns knowing that it's going to be
renewed in three years. Some of the attitudes of those people overtly change as renewal
of their contract approaches. They become concerned at trying to put forward ideas that
show them in a better light. (C.O.)

And further on:

You can see a change in attitude in them, that they know they're coming up for contract
so that they've gotta be doing things that shows that they are a high performer. Where
they might not necessarily have been for the whole time that they've been on their contract. (C.O.)

In relation to the interactions between the officers in charge of the various metropolitan districts and the impact on junior members this officer highlighted the competition that exists between them:

If we're talking Metropolitan then the first thing that needs to happen is that the six superintendents need to be reading from the same sheet of music. They, at the moment, are all off on their own agendas. There's no effect, there's no doubt that the bumper board is in effect, that they're trying to get to the top of the bumper board to create the biggest impression and em for that reason some decisions are being made which is having a very deleterious effect on the morale and the policing at lower levels. (C.O.)

And further on:

Oh yes, especially, people quite frequently, you've got two, at the rank of inspector you've got two classes of people. You've got the grossly ambitious, who once they reach that rank will crawl over broken glass to go further. Those people are generally not accepted by the rank-and-file as good managers. You get people that, who have attained the rank of commissioned officer and have hit the glass ceiling or stepped off the promotion ladder. Generally speaking I find that those people are accepted and respected by the rank and file more than the first group of people.

W.B. Are they more effective because they're, in getting things done and achieving their objectives?

I believe so, yes, yes I do.
W.B. Why would that be do you think?

Because they've got confidence that the person's going to be around for a while. That they're, that they'll be in that position for some time, they haven't taken the position as a stepping stone to go further and every decision they make is not a SAYO, or a STAR or call it what you like. And any strategy they put in place, there's not a hidden agenda behind the strategy that that is, I put, they're putting this into place to use it to go further. It doesn't matter about whether it's going to be effective or not but within their application for further promotion they can claim it as something that they've initiated. And I think that's important. (C.O.)

An officer made reference to the high degree of pride that attaches to a particular rank and the consequences of a loss of position:

No I haven't but I think, because they are under such pressure themselves to perform and within the police organization there's a lot of pride, probably more so than in a lot of other areas, that if you don't retain your commission and you go back to your former rank, you've lost a lot of your peer respect and I think it's that more than the money that is forcing these people to do unusual things, and very selfish things and I've had quite a few, I've seen quite a few examples of this. And that's something I don't really like about the contract system. (C.O.)

There appears to be a link in police officers' minds between the attainment of promotion and the worth of an officer. This is accentuated by the passage of time and the sense that an officer who has reached a plateau at any one level is somehow deficient. This view can be held regardless of the duties performed by that officer or the standard reached.
Oppal (1994, p. E-10) notes this lack of regard for officers of low rank who are, nevertheless, performing a valuable function. During the commission of inquiry held into the British Columbia Police a representative from the Municipal Police Association said:

A 20-year constable, unlike a nurse or teacher with 20 years of service is often perceived a failure rather than as someone who has given two decades of his/her life in the service of the community.

Summary
The above comments clearly indicate that many officers with the rank and power to control those around them act in a manner that is motivated by thoughts of their own advancement. Many of these officers are fearful of the potential for negative consequences arising from their own activities or the uncontrolled or unsupervised actions of others around them. This fear of being vulnerable to criticism gives rise to a variety of tactics designed to preserve the appearance of efficiency and the absence of problems.

Many of the officers who participated in this research expressed clear views about the extent to which the culture of the organization in fact allows or encourages officers to conduct themselves in a manner that is clearly designed to cater for their own needs. This behaviour is viewed as often being at the expense of other officers, the organization and, ultimately, the public of Western Australia.

The existence of this emphasis on personal interest and advancement is attributed to a variety of factors. The primary cause is seen to be the existence of contracts for all ranks of commissioned
officers and the manoeuvring that takes place as a result of the need for individual officers to create a favourable impression with their superiors.

The contract system for commissioned officers commenced in 1997. There are still a number of officers in the Police Service of Western Australia who were promoted prior to this date and they are not on contract. This fact is said to play a role in the manner in which they conduct themselves in comparison with their contracted colleagues. They believe themselves to be better decision makers due to the fact that they are not so fearful of the consequences of any decisions that they make.

This need to behave in a manner that is well received by one’s superiors is said to manifest itself at many levels of the organization from the upper echelons down to sergeants aspiring to advance themselves. It is an approach that often leads to decisions that are less than ideal judged from the position of ensuring the delivery of an effective police service based on the needs of the public.

It is also believed that the consequences of this inhibited approach filters down through the ranks and has a profoundly limiting effect on the decision making and problem solving capacities of many in the lower ranks.

3.2.4 Devolution

A central theme of the Delta reforms is the devolution to local management of the power to make and implement decisions about many aspects of policing within their areas. This is dealt with above under the heading of Localised Service Delivery.

The concept is further expanded in relation to the devolution of authority to various ranks under the heading of Managerial Accountability. The aim is to empower local, for example, district
management, with the autonomy to make and implement strategies based on the differing needs of their particular community. The documentation makes it clear that the definition of ‘management’ is a reference that is not limited to district superintendents but flows down to officers in charge of sections.

On the basis of the interviews conducted for this research it is clear that the ideal of devolution preached in the Delta reforms is not being achieved. In fact it would appear that many senior officers expend considerable effort to ensure that important functions are kept centralized and not effectively devolved.

The interviews conducted revealed some degree of confusion as to the extent to which devolution of central control is desirable and has been achieved. There are also a variety of comments about the reasons for this situation and the consequences.

This preference for what has been termed ‘a top-down’ command style has been identified as a common trait within many police services and a source of difficulty when junior officers attempt to put operational plans into effect. For example, in an article by Brown and Sutton (1997, p. 23) dealing with a problem-oriented approach to drug dealing that was unsuccessfully attempted by the Victoria Police Drug Squad, they commented that:

> Problem identification and solving become matters for grassroots, operational officers rather than being initiated and controlled from the top, a significant challenge for police departments which have tended to adopt top-down ‘command’ philosophies.

It is clear, from the analysis of information from different sources examined and the interviews conducted for this research project, that the senior executive of The Police Service of Western
Australia exerts enormous pressure on all of those below them in relation to everyday operational issues. They clearly do not confine themselves to long term strategic planning, content in the knowledge that the members running districts and sections are dealing effectively with day-to-day operational matters.

Furthermore, their ability to impose this situation on those below them would appear to be based on factors such as senior rank and the power that accompanies it rather than the power that would attach to a rational argument centred on accurate analysis of relevant facts.

This situation is perhaps linked to the thinking styles that are displayed by the average senior officer in a typical police service environment.

Some indication of the type of problem that can be caused by the existence of inappropriate or inadequate thinking skills in senior managers can be obtained from an article by Malone (1994, p. 29) entitled “Key Thinking Strategies for Future Problem Solving.” That writer points out that out of all of the police agency C.E.O.s interviewed for the article:

Most of those surveyed had high pragmatic, analytical and realistic tendencies. While essential for many operational and most day-to-day decisions, these styles are short on the innovative thinking and long-term planning typical of synthesists and idealists.

On the subject of the attitudes and thinking styles of senior officers in typical police environments, Lorinskas and Kulis (1986, p.185) cite Cizanckas & Hanna (1978) as claiming that:

The paramilitary model inhibits management practices that produce mature, healthy police organizations. Centralized bureaucratic control provides for little autonomy by police officers over their environment. The authoritative command structure encourages
dependence and subordination. The rule orientation encourages passivity. In fact, in the paramilitary model, officers are expected to act immaturity. Traditional police organizational thinking incorporates more nonsense than sense. Muddled thinking, even though traditional, is still cloudy thinking.

The traditional modes of controlling behaviour exhibited by those in the upper management levels of the Police Service of Western Australia clearly are not conducive to a problem solving approach being employed by those in the lower levels of the organization. There exists an almost slavish requirement to adhere to the application of correct procedure in any given situation. In addition, any departure from these requirements carries with it the possibility of serious consequences if discovered. This environment and the culture of blame are not conducive to a problem solving approach.

Before an officer is able to function as a problem solver there are a number of factors that need to exist within their environment. De Lint (1997, p. 259) discusses one aspect of this desirable environment. He states the view that it is of paramount importance that a problem-solver must be free to produce solutions to situations that are tailor-made for the purpose and that good police work is complicated instead of improved by the practice of fitting particular solutions into pre-defined formats, protocols and procedures. The problem-solver is thus an officer whose most important resource is not the law, force or information, but creativity and insight.

Bearing in mind the culture of blame attaching to the most minor instances of departure from clearly set out procedures one has to pose the question as to how an officer adopting a problem solving approach to his or her duties in Western Australia would be treated in the event of their actions being examined with the benefit of hindsight.
Officers from various ranks have discussed the existence of the so-called ‘top-down command’ philosophies and the undesirable consequences for those who are governed in this manner. This situation also involves issues that arise from factors such as pushing the responsibility for handling matters onto those in the lower ranks, failing to provide the resources to manage such situations and then apportioning blame to these officers when the inevitable problems arise.

On the subject of the personal impact or consequences of this lack of autonomy and the impact that it has on junior officers under the command of a district superintendent, one such officer had the following to say:

Yes, superintendents in my experience are regularly embarrassed by changing. I have no issue with changing corporate policy. We have a lot of changing views on policy when we are advised to do A and then it’s changed a week later to B and we’re in the middle and we’ve already told everybody and we change. The troops don’t see that the advice is coming to us, they think it’s just coming from us. So superintendents, I think a lot of people out there in respect of any district would say oh, a bit ordinary or gee they change their mind a bit or they don’t know what they’re doing and I would suggest in a great many cases that’s because we are being directed by someone. The quality of who we’ve got is critical and I don’t think my experience so far is enough analysis was done because things are quite harum-scarum at times. I think we’ve got some senior people who are too reactionary and they’re simply not prepared to allow managers to manage. (C.O.)

A senior officer referred to the situation where he was held responsible for the overall management of his area. Although he welcomed the new approach he still considered that it had the capacity to operate unfairly:
But in the new scheme of things I thought it was good. But I also felt that it was a huge ask being placed upon district officers. You know the devolvement seemed to be a devolvement more of responsibility and accountability rather than the resources to support that role. And the amount of direct support the officer in charge of the district had I think left a bit to be desired. (C.O.)

The above quotation contains a comment that has a suggestion of a blame culture where senior managers are placed in a position where, although the resources supplied to them may not be sufficient to allow them to carry out the functions required, they nevertheless will be held responsible for the results obtained.

Another commissioned officer expressed similar views when asked if he considered that the Delta reforms had resulted in true devolution of authority:

Them is the district officers. We went through a devolution project which never got off the ground. Because it means releasing control, it means the thing that we don't do is trust the people we pick to put into that position. Surely, if you're an assistant commissioner and you've got some say as to who you have as your district officers, at that point you should say well I've picked that person, I'm going to trust him to do his job. I'll call him to be accountable to me at any time I want but I'm going to let him go and do his job. Whereas we have assistant commissioners, and just about everyone that I know with the exception of a few that I don't really know, I think of probably a couple, but they want to run everything so there's no devolution.

It would seem, from the comments made above, that there is a distinct cut-off between groups and the behaviours exhibited. The upper management levels, for example, commander and upwards, display this controlling, manipulative management style. Those officers at the next level down are
required to deal with the consequences of these decisions in the sense that they have the responsibility for making them work thrust upon them. The manner in which they handle this situation varies from officer to officer.

One senior officer indicated satisfaction with the nature and extent of devolved power and spoke about the restrictions placed upon officers at the higher levels of the Police Service. He said:

*I think it's probably given a greater sense of ownership to the district officers. For example when I went to (District) I found it quite comfortable to know that all of the resources within my district were my personnel. Whereas previously the C.I.B., the detectives would have reported to the central C.I.B. and not to the district officer. The forensic officers would have reported to the forensic division, traffic would have simply passed through the area and done their job and would not be answerable to me. I'd have no control over whether any of those forces were deployed or how they were utilized or anything like that. So I never knew the whole system from the point of view of being officer in charge of the district. But in the new scheme of things I thought it was good. (C.O.)*

And further:

*Well I don't recall being interfered with by the assistant commissioner in the way in which I wanted to do things. He may not have agreed with what I wanted to do, in fact he was a little on the scathing side as to one of my initiatives out there which was called directed patrol which was to the effect that every police officer in the district, except forensic officers and detectives, had to carry out a certain amount of patrol every week. It was a very structured system but although he disagreed with that he never told me not to do. So apart from that I can't recall any instance where he interfered and told me what I should or should not do. (C.O.)*
In relation to the factors influencing decisions by senior management about how much power to devolve down, this officer made the following observations:

But, as I see it, he, as my superordinate, who's got the overall accountability and responsibility for all of the districts within his region, he's got to have some say as to what goes on there. I don't subscribe to the idea, as some district officers did, that this is my patch and nobody's going to tell me what to do because there's always someone senior to you. And beyond him was the deputy commissioner and the commissioner and the minister for police so the district officer has got a certain amount of responsibility and power and so on but he's gotta be prepared that there are higher powers which are entitled to have an influence over what happens there. I was going to say that one thing that would be set for the district officer is certain demands upon results. You know your burglary rate is climbing up, you'd better do something about that. And yet I think it's quite right and proper. But how you do that, how you manage to get say a burglary problem reduced is really up to the district officer to decide. If it works he'll probably get some plaudits for it, if it doesn't work he probably gets criticized for it. (C.O.)

Although this officer spoke positively about devolution he did voice concerns about the mismatch between resources provided and outcomes expected. This is a theme mentioned by other senior officers and the view is that this is not in accordance with the Delta reforms.

Another senior officer commented positively about the progress that has been made in relation to the handing down of power to the local level regarding decision-making:

Oh I think em, I think one of the big things we talk about with Delta is that we have regionalisation but more particularly we have a devolution and empowerment and that
means that decisions should be made at the local level. And I would like to think that that is largely happening.

W.B. What's your definition of local level?

I believe if there's a problem in a particular community the local police officer, sergeant, senior constable in charge of that area, would be assessing the situation and hopefully will be supported at the district office level to make decisions about the crime management plan for his area (C.O.)

It is interesting to note that both of these officers chose to focus their comments about local decision making on the issue of crime. As will be seen, the comments of other officers concerning the lack of devolution are broader in scope and refer to the need to be allowed to address different or additional policing issues.

In relation to the extent to which the reality does not reflect the intended style of policing, one senior member clearly stated that devolution was not being carried out in the intended manner and that this was being caused by the approach of some members of senior management. He commented:

Well I think the agency took on a very difficult strategy to devolve authority, accountability down to theoretically the lowest possible level, or the lowest level practicable. I think, with hindsight, we could have or should of addressed that in a slightly different way and I think at the time that we tried to devolve a great deal of authority we didn't necessarily have the business systems in place that supported that fully and I don't think that we had the maturity and understanding, maturity in terms of managerial maturity, to actually accept a great deal of that devolution that was being proffered at the time and I think that's come
back to haunt us a little bit because we actually got into a degree of devolution and it almost stopped and in some areas it flourished because it was driven by individuals who understand it, who could drive it down to lower levels in the organization. You see in other parts of the business where that wasn't the case because the individuals charged with the responsibility of ensuring devolution occurred didn't have that depth of understanding to deliver it. And as a consequence I think we still have varying levels of devolved responsibility in various parts of the agency. (C.O.)

Finally, this officer made the following observations with regard to the question of the decision making power that should be handed down to the ranks of working police officers, the sergeants and constables who make the bulk of the day-to-day decisions regarding practical policing:

But I think as a general principle if you say what should be devolved to the lowest level of operational officers it's gotta be the capacity to act in the independent office of constable. I still believe in that individuals have got to be empowered to make the decisions around the day-to-day work that they're being expected to undertake. You know nothing is more frustrating, and it doesn't matter whether you're a copper or a fireman or a salesman, if you're tasked to do something and then restrained at a higher level from being able to do it, to some extent it usurps the notion of that person being empowered to act. (C.O.)

The existence of such a problem is not confined to Western Australia. Oppal (1994, p. C-6) makes a reference to this type of situation with a comment from an un-named university professor who commented that:

Policing today is very much like it was in the 1820s…We have basically adapted a little bit of new technology and made a few changes, but it is still the same paramilitary structure with the same authoritarian top down line of command with all the superstructure that gets
in the way of people actually going out and exercising autonomy, exercising community functions and making a difference...without true autonomy, there cannot be true community policing.

Although, as the above quotes remind us, devolution is implicit in the whole Delta process, some senior officers perceive a danger in allowing too great a departure from some form of centralised control. For example one officer observed:

*I'm not uncomfortable, well I think there will always have to be a centralized structure that will oversee regionalised areas. I don't think we can operate corporately without some centralized structure. What I wouldn't want, to return to the old days of centralised command and control and telling everyone else this is the way we are going to do it and never coming out of the ivory tower. But I think there's a danger of the pendulum swinging to far where the regionalisation gives an opportunity for the local chiefs of police to become independent chiefs of police rather than interdependent chiefs of police. I think there's a distinction to make sure that they understand that they are part and parcel of the bigger picture as opposed to just dealing with things in their own patch. (C.O.)*

The comments above demonstrate a variety of views about the devolution project. Although there appears to be a general acceptance of the principle there are some reservations in relation to the ability of senior managers to come to grips with the requirements and the lack of sufficient resources to allow full implementation of the concept.

Officers from a variety of ranks expressed concerns about the practical difficulties involved in applying the official model. For example:

*I think the devolution process, the intention is good as far as giving the local chief of police the autonomy and the management of the district but it's very difficult to sort of, to
have the senior executive let go of some sort of input into the way the districts run. I think you need to have consistency in the way in which we police and you need to have issues such as issues that impact or corporate level stuff needs to be dealt with at a corporate level so there is a line there that we need to draw on however getting back to the question I think it works to a certain extent but there’s still that interference into the running of the district and I don’t think we’ll ever do away with that. (C.O.)

Another senior member linked the lack of devolution to the approach adopted by senior management as follows:

No, I believe that, and I’ve said recently to someone quite senior, I do honestly believe from my experience on a day-to-day basis that Delta is being practised by the superintendents at the district level because we were employed in our new positions based on that premise so we had to identify, recognize and adopt that model. I certainly believe I do and I believe most others do. I also strongly believe, unfortunately, that the senior command people do not. That group introduced it, that group are standing outside of the square, or trying to if you like, and said you do this. They did not put themselves in the triangle and be part of it. I do not believe, my personal experience of those very few, they are not practising it, we are still reacting to individual complaints, letters, articles in the paper, all of these things where we’ve gotta change strategic direction, focus activities, to go and respond to personal requests etc.

W.B. From persons in the force more senior to yourself?

Yes. There has been a devolution of responsibilities, there has not been a devolution of responsibility linked to accountability and linked to decision making in terms of managing. In other words all, I regularly receive strong criticism of rather low level issues at times,
and really question the level of involvement in the first place and there is a lack of acceptance that the managers at district level are actually managing and are aware and are on top of it in broad sense. You can never be aware of every single individual. If someone pops out with a complaint, okay, if you don’t know you don’t know but there is a lack of genuine adoption and understanding and yet I know, many times at command conferences, of which superintendents and above attend, the issue was raised and the issue was canned very quickly as being seen to be negative attitudes and negative to the big picture from command level but they’re not accepting at all that maybe they are not quite doing it themselves to support us. (C.O.)

Another senior officer commented on the influence that a commissioner is able to exert over lower ranks within an organization such as the Police Service of Western Australia:

I don’t think it’s been all that successful, it’s still got quite a way to go yet. And I guess there’s a couple of reasons for that, is one the previous commissioner was, my opinion is he is basically an autocrat. So that he actually set that style of management, he wanted to control things so all his assistant commissioners, because they were under so much pressure, also wanted to control things and so on down the line. And it’s never really let go. It may change, who knows, but they’ve never really been that successful at it. (C.O.)

This kind of treatment of senior officers by those above them is seen as having the potential to damage their image as a leader in the minds of their own subordinates. There is a danger that they may be viewed by subordinates as a mere figurehead and ineffectual. One senior officer commented:

It has a significant impact, it’s demoralizing, I believe it’s probably a strong word that’s bordering on demeaning.
W.B. For you personally?

Personally and as a district office team because it's not just myself who is affected in my personal situation. It is the entire DO team who are seen to be unknowing and incompetent and that is then interpreted, because it becomes a file, at the next lower level down it undermines who's running the district. The reality is they are not the superintendent and his team running it, it is still being run from in town because when they crack the whip these people jump. Not much has changed. They're responsible for the problem but there is, if there is a positive the positive is almost claimed also in town rather than at the local level. So there is not an effective implementation of Delta by the Command team. (C.O.)

The Police Service of Western Australia (2000, p. 4) gathered the same views from the data collected in a departmental survey on the process of implementing the Delta reforms. Devolution was a central tenet of these reforms and was viewed by many officers as representing a positive move towards improving local service delivery. However, the consensus of those surveyed was that a lack of trust by the police executive in the decision-making abilities of district officers was impeding this aspect of the reform agenda.

The comments of one respondent to this survey are in accord with those recorded during the current research. This officer stated:

We are told constantly that power has been devolved to the ‘Local Chiefs Of Police’ e.g. the District Superintendents. But my observations are that the real power still lies with, and is applied by those above the superintendent level. If you want centralised power say so, and take it back. If you really believe in decentralisation, then let the local
superintendent run his area. Constant interference frustrates them and makes them appear weak and indecisive to their subordinates, and unable to make decisions or control their district. Their subordinates are not always aware of the behind the scenes manoeuvres going on (p. 20).

Although the majority of the above critical comments relate to the lack of devolution by the senior command team, this officer expressed the view that some district superintendents were endeavouring to implement this requirement in relation to junior officers in charge of sections:

*I think in some areas it is happening. There are police stations being just about run by the officer in charge of that station. They're reporting back and the officer, the district officer or the assistant district officers and that are happy with their performance and are letting them get on with it. And giving them a budget to run. But not very many I don't think. But there are some, I believe there are some. I've spoken to some O.I.C.'s of stations that have said well in this area it's great. You get a station, you get your men, you haven't got enough men, you haven't got enough money etc etc but you know that's not the D.O.'s fault and you run with them. And that to me, that's very encouraging. (C.O.)*

Although this unwillingness to implement fully the devolution project is referred to as a failure to comply with a basic tenet of the Delta Reform Project, the attitude of mind that lies behind the issue is said to be of much longer standing:

*W.B. How long has that sort of attitude existed in the police force, has it only been in the last three or four years or has it been longer than that?*

*Throughout my career, thirty years. (C.O.)*
Officers from other police jurisdictions have commented on the long-standing existence of this attitude on the part of senior officers. Oppal (1994, p. E-3), during the proceedings of the commission of inquiry into the British Columbia Police, noted the following comments of a Canadian police officer:

The police system is based on authoritarian and militaristic principles. This approach emphasizes the role of employees as ‘cogs’ within the organization’s machinery.... Those who obey are rewarded; those who raise questions about the organization and its activities are suspect.

Another local senior officer referred to the absence of a consistent approach to devolution across the Police Service of Western Australia. and the undesirable consequences of this approach:

W.B. What sort of changes have taken place in the last few years in the police force.

Alleged or real?

W.B. Well, that’s an interesting question, alleged, real, whatever?

In real terms, flattening of the structure, devolution although I believe that’s tacit, it’s not effectual, certainly decentralisation and again fragmented decentralisation as opposed to perhaps a systematic form of decentralisation, in other words no one seems to know what they’re doing for sure at the moment or quite which direction they’re going. (C.O.)

This officer expressed the view that considerations of power and self-protection were the causes of this situation and that ranks from deputy commissioner down to senior sergeant experienced problems in this regard:
Well I think devolution’s only been given tacit sort of, what do you say, tacit approach in as much as we talk devolution but we’re not really letting go. There’s not enough empowerment at the lower levels to say well, this is now your concern, your responsibility, we’re going to leave you with it. It’s more like well you’ve got it but I’m going to still control it from my end so we haven’t really devolved.

W.B. Okay, who or what rank or level in the organization is it that’s not letting go?

Well I think it starts with the senior administration.

W.B. And what rank is that?

Assistant commissioner on down. Possibly even deputy commissioner on down. (C.O.)

The existence of such a problem is not confined to Western Australia. Oppal (1994, p. B-6) includes a reference to this type of situation from the local British Columbia police commissioner. He stated:

…but in practice the chief constable is the true ‘boss’ of the force. In enforcing the law, all constables, from new recruits to the chief constable, have the same authority. It is only within the police department that their individual autonomy is curtailed.

Finally, a local Western Australian officer referred to a point made by others with regard to the potential for problems when the organization fails to provide sufficient resources to enable officers with devolved power to carry out their new functions:
Well I think the first thing with budgets and I think with all this even devolution, if you're talking devolution, if they want to really, if they want to do it properly they've gotta make sure you've got the resources to do it. It's no good decentralising, pushing the workloads down without ensuring that you've got adequate staff at each level down below there to assume that role. If it's taken Bill Bloggs up here to do that job till now you can't just push that out to somebody else and say now fit that within your eight hours but we won't give you any extra person to do it. (C.O.)

Another senior member spoke of similar problems with the administration level above district superintendents and also included the regional commanders. This is the level between superintendents and assistant commissioners:

What I find is, before you get to us even there's the regions. They're becoming an industry in themselves. To me, and I say it quite candidly, I don't see the need for the regional officer. I think if we're looking at true devolution it should be able to go to the district and likewise, some of the things we're doing can go down to the sub-districts. We don't interfere in most things within the sub-districts... It was just an unnecessary link in my book. But they seemed to be, as much as it was devolved down they would like, they seemed to want to hang on to it. Whether they thought the districts weren't ready, or to me it just seemed to be creating their own little empire. And to be honest, and we discussed it ourselves between the districts, and I would say if we put it to a vote in the Southern district we'd vote that there wouldn't be a regional office. (C.O.)

This officer also made reference to the lip service that is paid to devolution and the problems caused by the mismatch between this, theoretical, devolution of authority and the lack of resources to enable a full implementation:
In other areas it may be different but the general consensus is that the Service Command still, they say the right things but in actions still don't hand a lot over that they should do. And they're still answering problems that happen in the field that should be answered by the people in charge. Now why the deputy commissioner or the A.C.'s gotta get on and defend an action of something that happened in one of the districts, surely that's up to one of the commanders or the district head. (C.O.)

This officer also acknowledged that the senior executive of the Police Service of Western Australia. was not alone in making the mistake of clinging too strongly to a desire to handle all matters personally:

You know someone saying, well I remember occasions where someone would come to the district office and complain, oh my deli down here is, there's trouble every night and or the inspector's driven past there and saw a blue and say hey you fellas, you've gotta pay far more attention to that place. I want someone down every Friday night. In reality when you looked at the bigger picture it was probably one of our smaller problems but because you didn't do your homework and looked at the intelligence about, all right, is that a problem, how does it stack up with the rest of it. You know, is it a worse problem. Our priorities are sometimes misguided just by someone making a single complaint or they've seen a single instance and all your resources were going over to which wasn't a real problem. (C.O.)

A consequence of this type of involvement by senior officers can be interference with local plans that have already been developed and an inefficient allocation of resources. Decisions of this type can be imposed by virtue of rank and power and not by a logical assessment of local conditions.

Another officer referred to his similar experiences at a district level:
There is certainly, when I was at (District) there was some devolution there, monetary matters were down to the local level. However there's, there was continually corporate directions that you had to follow. That is they'd come up with, and operations would be mounted from Perth, without consultation with the Districts, that you had to comply with, that you had to second staff to to assist these operations when you might have had your own strategies in place at district level. They were compromised by the fact that non-operational senior officers were making decisions on other projects and other strategies and other agendas that you had to support, without consultation. And I don't see that as devolution. (C.O.)

This officer also referred to an associated problem arising from the small degree of local autonomy granted to superintendents. This is the lack of uniformity in the manner in which policing duties are carried out and the confusion generated in the lower ranks. The role played by competition based on personal interest is also spoken about:

W.B. I'll come back to that in a moment but just picking up on your point there about the six superintendents need to working from, I think you said, the same music sheet or some such?

Reading from the same sheet of music.

W.B. The same sheet of music. Doesn't that imply a return to a more centralised form of management?

Yes, but when you see the diversity of the way that people are going about doing their business it's very destructive to the people on the ground when we're meant to be able
to cross-pollinate between places and the business is being done completely different in 
all different, in different districts. And I don't think that's good for the organization.

W.B. All right, perhaps I should ask you a question first just to maybe for me to clarify 
what your thoughts are, do you as an individual agree with this devolution of authority 
and this taking away of central power. Do you agree with it or do think it should be more 
centralized?

I think that, I believe that at local level, decisions should be made at local levels and those 
decisions should be respected. However I believe there should be a common framework 
within which everybody should operate. I think that's, I mean there's a number of 
instances, if you want me to go into them I will but there's six different. When Falconer 
first came here he said we're going to get rid of the silo effect because we're not going to 
have traffic, general duties and crime. That has been an abject failure but within the six 
districts you have six silos and I don't think that's good for policing or the community. 
(C.O.)

There appears to be confusion about the nature and degree of devolution that should exist. On the 
one hand the Delta project speaks clearly about devolving the bulk of issues to local chiefs of 
police. The consensus of the officers interviewed is that control has not been handed over in 
relation to strategic and tactical issues. Superintendents receive fairly constant interference in 
relation to many aspects of the day-to-day operations within their areas of command.

In relation to how the policing function is carried out in practice by officers at various levels, there 
is a lack of consistency as regards working practices employed. It could be argued that what is 
required is centralized control over the practices of policing to maintain a set of professional
standards of dealing with a given situation. This should be coupled with greater freedom for district heads to decide what the focus for their officers will actually be at a given period.

Such observations and opinions are not limited to commissioned officers. A number of sergeants expressed similar thoughts and described the consequences of this lack of devolution for the efficient operation of the Service.

In relation to avoiding issues raised by junior members one officer observed:

*Okay, but then again if you come to an investigator and say supervisor, who may be a senior constable, he may be a senior constable say at a big centre where he might have ten probationers under him. They're all over the place and he needs a head like an owl to do you know go round three sixty degrees. And he says well I'm not the problem, I'm just the supervisor, the problems bigger than that. It's got to do with the fact that there aren't enough police officers in the station to do what's required of us. Then of course when you start saying okay there's something at a DO level or at an RO, a regional office level, or a command level then you start getting against, up against a group of people who have all basically got those positions on the basis that they adhere, or at least pay lip service, to the Delta philosophy. Which is all about forcing the decision making down to the lowest level so when you get to them they say well hang on, that was his job. They don't accept that they haven't given him the tools to do it and to suggest anything to these people, that particular strata of the hierarchy, they do not take it at all well.* (Sgt.)

Another officer referred to his own personal difficulty with allowing junior personnel to take control of delegated tasks:

*W.B. But is that common with lots of senior police officers?*
Well they won't let go, right. And I must admit I mean I have trouble even at station level at times because if I allocate a file to a person who I don't think is quite capable of doing it I'll be looking over his shoulder to see whether he is doing it. And make sure, have you done this, you know, you must do it yourself, have you done that, have you got a statement from this bloke, right. So, I think by our very nature of being police officers it's there.' (Sgt.)

Finally, one interviewee linked this lack of devolution to the need that senior officers have to avoid appearing to be bad managers:

Oh yes, most definitely. I've heard all this talk about pushing responsibility further down the chain. Well I don't think that's quite right. I've yet to see that. The people who are supposed to push responsibility down to, even sergeant level, won't allow that to happen because they are then not in control. They have to be in control to make sure that they don't get made to look bad. (Sgt.)

The requirement to implement a programme of devolution in respect of many aspects of organizational affairs arose under the Delta Project in 1996. Two successive commissioners took on the task of putting this change into effect.

Matthews (2000, p. 4), during an address to the Conference of Executive Management, stated:

In respect to devolution, I believe it would be fair to say, and it is widely acknowledged internally, that the attempt for greater devolution and empowerment of staff has met with only limited success. There is little consistency, and in many ways there remains a strong
centralist control. We must determine and articulate clearly defined sets of responsibilities.

Given that the organization is still controlled by a centralised, powerful group of senior officers, the question arises about the effects of this situation on other aspects of how the organization and the officers in the lower ranks are affected.

Friedman (1992, pp 46-48) states that the key variables influencing the attitudes and working personalities of individual officers are the structure of the organization, the nature of the community in which they work and the values and attitudes of senior police managers.

Summary

The information derived from the interviews suggests that the nature and extent of the devolution of authority within the organization that has been achieved falls a long way short of the aims of the Delta Program. This situation is the cause of resentment and confusion on the part of local senior management and practical difficulties for them and the rank and file members with whom they are required to work.

The root cause of the problem appears to stem from the unwillingness of command level senior management to allow the implementation of the requirements of Delta. There is a clear feeling that these officers, from the rank of Commander up, are reluctant to relinquish the influence that they are able to exert over subordinates. This capacity for control is a function of various other features of the organizational structure, such as rank and power, and the motivation for such actions is viewed as being linked to other aspects of the culture such as the contract system that relates to various ranks from inspector upwards and a strong sense of self-interest in those ranks.
This combination of interacting factors creates an unbalanced situation starting at the upper levels of management and is passed down to the level of superintendent. There is then often a flow-on effect whereby local police chiefs must constantly alter course to accommodate the directives received from above. This can create local problems. The superintendent can appear to be lacking in purpose and direction and a coordinated approach to many aspects of police work can be inhibited.

Although the Delta reforms set out clear principles in relation to the need for this process of devolution of power, the reality is markedly different across various strata within the organization. A wide range of views also exists as to the degree to which this principle should be implemented in relation to the day-to-day work of the various sections and districts.

Another aspect of the devolution problem, linked to the concepts of rank and power, is the increase in actual workload that is created. The Delta reforms were intended to push decision-making down to the lowest practical levels of local management. What has in fact occurred is that the Executive of the Service has retained control while professing to devolve.

There has not been devolution of the assets required to carry out this local management nor a full control over these issues. Coupled with that is the continued existence of the unwillingness of officers at various levels to make decisions without reference to higher authority. This appears to be based on fear of criticism about decisions made.

It appears that this process in fact causes an increase in workloads at various levels rather than a streamlining of the decision making process. There is a double handling of the administrative functions involved in a whole range of decisions. Those at the lower levels must carry out the initial activity involved in any matter that has been handed down to them.
These officers then feel obliged to consult with higher authorities before making many decisions. If officers take the initiative and actually commit themselves to a course of action, their superiors frequently disapprove of this and the decision-making process essentially starts over again. This is viewed as frustrating and inefficient.

These factors cause discontent and an increase in the amount of administrative activity required in order to get approval for a variety of matters requiring attention.

Finally, although control is still exercised by officers in positions of power, principally those of the rank of inspector and above, there is a perceived lack of willingness to accept responsibility when decisions result in unexpected or undesirable outcomes. At that point there is an attempt made to shift the blame to the officer of lower rank on the basis that the devolution process had been applied.

Blame is transferred to junior members on the basis that they failed to carry out instructions correctly. This is seen by the junior ranks as an attempt to divert criticism from the real decision maker.

3.2.5 Accountability

The Police Service of Western Australia. today, like so many other Government organizations, is required to pay great attention to the concept of accountability. The Services’ document “Purpose and Direction” (1995, p. 9) describes this concept within the context of the activities of its employees.
The document couples devolution of authority with devolution and acceptance of responsibility and accountability for actions and there are references to holding individuals responsible for the results of their decisions and the outcomes. In addition, the document refers to the need for changes to any management practices that restrict effective management and decision-making and the acceptance of honest mistakes.

The officers interviewed for this project spoke about a range of issues concerning this aspect of their working lives. The comments and observations ranged from an acceptance of the concept from high-ranking members to the much more pragmatic observations and views on the part of junior officers.

One officer spoke about the commencement of the references to the notion of accountability within the Police Service of Western Australia in general:

_I think it's almost, you can put it into Delta. All of a sudden it starts appearing, the words responsibility, accountability. It started to be in the information material coppers read these days. You'll find it mentioned, generally mentioned on the media. I mean not only with regard to police officers but any government service. I mean a while back, I mean it wasn't that long ago when you know a government job was good for life. You know I mean you basically kept your nose clean and you retired. These days there's much more of I think the private sector work ethic perhaps has started to become applied to the police service and other government services._ (Sgt.)

Within the concept of accountability there is a reference to the concept that 'the customer must be right.' The Police Service adopts this view and uses it to both place the responsibility for issues onto individual officers and avoid acceptance by itself of any onus for issues that may arise. This
approach could be at the centre of the culture of blame that exists within the organization and which is dealt with in the following sections of this study.

With regard to the fairness of this situation, this officer remarked as follows:

I think it’s fairly well to say now, certainly from our point of view from being here at (Section), the average young copper out there on the street seems to have this idea that his every move is going to be subject to some scrutiny, whether at the time from the public, perhaps through the media and through Professional Standards Portfolio, should a complaint ensue from something he’s done, some judgment he makes. And that must be a very disconcerting way to go about his business (Sgt.)

From this officer’s comments we also get a sense of the apprehension that many of the members of the Police Service of Western Australia feel with regard to their vulnerability to criticism and decisions that they may be required to make.

A more senior officer offered a different perspective:

Well my view of accountability is one where we’re simply stating up front that this is what we’re about, this is the way in which we manage our resources, this is the way we manage our investigations, this is the way we deal with complaints and I guess to put it into some sort of context it’s a little bit like telling the public what their rights are as opposed to what their responsibilities are. I mean we sort of twist that the other way around when we hear about the law reformers talking about well you know they all want to know their rights, what about their responsibilities. Well I think to turn it the other way around when we talk about accountability it’s very much about telling the community, public sector, private sector, this is what our responsibilities are as a police service, these
are what your rights are to expect from us. Both in terms of prevention and control of crime, you know traffic or whatever it might be. That’s what I think accountability is more about. I think people still have this notion that accountability is all about making sure your reports are in, complaints are dealt with on time and it’s got, I don’t want to keep on with all the management hype but it’s got a punitive connotation to it still. And I don’t believe that’s a true perspective of what accountability is about. (C.O.)

And further:

Well they point to, in both terms of strategic intents, that you need to forge strategic partnerships, managerial accountability. I mean people still have this notion that accountability is all about not getting tripped up. It’s more than that, it’s basically again I think being open and honest in the way that you do your business.’ (C.O.)

Having made these comments about how he believed that accountability should be viewed, this officer went on to acknowledge the practical effects of this requirement on more junior officers:

Well I think they are probably still struggling to come to terms with the need for a lot of professional standards in the way those inquiries are conducted for instance. I mean that’s a major issue for policing at the moment. And I certainly get a sense that the junior personnel are still coming to terms with being scrutinized so heavily in the way they do their job. They just want to get on and do their job and the need for all this scrutiny and accountability in the way they do their job is something which has been, well it’s really accelerated from what is used to be. Before there was not so much scrutiny, there was some but not nearly as much as there is now. (C.O.)

In relation to the relative abilities of senior and junior ranks to deal with the results of attention to accountability this officer made the following observation:
Yeah I think there’s an element of truth in that in the sense that at upper levels of management you have both time on your side, more often you’ve got time on your side. I certainly have experienced greater opportunity to be creative the longer I’ve been in the job and at the higher rank I can get. Simply that you’ve got, not necessarily, I spoke about time before, I mean time is, time is a pretty precious resource which you know, I guess, look I’m spending longer at work now than I ever have and time’s getting much more of a precious commodity for me but in the particular job I’ve got at the moment I do have time to make considered decisions in the way which we want to go. I recognize that a constable on the street has far less time on his hands or her hands to make a decision and to take an approach. And given the fact that the nature of the duties is such that they also don’t have that great an opportunity for I guess flexibility in the way they do their things into the, I think there’s an opportunity for them to be innovative and creative but that’s within I guess a limited span because as you mentioned earlier they’ve got rules and regulations, they’ve got statutes they’ve gotta abide by, policies they must keep to and they’ve got that ever present accountability sort of hanging over them. Well, I’ve got more accountability hanging over me because of my position but I do recognize that I’ve got a greater opportunity to influence the way things are done around here than opposed to a constable that’s here. (C.O.)

This officer acknowledged that accountability is easier to live with for those in senior positions. They do not face the same need for immediate action or degree of critical scrutiny and potential criticism as those in the lower ranks. In addition he acknowledged that the need for junior officers to attend to the requirements of various rules and regulations intervenes in their ability to act freely.
Another officer referred to the problems experienced in relation to accountability as it relates to budget management and the lack of any real control that he can exercise over factors that influence issues for which he is held responsible:

These days you've got that high level of accountability, you're starting to think creatively about the way you do your business and we're becoming more effective budget wise.

The down side of course that there's an argument that you can't budget for policing and one of the problems that I face is that I can control my budget to a certain extent but also, to a certain extent, the budget is controlled by the number of major crimes that occur out there which I have no control over. My budget is only as good as the next major murder we have over here in (location name removed) because at that point it'll go, it'll run over. (C.O.)

Again there is the acknowledgement that a police officer is unable to exercise adequate control over his or her environment and may suffer the consequences of unforeseen events.

This officer also made reference to the need for a change in management policy from the current focus on attention to reactive policing, driven by current accountability mechanisms, to measuring proactive problem solving strategies:

Oh I don't know whether everyone understands what problem oriented policing is at this point in time. That's one of the fundamental problems we've got but we're still running with a lot of people who are focused on reactive policing and that's very much driven by the accountability mechanisms in the police service at the moment where district officers are likely to get the most kudos for having a big investigative task force out there and taking out a couple of burglars or taking out a couple of armed robbers but they don't get no kudos at all for getting on the front foot and having proactive things going to cut that
off at the pass. And that's the thing, we need to change the reward system, not the
reward system but the recognition system, the reporting system so the accountability
systems actually look at what we're doing proactively to solve the problem, not
reactively. (C.O.)

Another officer referred to this imbalance between responsibility and accountability for operational
outcomes without the necessary control over resource levels in the following terms:

But I also felt that it was a huge ask being placed upon district officers. You know the
devolvement seemed to be a devolvement more of responsibility and accountability
rather than the resources to support that role. And the amount of direct support the
officer in charge of the district had I think left a bit to be desired. (C.O.)

This is viewed as a departure from the intended structure that the re-organization of the Service
was designed to achieve. An officer referred to this aspect in the following way:

Well, what's happened with the decision-making is, we're making more decisions under
HR issues but they haven't given us any personnel to do that. This firearms is an
example, they've, instead of having to go from one head of the Firearms Branch it's now
come to the superintendent to make that decision. But we had no extra resources to fund
that. Part of, there is a devolution project says that nothing can be devolved without the
necessary people to go with it. But that's never been adhered to. (C.O.)

A senior officer commented on the proliferation of agencies that play a role in monitoring the
activities of police officers and the amount of work entailed in reporting to these bodies:
There are departments that are set up just to look at policing and crime research and so on. That's sort of a growth industry. And we're becoming the subject of requests from those departments. Not on a regular basis I suppose but from time to time. For example the Crime Research Unit of the Western Australian University requires us to forward to them details of harm, self-harm and self-harm attempts in custody. And it's only a minor thing that we've got to provide them with that but it's just one more little demand upon us.

These comments from a senior officer about the amount of time that members of the Police Service spend in responding to the demands of outside agencies highlight one problem. Another area of concern is the impact that this situation has on the attitudes of junior members who are constantly faced with the potential problem of having to justify their actions after the event to inquirers who are not always sympathetic to their circumstances.

An officer commented:

I think that again the younger members, not the younger, the newer members of the service are more inclined to be older when they join, less likely influenced by peers, less entrenched from an early age in bad cultures, or less likely to become entrenched in any adverse cultural traits. I think that they're more intelligent, likely to think through the consequences of their actions. And I think also that generally the chances of being held accountable for the actions are increased. I think that the presence of other regulatory bodies, better supervisors, more scrutinizing in court procedures tend to weigh more heavily on the decision making process of the individual. (C.O.).

The existence of this need for accountability by younger officers is seen as having an impact on the way that they approach their duties. For example, one officer commented:
I think that a creative approach is very much going to have to be for a lot of us in this organization a learned process, a trusting thing. People have gotta, we've gotta turn around and, as far as the accountability side of things go, and say we will, we know you will make mistakes, we will trust you to make mistakes and we will be tolerant. And I think it's that tolerance, or the fear of making mistakes is stopping the creative processes in this organization. (C.O.)

And further:

I think that, on the upside I think the organization has had accountability like we've never had before I believe, and that accountability is very transparent and I believe the public would say that the West Australian Police Service, and as is indicated by the various public surveys that we do see, community surveys, that accountability in this organization is very very effective. However, on the down side there is, in my view, little doubt that accountability has also created a fear. Particularly, what I have seen, particularly crime investigators, young detectives who where once would have been encouraged or felt that the organization was accepting of the strategies and methodologies they would utilise to gain convictions. And I'm not talking illegal activities but certainly pushing the legal boundaries when obtaining evidence, particularly confessional evidence, where these days they're very, well not so inclined to, well disinclined to do so because of the fear of being investigated and having complaints made against them and the outcome, the possible outcomes of those investigations so I think in many ways I think we have a situation where a lot of very good young crime fighters, if I can use that term, are em, have been hindered by the accountability network that now exists in this organization. (C.O.)
Here again are references to the sense of fear created in the minds of officers in relation to carrying out their duties.

Another officer considered the consequences of accountability in relation to the manner in which any inquiry into a member’s conduct would be handled after the event:

Yeah, that’s a good point. I see where you’re coming from and I agree that they are certainly going to have to make judgements and take a punt, take the risk that that judgement is right and then proceed in that direction. And then if you end up with a suicide or something like that coming from that schmazzle, not related to what the police were doing but if you’ve made the wrong call, again, then they’re gonna be held accountable and judged, as we’ve started off with. And probably insufficient consideration will be given to the scenario as the copper was confronted with it. So it could be more pressure on our troops. (C.O.)

This officer made the following observation about the potential consequences for officers of this need to be accountable:

He needs to be able to make a decision and say that’s it, that’s the way we’re going to go. If he, he has to be accountable for what he does but, the thing that worries me, and I suppose to illustrate that, we judge a person and sometimes we take six months to judge a person on a decision that he had thirty seconds to make. And, that’s absolute garbage as far as I’m concerned. That’s exactly the same as what the courts do when you go into court you get questioned on every decision that you made, every move that you made and no account is, by the people sitting in the armchairs in hindsight, no thought is given to the immediate circumstances that precipitated that decision and they’re so accountable
that if you make a blue you can do your job even though you're under extreme pressure, provocation, frustration and all of those things. (C.O.)

In relation to this need for accountability and the interaction with other aspects of the daily working lives of officers at various levels within the Service, a fairly senior member made the following observations:

Well, with the accountability we are much more responsible for our actions and we have to be in the position to be able to stand up and justify why we take actions and accept the consequences of those. And that's purely a lot more because of the outside watchdog organizations that are checking on us. Also particularly with commissioned ranks we're all on contracts now. So you are judged there, that's where the accountability you can, you will now live and die by your decisions whereas in the past, under some of the very old systems well, just the mates club looked after everybody.' (C.O.)

And further:

Well starting very early in your new police practices, you have a look at the young copper at the station, arrests, actions that they take, the way that they deal with the public is held up and much more publicly accountable in the fact that the media love stories about coppers, they love good stories but jeez they can make a good story out of adverse ones with the publicity. Now, little incidents that might seem insignificant to the copper there are ones that have major repercussions on the organization. That's where, that young copper's accountable but on top of it his supervisor going right through the chain, why aren't we training them or why wasn't there sufficient supervision, that's a area of accountability there that goes through the mind. The other one that, say for myself, management issues and that, a lot more with operational areas that, why haven't you got
your staffing levels and numbers and your availability to be able to deal with crime rates, reduce them. (C.O.)

This officer made the observation that the process of making police officers accept the notion of accountability commences very early on in their careers and takes an extreme form:

Well I think it's not just that. Take it a step even further that the young conny's coming out of the Academy, it's absolutely drummed into them, their need to be accountable and not to be corrupt or do anything wrong. It's absolutely, it's like they're brainwashed that if they do anything wrong they'll be crucified. (C.O.)

This process continues when officers commence full time duty and is reinforced by actions taken by the Police Service of Western Australia against those who fail to observe the rules regarding accountability for their actions. This requirement for an almost pedantic attention to detail and the consequences of any deviations were the subject of one officer's observations. He said:

But we're made accountable for the most ridiculous things. Accountability, it seems to be it's accountability for accountability's sake. They're not, well I guess they are important things but it seems they've taken this accountability to ridiculous extremes. Obviously you've gotta be accountable for large sums of money, for policy, things like that but I mean they're, a lot of people at the moment are getting into trouble simply for not crossing 'i's and dotting 't's which, in reality, they don't have time to do cause things are pretty hectic out there. But we tend to give these people a fair old whack for doing silly things. (Sgt.)

In his book about what he terms the decay of public language, Watson (2004, p. 96) describes how modern terminology has clouded the true meaning of many concepts that people are required
to espouse and the consequences of this process. In relation to the term accountability Watson observes:

That so long as it runs on the principle of accountability, a business or department is unlikely to profess, practice or even know anything about imagination, courage, initiative, reflection or generosity (to name just a few), which have been priceless human qualities until now and great aids to getting at the truth.

This close scrutiny is not simply limited to on-duty behaviour but has been widened to include actions taken as private citizens. One officer observed:

Yeah well I think the accountabilities on people nowadays, I mean they’re even going down to your personal behaviour and things off duty, so accountability, work-wise, we’ll do it this way. Workwise the courts, everyone are getting more demanding, the public are getting more demanding of, they want results from people. So the accountability in doing our jobs, you know we’ve gotta meet certain standards and those standards are getting higher and higher particularly in court so we’re more accountable to do our job correctly. Secondly our professional standards, I think that the demands placed on police officers are probably extreme, their behaviour. I mean you know under our regulations you can be out having a couple of beers and might be telling a joke and someone might swear or something. That behaviour is seen to be inappropriate unethical behaviour or something like that. Now, we’ve gotta remember I think what’s probably hasn’t, we’re human beings, we’re people, we’ve got the same sense of humour, feelings, needs, requirements of everyone in the community. Okay by the virtue, by virtue of our position we should be seen to be decent people but not fucking angels. (C.O.)
Some members believe that this emphasis on accountability has an adverse impact on the outlook of junior officers. This is exemplified by the following comment in relation to the question as to whether or not this was counter-productive to the willingness of officers to perform their duty:

*In some respect, because there’s so much emphasis placed on accountability, there’s a lot of pressure on the younger guys and I think some of them are really, you know, shit, do I do this, do I don’t or, you know, what do I do here sort of thing, you know what I mean.* (Sgt.)

It seems clear that the consequences of a strict regime of accountability are potentially very serious for any junior officer who is deemed to have behaved inappropriately. But it also seems clear that officers can deal with this by using their discretion to avoid involvement in any delicate situation. In this manner they are able to exert a degree of control over their environment.

Commissioned officers and sergeants performing administrative roles cannot so easily use such avoidance mechanisms because of their higher profile within the system. In this sense they are more vulnerable and must take the risk of unpleasant consequences more often than the junior ranks. They must resort to different tactics such as those mentioned above that involve exerting control over those junior officers around them.

In relation to the impact of this approach on the outlook and performance of junior members one officer made the following observations:

*With regard to Delta I imagine this is. The main area of impact I find in my position here is that the accountability now that we’re required to have with regard to all our duties, both on the road and off the road, have caused considerable increase in the paper work. It’s also increased the problems encountered by the junior officers in that they realise now*
that for any reason be it minor, whatever, a person will complain about them. The complaint will be accepted either by the Police Department or by the Ombudsman's Office, as a legitimate complaint, it then has three processes which it can undergo. It can be an Internal Investigation file straight from their office, they do it, it can be one of the new local resolution files or it can be an infringement adjudication file. Either way, while that file is being assessed, investigated whatever, that officer is literally non-operational because of the problems he has in concentrating on his duties. Again, as supervisor it also comes back on me, that if it's a resolution file or an infringement adjudication file, I am the officer that investigates it, I investigate my own staff member. I assess the situation, I make a decision, that decision is then forwarded to the necessary sections, most of the time it goes through the district officer. If the person who has made the complaint feels aggrieved by the way I've conducted the inquiry he then can make a complaint direct to the Ombudsman which then puts me under the microscope for an investigation with regard to my investigation manner. If it is found to be in any way lacking I then find myself on the receiving end of an inquiry. Now these problems, this one particular problem impacts incredibly on a traffic officer because we have so many contacts a day and we stop every sort of person known. (Sgt.)

The application of this concept of accountability and the detrimental consequences arising are not limited to policing but affect judges, teachers and social workers. But although members of these groups are facing similar issues, unlike police officers, they are taking a more active stand in warning that such constant criticism undermines their role in society.

Summary

Accountability has become a fundamental aspect of the official ethos of the Police Service of Western Australia. In the official literature it is viewed as a necessary aspect of a responsible
approach to the use of public assets and the exercise of the considerable power and authority that resides with police by virtue of their office and duties.

Senior police officers interviewed for this research appeared to be at ease with the concept as it was simply a matter of openly describing how they go about the business of policing. In many instances this simply means stating the official policy in relation to various matters. In the majority of cases these senior officers have time to consider their position and response before committing themselves. Their own actions are not very often under scrutiny but they may have to account for those of junior personnel.

The junior ranked operational officers have a different interpretation of the concept and how the requirement for accountability impacts on them. Their practical view is that any action taken by them can be subject to critical review after the event as the result of a complaint lodged with any one or more of the multitude of investigative bodies with the role of examining such occurrences.

It is clear from the comments recorded that the imposition of strict methods of accountability has placed a great burden on police officers at many levels within the organization. They are constantly open to the demands of a great variety of people and agencies in relation to explaining why a certain action was or was not taken.

Most, if not all, of these demands for explanations arise after the event in question. They are frequently contingent upon a complaint being received about some aspect of the actions of police. They are often made by powerful organizations on behalf of individuals who were aggrieved about something even before the police officer became involved. Their view of the world is often not improved by an outcome that they are disinclined to accept and for which they frequently blame
the officer involved. These factors add another dimension to the negative and critical environment that police work in and contribute to a general atmosphere of unease.

It appears that many officers deal with the tensions created by adopting techniques that are essentially designed to either avoid dealing fully with the kinds of situations that experience tells them are potentially dangerous or in supervising/restricting the actions of others in order to preserve some degree of control. This view of accountability is detrimental to the creation of a problem solving approach to the tasks that police officers are frequently called upon to perform.

The founder of problem solving policing, Herman Goldstein (1990), provides a useful description of this situation. He makes the point that society must accept the need for police to take risks when making decisions about complex issues and that they are not infallible in this task. In his view, too much of what police do is designed not with a primary focus on effectiveness, but rather to justify their actions if called upon to do so.

The desire to be able to justify and provide a legal basis for an action, sometimes even after the action is taken, gets in the way of being effective. As Goldstein (p. 48) remarks, this is accountability run amok.

3.2.6 Scrutiny

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (p. 1289) defines scrutiny as “critical observation or examination.” In the same work one definition of the word critical is given as ‘expressing adverse or disapproving comments or judgements’.

A number of the officers interviewed for this research referred to such a regime of scrutiny that pervades much inquiry into the conduct of police officers.
In speaking about the origins of this approach one officer referred to the new Delta philosophy:

Well, it’s been pushed. I mean it’s one of those accountability things, it rolls right along with Delta, that we’re look at us, we’re an open and accountable organization. And we’ve actively encouraged, we actually produce brochures telling people how to complain against us. I mean is that right or is that wrong, I don’t know. I guess we are the most accountable organization in this State I’d say, without doubt. Whether that’s a good thing or a bad thing I don’t know. Maybe it’s not such a bad thing but it does create this problem where we get these spurious complaints coming in all the time. (Sgt.)

In relation to the impact of this approach another officer stated:

Well obviously being under scrutiny, anybody that’s under scrutiny to the extent that we are, I mean it’s got to have some effect on, for instance, on their thinking. And on how they perform their task because at the back of their mind will be not only must I do this job properly but I must also make sure that anybody who comes behind me to review what I’ve done won’t have any complaints against me. So I mean, I think we’re all aware that the most successful investigators or police officers we’ve ever had have been the entrepreneurial police officers who are willing to push the envelope of, I’m not talking about doing anything illegal but we, I personally was involved in an investigation recently where a fellow who was involved with the Wood’s Royal Commission told us to be entrepreneurial because that’s what’s lacking in a lot of police forces around Australia today. Probably because of the scrutiny we’re under, we’ve become less entrepreneurial, less committed perhaps because we’re more concerned about whose looking over our shoulder and what’s going to happen next. (Sgt.)
There is mention here of the element of uncertainty about outcomes that attends much activity that
police engage in. This officer was of the view that the widespread existence of this aspect of the
organization's culture had arisen in spite of the Delta reforms and could be managed by senior
officers:

Oh yes, it's right through the organization. Again, as I said before this thing filters down. The
mistakes that the people here make sort of, and there's an awful lack of
communication despite what the rhetoric that you hear with the Delta business and all the
rest of it, there's still a huge lack of communication. As I say the impact of Delta on the
fellas on the street is probably minimal. But I see that as a perception of constant scrutiny
affecting your work performance as a management issue that could be addressed by the
supervisors out at the various stations and squads and what have you. (Sgt.)

And further:

I don't know, that's probably similar to this perception that we'd spoke about earlier where
the perception that you're under constant scrutiny is going to affect your work
performance. I mean if that's true, and as I said earlier I only get this feedback not from
firsthand knowledge but from other people, but if that's true surely to Christ a lot of the
managers out there would have realised this by now and have tried to address the
problem, tried to address the problem with the Executive. (Sgt.)

This member makes reference here to the perception among police officers that this element of
scrutiny is constant.

In relation to a cause for the existence of such an approach this officer referred to the perceived
intolerance of the organization with respect to mistakes made by officers:
Yeah, as an organization we’ve never let our people make mistakes in the past. This is where a lot of the perception of Internal Investigations, or Internal Affairs, comes from. In the past we’ve never allowed our people to make mistakes… And this reflects through the organization, we’ve never allowed ourselves to make mistakes. Why, I don’t know. It’s probably a deep-seated cultural thing. I don’t know, but I think this is where a lot of this attitude stems from. This perception that we’re out there to give people a whack, to catch hold of them doing something wrong and give them a bit of a whack under the ear. I don’t know. (Sgt.)

A senior officer expressed concerns about the range of agencies that spend their time overseeing the activities of police officers and the consequences of this concentration on scrutiny:

In this particular role that I’ve got here I suppose yeah I mean I could talk where I’ve been before but, or I could talk generally, but I think in the role that I’ve got here at the moment somehow or other we’ve got to become less accountable to special interest groups whether they’re government or otherwise as far as our role is concerned. We are becoming very subservient to other government departments and instrumentalities and special interest groups such as the Deaths In Custody Watch Committee, The Ombudsman, the A.C.C. and so on. All of these people who are watching over our shoulder are contributing to the amount of paperwork that is being generated. (C.O.)

This officer refers here to police being “subservient” to the many other organizations that monitor their conduct. This can also be described as a lack of power and autonomy on the part of an agency that many traditionally viewed as being in control of a range of matters affecting themselves and society.
Further on this officer states:

And all of that attention that we've got to give to them and to their letters and their files and their complaints and so on, is just taking away our ability to do the core business of policing….And there are no doubt, in other parts of the police service there are other interest groups and agencies which are placing demands upon the police service. And for some reason we just seem to give in too easily to these demands in the interests of, supposedly, open and accountable. And willing to provide our customers, i.e. anybody in the community, with anything that they virtually request. I think we've got to be prepared to stand up, be a bit more firm and say no more often in the interests of getting back and spending our time on our core business. (C.O.)

Here again is a reference to the need to ‘stand up, be a bit firmer and say no’ with the inference that the organization lacks power over its own affairs.

This officer expressed very strong views about the motives of the other agencies that monitor the activities of police officers:

And they're virtually growing and living off our back, the Ombudsman and the A.C.C. They've got to find fault within the Police Department to justify their existence. And I find it quite abhorrent some of the things that are being criticized by the Ombudsman’s office for example, some ridiculous things that they are calling upon us to account for. A police officer tells a lie for the sake of saving embarrassment for example and now our professionalism is being questioned because of that. And it just amazes me that we're even answerable to anybody for such stupid things. (C.O.)
This proliferation of bodies with a charter to investigate the police would be well known to the majority of police officers. Another officer expanded his criticism about the level of impact that this attention to accountability has created beyond the effect that it has on an individual constable:

Accountability, since Delta was brought into our particular employment or our particular service, accountability was one of the main areas of concern of the government. I think that the people thought that we were not accountable for what we did, we were let loose and it’s been in probably since then, well since then. And Delta was brought into being. It has impacted heavily upon us because not only now are you required to do an extremely difficult job under extremely difficult circumstances but now you have to have in the back of your mind that whatever you do can be open to public scrutiny, it can be open to numerous external agencies, the A.C.C, the Ombudsman’s office, Equal Opportunities, Ethnic Affairs, there are a multitude of them. And we are probably the most scrutinized people in the world and it has dramatically impacted upon the patrol methods of this state. It has caused an enormous problem that I don’t think the police hierarchy are even interested in listening, I don’t think. (Sgt).

This quote contains further references to several factors of importance. There is the uncertainty created by the realisation, ‘in the back of your mind’ regarding scrutiny of officers’ actions after the event, the multiplicity of agencies with a charter to conduct inquiries into an officer’s conduct, the impact that this situation has on an officer’s willingness to perform his or her duty and the perception that senior managers are avoiding dealing with the situation.

One senior officer described the level of scrutiny as excessive:

It would be part of the over-zealous pursuit that we have today which generated the fear mentality. We have to come back to managing police, not policing them. It’s a matter of
managing police and making supervisors responsible for taking pro-active actions on their
troops and making sure that they stick with that. (C.O.)

Another fairly senior member provided information that he had gained from a junior officer about
the impact of the atmosphere of constant scrutiny on the daily working lives of police officers and
the feeling of unease that is generated:

... the average young copper out there on the street seems to have this idea that his
every move is going to be subject to some scrutiny, whether at the time from the public,
perhaps through the media and through Professional Standards Portfolio, should a
complaint ensue from something he’s done, some judgment he makes. And that must be
a very disconcerting way to go about his business. (Sgt.)

Another aspect that this officer also referred to is the sense of unfairness that junior officers feel in
relation to how they are treated by the system as a result of the automatic assumption of blame
attaching to their conduct:

I think there’s a perception is given the resources they have to work with, the constraints
they have to work under, the stresses they have to work under, to them it seems totally
wrong to judge them after the event. They can accept that, later, they’ve breached this
particular regulation or whatever but they still say it’s unreasonable. And they go away
feeling as if they’re hard done by. Even though they acknowledge the behaviour which
constitutes the offence or whatever, they admit yes I did that, okay, but given the pressure
I was under it wasn’t unreasonable that I made a blue. And what they feel is that Internal
Affairs, Internal Investigations, or even perhaps less so with district supervisors cause
there’s more contact between the two on a regular basis, but we’re certainly seen to be nit
pickers, completely out of touch with what the rest of the police service has to deal with.
(Sgt.)
A junior officer commented about his perception that those who are given the task of examining the conduct of other officers are sometimes motivated by self interest with regard to the manner in which they conduct themselves:

Well they always, they’re not looking for the positive, they’re always looking for the negative. They’re looking for chances to criticise people because it seems to be the more they criticise people the better they are. (Const.)

Another senior member referred to the degree of scrutiny and how it is changing the manner in which officers approach their duties:

So, you know, you could argue on the one hand that we haven’t had enough accountability in the past. That’s why we had to change. But I think the junior people’s perspective of it is still that we’re over scrutinized. To some extent I agree in the sense that I sort of question the numbers of external agencies that do scrutinize us. I think it could do well by perhaps consolidating some of that rather than having a number of different ones. (C.O.)

This concern about exposing oneself to this sort of pressure results in officers avoiding the kinds of activities that can lead to such attention. One senior officer observed:

It’s very unsettling, people feel like someone’s looking at them, checking on them all the time. One particular detective up at (country town) hasn’t had an arrest this year. (C.O.)

Here again this officer’s observations highlight the aspect of scrutiny being seen as constant.
This officer went on to say:

*W.B. Are you saying that people are inhibited from performing a range of functions?*

They are, they definitely are, not that they are doing anything illegal in the first place but they go to situations and start wondering whether they are being set up at all… Coppers are genuinely frightened that they are getting set up or that later on people with hindsight and the time to look at situations away from the urgency of a matter make decisions that are based on non-operational knowledge. (C.O.)

A fairly junior ranked police officer made comments that seem to encapsulate most of the above sentiments with regard to this scrutiny and the perception of the possible consequences for officers who have their actions examined:

*I think we should, more discretion should rest with the police officer, as to how he conducts his duties. I mean obviously there have to be some controls on, on people but I think we're in a situation nowadays were there is that many controls and that many policies and things that you have to note and know about and know this and know that that it's just, it's impossible to know them all, impossible to know them all but they're all in place there so if you do happen to make a mistake they've got something to hang you with.*

*W.B. What do you mean by or who do you mean by ‘They?’ in relation to that sort of activity?*

*Em, our scrutinizers, Internal Investigations, The A.C.C., The Ombudsman.*
W.B. Right, so how do police officers deal with the existence of those restrictions?

From my experience, by and large, to get the job done, they, we've cut corners. Cut corners or disregarded things that are just ludicrously stupid.

W.B. Is there, in this day and age today, is that still done as much as it used to be by police officers?

No, no because the end result or the consequences of doing that now are, are going to land you without a job at the very least, disciplined most likely, and, at the very worst case scenario, criminally charged before a court. (Const.)

Although a number of the officers interviewed for this research considered that police officers were more intensively scrutinized than other members of society it appears that the members of other occupations are also coming under similar notice. These include the judiciary, teachers and social workers.

This process is being criticised by senior members of those other professions because of the likelihood of improper interference with their independence and effective functioning. For example, Meertens (1998) reported on the views of the Western Australian Chief Justice, Mr David Malcolm. The Chief Justice asserted that the media's aggressive attitude toward judges and the decisions that they make is endangering the independence of the judiciary. It is also making the task of striking a balance between independence and accountability more difficult.

In relation to another profession, Meemeduma (1998) spoke out against the growing practice of representing social workers as being out of control, unaccountable pariahs of social ills who were feeding on the social distress of society. Dr. Pauline Meemeduma, Associate Professor of Social
Work at Edith Cowan University in Perth, states her opinion that challenges that pillory social workers can only lead to:

paralysed practice, tunnelled and restrictive in its response, guided more by what critics may say than any creative response to the situation. (p. 2)

Summary

Within the context of the organizational environment of the Police Service this concept is an important link between the categories of accountability and the blame culture. This is in the sense that accountability without close scrutiny would be unlikely to result in adverse outcomes. Similarly, scrutiny in the absence of an overly critical approach is less likely to result in the attribution of fault to an officer for a particular outcome. When these factors operate together they create an environment where officers believe that their every action is open to question in an atmosphere where those carrying out any evaluation of their conduct are biased against them and too ready to attribute blame to them. The existence of this element adds a further dimension to an organizational climate that is likely to detract from an uninhibited approach to developing solutions to problems.

The comments of the interviewees contained in this section show clearly that many officers conduct themselves with one eye constantly looking over their shoulder in an attempt to guard against any criticism of their actions. This results in many officers performing their duties in a manner that is viewed as less than vigorous and as being detrimental to effective policing.

The officers interviewed made many references to the consequences of this overly critical approach that is applied to any examination of an officer's conduct. They believe that it is creating fear and a lack of interest in frontline policing, excessive work pressures especially on junior
officers and an excessive and unbalanced degree of time and attention from experienced senior officers with regard to the investigation of internal complaints at the expense of more serious issues of crime committed against members of the general public.

3.2.7 Blame Culture

The existence of a general climate of blame within the Police Service is well documented. This documentation comes from the Police Service of Western Australia and external sources and supports the views expressed by those officers interviewed for this research.

An example is the report entitled “Police Service of Western Australia Practical Ethics Survey” (1997, p. 31). In the report reference is made to some of the findings of the survey in relation to the fact that minor transgressions of members are dealt with by a punitive disciplinary system rather than by a management response. There is a reference to “the blame culture” under which officers who make honest mistakes are treated no better than those guilty of misconduct and that the Service concentrates on what officers do wrong rather than what they do right.

Other sections of the survey contain a variety of negative views concerning lack of consultation in relation to decisions made that affect staff, the fact that the senior executive level of the Service and management do not explain the reasons behind decisions made and fail to consult with junior officers in relation to matters affecting the running of the organization.

The existence of this “blame culture” is a fundamental and widespread characteristic of police services. An article by Beggs (1999), an English barrister, refers to the “tidal-wave” of litigation facing senior British police officers in relation to operational decisions made by them. This situation is producing what is being termed ‘defensive policing’ throughout Britain.
Jones (2000, p. 19) speaks about the existence of a “punishment culture.” The author stated his view that the result of this approach was that officers failed to use their initiative or work well with senior managers for fear of being punished for honest mistakes.

Police officers from the United Kingdom are subjected to more serious consequences as a result of the existence of this culture of blame. Broughton (2000, p. 21) stated that:

All the time the police officer has to be aware that he or she is alone out there. Every trivial incident, every casual encounter with a member of the public, could contain the seeds that will destroy a police officer's career. To err is human unless you are a police officer when to err is to invite a massive claim for damages.

A sergeant made reference to the analogy of school children in the manner in which superintendents are treated by the upper ranks in situations such as periodical meetings at which they have to report on the performance of their district in relation to a variety of measures such as crime figures. He stated:

To make you understand, to fully understand it, the district officers' meetings each fortnight or weekly, the superintendents go in there, into kindergarten play time, they sit there, they get a flogging from the bosses about what's going wrong in their areas, then the poor buggers try to get up and salvage what pride they've got left and try to get out of it the best way they can I imagine, the poor bastards. I've been to one of them. They are on the hammer, you've done this wrong, you'll get that done wrong, you do, you do it, you do it cause your tenure's up in three years too sport. (Sgt.)
The above viewpoints clearly detail the kinds of actions that the senior management employ to force a kind of compliance from those immediately below them by means of creating fear of a variety of undesirable outcomes for those who fail to toe the line.

This attitude on the part of senior police agency managers appears not to be confined to Western Australia. Bittner (1981, p. 59) referred to the contrast between the expectations about high-ranking military officers as opposed to senior police officers. He observed that:

Because police superiors do not direct the activity of officers in any important sense they are perceived as mere disciplinarians. Not only are they actually available to give help, advice and direction in the handling of difficult work problems, but such a role cannot even be projected for them. Contrary to the army officer who is expected to lead his men into battle, even though he may never have a chance to do it, the analogously ranked police official is someone who can only do a great deal to his subordinates and very little for them. For this reason supervisory personnel are often viewed by the line personnel with distrust and even contempt.

Bradley (1992, p. 135-136) cites Smith and Gray (1983) in relation to problems in police agency human resource management. They refer to a major study of the largest British police force that revealed not so much mismanagement as under-management and a set of managers who could do a lot to their officers and very little for them.

Although the junior ranks, for example, from senior sergeant downwards to constable, are not subjected to the same types of pressures they also suffer from the imposition of a variety of actions that serve to make them subservient and limited in the exercise of a free approach to their
duties. This is the blame culture referred to above. A range of quotes from a small selection of
interviewees will serve to highlight the nature and consequences of these effects.

The organization is viewed as imposing responsibility for outcomes onto officers who have neither
the experience nor the resources to manage these requirements effectively.

One officer commented:

Certainly from where I've been for the last two years I mean there's this whole notion of
accepting responsibility, of having in some cases responsibility thrust upon young people
along with accountability and it seems to me at times that these things we're imposing on
the young people, they don't necessarily have the knowledge or the experience to handle
it quite frankly. (Sgt.)

In relation to the pressures that this approach creates, and the potential for criticism and blame,
one officer observed:

At the end of the day his perception is he can't win. He can only do one of those things all
the time, he tries to prioritize as much as he can but there is no acceptance of his inability,
no matter how hard he tries, to fulfill all those obligations which have been placed upon
him. (Sgt.)

In relation to the willingness of the organization to contemplate that it might be in error on a
particular matter, in this instance customer focus, this officer made the following observation about
how such a situation would be avoided by means of blaming a junior officer for some shortcoming
rather than acknowledging that the organization is at fault:
And there's very much with the words the case of the customer must be correct and the customer’s always right. And I don’t think that’s necessarily the case but in order to promote that theory they are having to place it on individuals the responsibility on individuals rather than the organization. Because if you say the organization is wrong that implies huge problems. It's much easier to say that individual is wrong because then you can say okay let’s work on him. He's a much easier work unit to manage in terms of sending him to another educational course or whatever. But if you were to say he is merely a product of that organization, it’s the organization which has got the thinking wrong, that has huge problems for the organization. (Sgt.)

This officer linked this problem to a shortage of resources and the pressures generated for the lower ranks:

I think there’s a perception is given the resources they have to work with, the constraints they have to work under, the stresses they have to work under, to them it seems totally wrong to judge them after the event. They can accept that, later, they’ve breached this particular regulation or whatever but they still say it’s unreasonable. And they go away feeling as if they’re hard done by. Even though they acknowledge the behaviour, which constitutes the offence or whatever, they admit yes I did that, okay, but given the pressure I was under it wasn’t unreasonable that I made a blue. (Sgt.)

Kennedy (2002) wrote an article that provides a practical example of how this approach has been applied in Western Australia. This article refers to an investigation into allegations of the use of unnecessary force and unbecoming behaviour by a small group of officers policing a large festival in a small country town south of Perth in 2001.
The Police Service had identified the possibility of problems arising at this festival due to the occurrence of a violent confrontation between police and about 40 bikies the previous year. To combat the possibility of a repetition of this situation the department decided to augment the lone officer permanently stationed in the town with five others from the surrounding district. The highest-ranking officer in this group was a constable.

As a result of a complaint concerning the conduct of the police who had been called to control two parties that were getting out of hand, one officer was found guilty of using excessive force when he inappropriately struck a youth on the leg with a baton. This officer, if found guilty, was facing possible demotion, a fine or even dismissal from the Service. Another officer received a formal counselling for ‘chiding a man in the street.’

The inspector in charge of the investigation into this situation stated that there had been a lack of control by the police because there was no officer in charge and the highest-ranking officer present was a constable. The investigating officer stated that a sergeant would accompany the extra police at the next festival.

This is a clear example of the organization failing to properly allocate resources to an identified problem and then blaming the junior officers who ‘allowed’ matters to get out of control. It is also of interest that the organization saw fit to appoint a commissioned officer to investigate the complaint about the police officers but not even a sergeant to control the original problem.

One sergeant expressed his view about the willingness of senior members to accept responsibility when their plans are not successful:
Oh no, then the blame starts, that's been my experience anyway. They say that it was a brilliant plan but the people down the bottom didn't get on board, didn't get on the boat and, as a result, the boat sank, or the boat sailed away. (Sgt.)

Another sergeant offered some more detail about the reactions of senior officers when plans are not successful:

The problem was I was given, I wasn't given an option, I was told, this will happen, this will be done, this will be done. Now, that's fine, if you walked up to me Bill and said, (name), you'll do this and this and this and this, right and we'll do this and we'll achieve this and these are our objectives, this is how we're going to do it, these are our goals, this is how we'll measure them. All right, now, if I do what you say, exactly the way you say it right, and it fucks up, I expect you to take the responsibility.

W.B. Is that what happens?

No.

W.B. What happens?

He comes back and says you're not doing it right, you're not doing it right, something's going wrong, you've gotta alter that, you've gotta, the big catch word is, I can't think of the word they use, there's a word where they say you've gotta be flexible, flexible, flexible, you've gotta have flexible ideas, you've gotta have, each day you got to go through your intelligence, see if it's working. If not, alter, always be flexible, always be aware. They have given us the parameters on how to work, they have told me how to work, they have told me what to do, they have told me how I'm to do it. It's not my bloody fault it doesn't work. My way worked and I'm a sergeant, what would I know. (Sgt.)
One officer commented on the perception that junior members have about the blame oriented approach that the system imposes in relation to the investigation of complaints about decisions that they make. He stated:

_There's a perception of the rank and file that there's a reverse onus on them every time a bloody internal investigation starts, i.e. I'm guilty and I've gotta prove myself innocent._

_(C.O.)_

This view was supported by another commissioned officer that coupled it with a comment about the extra difficulty generated by the possibility of an inquiry disclosing additional breaches of some rule or procedural matter:

_I think that there is an overwhelming level of weight put on the veracity of complainant's statements, unrealistic weight and quite often the inquiry takes the line that it's tantamount for the officer to prove his innocence. And very often also, I'm told and I may be wrong, that while there is an inquiry initially on X that the officers usually come unstuck for an unrelated procedural matter or an unrelated other issue and, at the end of the day, that also leaves the internal investigators in a less than satisfactory light._

_(C.O.)_

In relation to the perception that junior officers have as to the consequences of any such complaints made, this interviewee stated:

_Because as I said they say, they take every time that there is some, see an informal counselling is in fact, is formally recorded although it's an informal counselling. They take it that that admonishment will have a deleterious impact on their career further down the line. And so they don't put themselves in a position where that's going to happen._

_(C.O.)_
The severity of the personal consequences for police officers that have been under investigation is being recognised. Tannenbaum (2000, p. 35) refers to the impact in the following terms:

There is very little doubt that being under investigation is a highly damaging experience to most. Even following resolution, the consequences, even if favourable to the individual, are not happy and most people will do very poorly and do not seem to make a good readjustment if they return to work. Following the onset of investigation the person is in a highly shocked and anxious state and they tend to dwell upon the issues continuously. In a number of cases their lives appear to fall apart very rapidly.

The State Ombudsman conducts many such investigations and that agency has been the subject of criticism in the past by the Western Australia Police Union. The April 2000 issue of the Union’s magazine, W.A. Police News, contained an article about the delays experienced by some officers being investigated. Some matters had been running for periods ranging from 322 days to 680 days. This situation clearly adds to an already stressful situation for those under investigation.

This apparent disregard for the consequences for officers that result from such delays has been referred to by other police agencies. Oppal (1994, I-54) received a submission from The British Columbia Federation of Police Officers asserting that:

Experience has shown that after a member is suspended, it usually takes more than a year to resolve the matter. During this time the member is punished without recourse. Unreasonable suspensions have occurred under this system.
A junior Western Australian police officer with considerable service made the following observations about what appears to be the general approach of those who scrutinize the actions of police officers:

Well what we're constantly doing is reviewing their decisions in a bad light. We've got an incredibly complex system of investigation, internal investigations. We're constantly looking at mistakes people make, or we look at issues looking for mistakes rather than backing up the decisions or working on which decisions are working, which decisions aren't, which decisions are valid, we're constantly saying we want things done in a certain way. So, what you're doing then is taking the core competency, which is the initiative of the police officers on the street, away from them because they would rather do nothing because they're encouraged not to make mistakes. (Const.)

The comment in this quote about ‘they would rather do nothing because they’re encouraged not to make mistakes’ is a reference to the kind of avoidance strategy that officers practise in order to deal with the unpredictable nature of their occupation.

With regard to the question of whether or not this approach is having an impact on the junior ranks this officer stated:

It is, it is rapidly destroying the ability of police officers to do the job which the public expects of them. There's so much review, and the review, like I said I've used the words 'bad light'. They're constantly looking for matters which they can place on police. Whether it be using incorrect methods, they constantly want to criticise police. That appears to be the entire idea of the so-called Professional Standards Portfolio, the A.C.C. and the Ombudsman's Office. It appears to be 'We want to stop police doing their job'. We want
the police to be so lame that they will never, ever get a complaint against them again.
((Const.)

When the system under which people carry out their duties requires them to anticipate problems that might arise as well as react to issues that have already occurred then it could be argued that the scope for being held responsible for undesirable outcomes is enormously widened. Such a situation involving teachers and the Victorian Education Department was reported by Hewitt (2000). In that case the Victorian Supreme Court had awarded a school girl $500,000 in damages on the grounds that teaching staff at her primary school had failed to pick up signs that she was being sexually abused by her stepfather.

The existence of this blame culture in the Police Service has implications for police officers in respect of the implementation of the various forms of community/problem-oriented policing that many police agencies have been adopting for some years now. Bayley and Shearing (1996, p.95) addressed some of the emerging civil legal liability issues in relation to the implementation by police officers of ‘solutions’ to community problems and they observed that:

Community policing is a license for police to intervene in the private life of individuals.

Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990, p. 19) pointed out that:

Allowing officers the freedom to attempt creative solutions to problems carried with it the risk of mistakes that can range from the embarrassing to the disastrous.

Worrall and Marenin (1998, p. 124) describe how this approach to policing expands the roles, duties and expectations about police work held by officers and citizens:
The COP philosophy advocates and expects 'creative risk-taking' by police officers in their problem solving and community protecting and organizing activities. Many officers may possess neither the inclination nor the training to handle new roles and demands. Risk-taking, by its very nature, entails greater chances of failure and exposure to liabilities.

These factors are likely to come into play as a result of what officers actually do. This situation is made more complex again by the possibility of officers being sued in the civil courts by disgruntled members of the public.

Mugford and Mugford (1992, p. 331) dealt with the policing of domestic violence in Australia. They noted that the mid 70s in America saw the issue of not only the first books documenting the worst cases of this admittedly serious problem but also the first cases in which police officers were sued for alleged inaction.

De Lint (1997, pp. 259-260) provides an informative explanation of the way in which the informality of a problem solving approach to policing issues creates the potential for civil litigation against officers. He states that:

In addition to problems of accountability to a political community, there are problems of civil vulnerability when the front-line police officer is conceived in this problem-solver role. Therefore police generalists work informally to be answerable to community problems. As they do so, however, they make themselves vulnerable with every interaction because their particularistic methodologies may not fit standardized formats. The informalism of the problem-solver role leaves police open to civil suits and the problem-solver is right now suffering from libel chill. When answerability is codified in law, law becomes a prime limitation on answerability - it provides the technique to avoid answering. While well
equipped to avoid administrative and criminal sanction, the front-line has few tools to
dodge civil liability when engaged in many kinds of on-the-spot innovations.

Although De Lint asserts above that front-line officers are well equipped to avoid administrative
sanctions in relation to decisions made by them, the data gathered during this research project
would suggest that this is not the case in Western Australia. Indeed, the blame culture, the various
methods of scrutiny applied to officers and the rise in exposure to civil liability contribute to a
working environment that is indeed risky for police officers.

Summary
As a result of the Delta reforms the Police Service of Western Australia is officially structured in a
manner that is designed to distribute responsibility and decision-making downwards through the
ranks. This is intended to facilitate a more efficient organization in which all levels participate in the
process of arriving at optimum solutions to issues.

The reality is that this process is influenced by other factors that render the intention largely
ineffectual. There are several factors operating and what has been called the ‘Blame Culture’ by
many sources is a major issue. These other elements include factors such as junior personnel with
limited experience in relation to such functions and insufficient resources to efficiently carry out
these devolved tasks. As a result of other pressures on senior personnel they are unwilling to
devolve actual power or refrain from blaming junior officers when things go wrong.

This propensity to blame others for outcomes that, in hindsight are unsatisfactory, is a major
feature of the manner in which police organizations function. This arises from the nature of their
activities within society and is worsened by the internal tendency to transfer blame to others that
appears to arise from the interplay of the other elements displayed by the organization such as rank, power, self-interest and the requirement for accountability.

This feature of the organization that arises from the circumstances attending the exercising of the policing function was clearly recognised by Bittner (1980) when he addressed the functions of police in modern society.

Bittner (1980, pp. 8-9) points out that police officers are only opposed to reprehensible interests or at least to interests lacking in proper justification. Even if one were to presume that police officers never err in judging legitimacy it is still the case that generally speaking they can only do something for somebody by proceeding against someone else.

In addition, police officers are expected to take immediate action without the luxury of having the time to consider the deeper issues involved in many such conflicts. Under the dual pressure to ‘be right’ and to ‘do something’ policemen are often in a position that is compromised even before they act. This combination of elements produces a climate of apprehension and a serious lack of willingness on the part of officers at many levels to commit themselves to independently taking meaningful action in response to the many varied issues and problems that arise.

This organizational culture is not conducive to a problem-oriented approach to policing on the part of any level within the Service. As noted by Goldstein (1996, p. 3) this tendency of the system to criticise officers taking action in an attempt to solve problems is linked to their use of discretion. Although there is a widespread belief that police officers, in enforcing the law, do not exercise their discretion, this is not the case in practice. In reality they are expected to perform this function all of the time. If all goes well, they are praised. If things do not proceed according to plan they are subject to being blamed for the consequences of their problem solving endeavours.
3.2.8 Fear

Police agencies in western societies perform their functions for 24 hours each day of the year. Members of the public expect police officers to deal with all manner of events from the most trivial to the most dangerous and life threatening. Furthermore, in calling for assistance from police officers there is an expectation that they will attend to the tasks regardless of the dangers that they might present.

This view of the police is constantly reinforced by the images portrayed by the various media in which police officers are portrayed as fearless crime fighters and agents of social justice and service. The events that occurred in New York on 11th September 2001 provide a vivid example. When the twin towers were collapsing around a panic stricken and fleeing public the only people running towards the area were police and fire brigade officers.

Police officers regularly accept exposure to physical dangers that would deter other citizens from acting. What is noteworthy with regard to this research is that none of the officers interviewed made reference to concerns about the physical dangers of their duties. Therefore it is interesting to discover the nature and extent of the fears that police officers experience in relation to their occupations on a regular basis. As will be seen these feelings affect officers at all ranks surveyed and have a major impact on their attitudes to their occupation.

The police department exists to service the needs of the public and members are required to respond to requests for assistance in relation to a variety of situations. Many junior officers feel serious concern about any such involvement because of the potential for unfavourable outcomes. This attitude creates an atmosphere in which officers are reluctant to approach tasks in a free and open manner.
For example:

Yeah, I know exactly where you’re coming from and it’s a reality and it’s always been a sore you know and the argument has been that you know, the bloke doing the work’s going to get complaints and the bloke not doing anything is not going to get em, he shouldn’t get em. And it has become a tactic. (C.O.)

Another officer described the changes that have occurred as a result of this sense of apprehension that exists about potential complaints and how officers are less robust in pursuing their duties:

I would say it’s had a dramatic effect on police officers doing their job because we’ve seen many many instances where blokes have been charged purely for doing their job and there’s never been a conviction laid and so it I suppose it breeds the, well not mentality, it’s there, so I don’t want to get myself into trouble so I’m not going to put in the hard yards. (C.O.)

There is a reference here both to the widely held perception that officers conducting internal investigations prefer charges against members almost as an easy way to deal with complaints lodged and also the lack of success in these actions. As a result police officers’ self interest can intervene between their sense of duty and their desire to avoid the stress that accompanies complaints about their work performance.

This officer explained further that:

And, whereas before there might have been some short cuts or innovative things done to produce the results for society, nowadays it would be the police that would be risking their freedom by pursuing those sort of moves. (C.O.)
Another officer described the link between the review mechanisms that are now firmly in place and the attitude of officers in relation to their duties:

*W.B.* They become what, very guarded about how they do things?

*Reserved, yeah, I don’t say they neglect their duty but just, maybe they don’t, they’re not as forceful in the way they police a situation as they would be if it wasn’t for that.* (C.O.)

This wariness about the internal review process is believed to be having a significant impact on officers’ attitudes and willingness to engage in their duties. One senior officer commented:

*Coppers are genuinely frightened that they are getting set up or that later on people with hindsight and the time to look at situations away from the urgency of a matter make decisions that are based on non-operational knowledge.* (C.O)

And further on this officer stated:

*…and it is an impact on some coppers in the fact that they are frightened to do their job because they think they’ll get pinched.* (C.O.)

This reluctance of the rank and file to become involved in dealing with criminals is clearly seen as a consequence of the existence of the various measures that have been introduced to combat real or perceived corruption by police officers.

The same situation has developed within the ranks of the New South Wales Police Force who have come under even more intense scrutiny over the years due to a much higher level of proven
corruption. Martin (1998) referred to the detrimental consequences for crime fighting in that state due to the pressures that are now placed on officers within that organization. In the New South Wales Police Force it is said that officers opt to take a minimalist stance rather than be effective crime-fighters, that commanders do not want to be told about problems in order that they can avoid getting into trouble and that junior officers avoid contact with the public for fear of the inevitable lodgement of a complaint about the officer's conduct. As one officer remarked, “If you don't do anything you can't get into trouble.”

The consequence of these developments is large-scale resignations of the Force's most experienced officers and an escalating crime rate.

The undesirable consequences of this perception of the potential for things to go wrong was described by another officer in the following terms:

> What I think today is that the morale level is so low that these people just don't give a stuff any more. All they want to do is get through their eight hours with the minimum amount of fuss. The potential for getting into trouble I believe is a great deterrent to people doing their jobs. I hear all the time that the hierarchy say if you're doing the right thing and you get yourself mixed up into a little bit of strife, as long as you've been acting correctly and trying to do the right thing we'll support you. Well I hear that but I don't see that and I see a lot of people coming to grief or getting grief put on them for stupid things. (Sgt.)

This theme of getting through the day with the minimum amount of fuss is one that recurs frequently and will be detailed in further sections about the coping mechanisms that officers adopt.

A more senior officer spoke about the fear engendered by the existence of the various investigative agencies and the impact on work practices:
Look, I don’t think there’s any doubt that the attitude that the existence of the A.C.C., the Ombudsman and the determination by I.I.B. and I.I.U. to have every little stone overturned to get to the bottom of something has put the fear of Christ into people. And they’re not working to capacity. We are not locking up anywhere near the number of crooks that this agency used to arrest. Because people aren’t prepared to go beyond the line ever so slightly or even to do their job completely for fear of coming unstuck. (C.O.)

There is also a perception that any transgression may result in long-term damage to an officer’s career. One senior member made the following observation in relation to this issue:

However, people perceive that that is not happening, that even an informal counselling, as minor as that might be to you and me, to a young police officer that is a kick in the guts to them and, although it goes no further, they take that as a black mark on their record and the perception is that my career is gone because I’ve been informally counselled. And there are certainly more informal counselling over the last three or four years, and counselling generally, than there ever has been in the past. (C.O.)

A more senior member gave a practical example of the self-protective behaviour that the current system of internal investigation induces in officers. He observed:

Three significant issues that occurred in this District where constables in one case told lies out of fear. They did the right thing, they were so frightened by the time they’d been spoken to by their fellow officers, they then went and told lies when they had no reason to and they found themselves in trouble. So I put a report up expressing my concern that there is a wide held view, and I do believe that to be the case, that officers are of the view they will be charged if there is any opportunity to charge them with a disciplinary matter. And I believe that that is very sad because they should look upon internal investigators
with great confidence knowing that if there is an allegation that it will be seen, walked
through and looked at, treated in a positive way and there will be action taken even or
considered against litigants who are telling lies, false reports etc. (C.O.)

The widespread existence of a concern about the consequences of making what may be viewed
later as unsatisfactory decisions is a feature that appears to be part of the thinking of officers at
many levels throughout the organization. This has generated reluctance on the part of members to
commit themselves to action without seeking approval from above. By this means officers appear
to be trying to avoid criticism.

One senior officer referred to the need to assist junior members to overcome their tendency to
avoid decision making in relation to complex matters:

No, I think the fact that they know that these processes are in place and these people are
in place I don’t think, while they’re mindful of it I don’t think it hinders their decision-
making. I think as I went back before and said about the supervisors, I think where there’s
a tricky one or a difficult one they need to have that line of communications open to their
supervisors and their supervisors have gotta have the ability to be able to provide them
with the right advice when they’re requesting it so, yeah I really think they’ve got the
ability, all of them. It’s just a matter of, you know, making sure that we encourage them
and help them sort of make this decision making process. Make it so that they’re aware
that they can make decisions and this is one of the big things we find that with a lot of
officers they’re not, they don’t make those, you know they’re frightened of making a
decision. Now whether that be because of the fear of making the wrong decision but.
(C.O.)

With regard to the rank level affected by this problem this officer stated:
Oh I think it's probably the younger constable where and I think it's mainly brought about by inexperience, inexperience in decision-making. (C.O.)

Bearing in mind the fact that the majority of the day-to-day decisions in policing are made by "younger constables" because of their numbers and their manner of deployment, this issue should give rise to concern. The inference here is that the problem will be rectified for individual officers by the passage of time as they become more experienced in the making of decisions. This would appear to be based on the assumption that organizational factors are not the cause of this reluctance to commit to a course of action.

This is negated by the comments of other officers regarding the widespread difficulty experienced by more senior members in this regard. It may be that it is exposure to the consequences of taking positive, independent action within the culture of the Police Service that creates this fear about making decisions.

One senior officer expressed the view that, while junior members are quite capable of making decisions, they baulk at carrying out the required action in circumstances and situations that are perceived to have the potential to give rise to questions or complaints about their actions:

No, I think most of them are capable of making decisions, in complicated matters or contentious issues perhaps they baulk and then they seek advice from their senior officer but most of them are pretty good. It only those times where it's a difficult situation or a complex situation where one thing which is very controversial or something like that where they need to make a decision and it does sort of make them a little bit hesitant. (C.O.)
Other members interviewed observed that this reluctance to take the initiative in situations was much more widespread both in terms of the kinds of situations that were perceived by officers as being problematic and the ranks involved. This reluctance manifests itself in various ways. Officers will avoid engaging in a situation that has the potential to cause them difficulties. Once involved in an incident they will deal with it in a manner that older members view as lacking in a positive approach. Worse still there is a fear that many officers will hesitate at a crucial moment when positive action is demanded through the fear that has been generated of unwelcome consequences.

One senior member observed:

Well, I've got a concern that some of the operational officers may, may opt to take an easy path where they would err on the side of caution, undertaking perhaps complex investigations, where they would perhaps feel that they're gonna incur a large amount of criticism or scrutiny or generation of complaints where it all gets a little bit too hard. Ultimately it comes down to the professionalism of that particular officer and the people around as to whether they can carry on and do their job. I think there's an opportunity for those officers to in fact take an early option out because they simply don't want to generate more complaints. And you've got to understand that a number of those complaints are malicious and vindictive and not always legitimate. And officers, perhaps even knowing that they mean be malicious or vindictive complaints may simply say look I don't want to suffer that process again so let's not expose myself to it. (C.O.)

Other officers expressed a much clearer view of the nature and extent of this impact on morale and one officer stated:
I think it's very widespread and I think that is probably one of the greatest reasons why we haven't got officers out there doing the job because a lot of them are too frightened to get involved because it might turn to crap. (Sgt.)

And further:

Now I think a lot of the guys out there at the moment are too frightened to do the job, really too frightened to do the job and as a result of that the morale is absolutely bugger all. People are getting away with absolute bloody murder out there because the coppers aren't out there doing their job and when they are out there they're too frightened to do the job properly. And I think that in total that has just caused an attitudinal shift to say well that's not my job anymore, that's not my function. (Sgt.)

A more senior member asserted that the actions of the Police Service of Western Australia. have generated the atmosphere of fear among officers and that this apprehension has ramifications where officers will suffer from hesitation at crucial moments:

Quite frankly I think we're losing control of the streets. The control of the streets was effective in the eighties although it bred an acceptance of misconduct at the same time. We have to strike a balance. Now we've come away from that and put so much on police officers to a degree where in many cases they are in fear of their own job which affects the way they carry out the functions that they are required to do. (C.O.)

And further:

Well for a start it's probably over zealous policing of the police instead of concentrating on managing the police. We have generated this fear to a degree that it could have serious
ramifications in that people will hesitate to do the job that they know should be done.

(C.O.)

This officer also referred to the factors that have generated this self-protective mode of thinking:

However, I think that the pendulum has swung too far in that people will avoid doing the work, the hard work, for fear of recrimination, criticism, complaints. And they've come away from that so much that their own self-protection becomes the most important thing. Without, we don't have risk takers. Or, we still do have risk takers but there's not so much risk-taking going on and really a good manager needs to have that element of risk taking.

He needs to be able to make a decision and say that's it, that's the way we're going to go.

(C.O.)

In this officer's view supervisors are compounding the problem by passing down to their subordinates this fear of the consequences of complaints and the need to police in a manner that avoids such issues arising:

...they can pass that over zealousness on trying to prevent their people from doing the things that generate complaints because it increases their own work load. So that the same thing is, they're always passing on the fear so that people won't be over zealous or maybe affecting the effectiveness of those people by drilling into them this fear of complaints again. (C.O.)

Another senior officer expressed concern about hesitation by officers at crucial moments:

You've got to have some sort of control, however, I think there's a ways and means of going about it and I must sound awfully negative but I'm not. I think we've come with the heavy handed approach to, as I mentioned to somebody funnily enough even this
morning, we've got staff now that if there's any doubt at all as to what you're doing is right or wrong they'll hesitate. Given a situation perhaps with an armed offender or something equally dangerous that hesitation could be one step removed from them being alive or dead. (C.O.)

Villiotis (2000, p. 35) mentioned the creation of this atmosphere of indecision when faced with life-threatening situations when he observed:

I am just so angry that police feel so far on the back foot in violent confrontations they often place their own safety at risk by trying oleoresin spray on an offender armed with an edged weapon. In many cases it is ineffective.

Finally, in relation to junior officers and their willingness to make decisions and take action a senior officer again made reference to ‘crucifixion’ for transgressions. This comment was coupled with his observation that a majority of officers seeking promotion were opting for non-operational positions:

That tells me that people don’t want to be on the streets.

W.B. Why do you think that is?

Because they, there is a perception that if they’re out there and they make a decision and the decision is found to be wanting or wrong then they’re going to be crucified so they’d rather not, they want the rank, and they want the money but they don’t want the responsibility of being out there on the streets where they can be subjected to, subjected to a complaint and if they are subject to a complaint they’re not going to be supported by the person making the investigation. (C.O.)
There is a fear of accepting responsibility for decisions that generates a willingness to avoid issues that might lead to problems. This is not limited to the lower ranks or officers involved in operational matters. It affects many senior members also as the following comments demonstrate.

A senior officer observed:

I worry about the hesitation I also worry about whether it’s a lack of training or it’s the fear of recrimination that is preventing a lot of our guys from decision making. Very few constables will make decisions without referring it up, very few sergeants now will make decisions without referring it up and I think that in itself shows an increase in insecurity in their own ability to make those decisions. And that if they make a wrong one that it will not be dealt with fairly and it will be, bang, you know, throw the book at them. (C.O.)

This reluctance to make decisions was linked by a junior officer to a lack of leadership, an emphasis on administration of the organization and the perception of constant scrutiny. He describes his observations of how the approach can be observed in the ranks above constable. He commented:

What is my perception is the management structure of the police service, there is more administrative-ship rather than leadership. That is people are taught to be good administrators, to account for their money, to dot their i’s and to cross their tee’s and to be accountable should something go wrong. And that fear of something going wrong is a very real and tangible fear that is at my level. Quite often it will influence a police officers decision when he goes to make a decision, that fear of doing something wrong and then being accountable for it. So I see that there is a, I see that within the management structure there is not enough leadership and the demonstration of good leadership skills.
But there is a lot of demonstration of administrative-ship, this term that I call administrative-ship. (Const.).

As a practical example of how officers at the level of sergeant are adversely affected by these concerns this officer observed:

The lack of leadership in the hierarchy that I have seen is so tangible you can taste it. A sergeant can have, when placed at the scene of a crime, have a fantastic amount of resources available to him, but I've observed in instances where that individual has been reluctant to make the simplest of decisions because he has not had the confidence in his ability to make what is perceived to be the right decision. That indecision at the time has been the downfall of the whole operation because that person now. One of the things that I learnt early as an officer is that it doesn't matter if you make a wrong decision. If you make a decision that's your decision and you stick by it and you justify it afterwards. (Const.)

This officer also stated his views on how the actions of senior officers are affected by similar fears based, in their case, on the existence of contracts:

I think that that particular thing, or that particular set-up for our commissioned officers puts them under a great burden in so far as they may have some skills that will never be utilised because of this fear of being returned to their previous rank. Perhaps I haven't said that very well but they may be influenced to make decisions that they otherwise would not have made because of this fear that they will be returned to their previous rank. Therefore, what it does is that fear has basically stemmed down the hierarchical ladder. If a particular individual is more worried about being accountable because his three year tenure might be up he might make decisions that are politically favourable as opposed to being good leadership, good management decisions. (Const.)
This officer, while only very junior in terms of his years within the Police Service, had many years experience as a commissioned officer in the armed forces and seemed well equipped to make informed comparisons and comments about the differences between the two organizations.

Other officers referred to the apparent concerns that commissioned officers experience and attributed this to the existence of contracts of employment. Others referred to a general climate of insecurity and a culture and practice of ruling by fear that has existed within the Police Service for many years. For example:

I just think they're insecure, I honestly think they're insecure.
W.B. What's the cause of their insecurity?

I don't know, I don't know whether they feel that, obviously I'm not a party to what goes on at these superintendent meetings, but I don't know whether they're afraid of being pilloried in front of their peer group as being somewhat less than effective, costing too much money or being impractical or impolitic or whatever. I really don't know, but it just seems to me that the people who got promoted, who supposedly have all these qualities, don't seem to demonstrate that they have them. And to me that sort of smacks of insecurity and I don't know whether or not the Executive or the Commissioner treats them in any particular fashion if they are seen to have done the wrong thing I don't know. I wouldn't have thought so, not if they had any faith at all in their own management style. But I think the fact that everything we do ends up in the media, because in some respects the culture of us against them has failed to the extent that now it's almost, if something happens it's almost a queue of people waiting to tell the media whatever to actually bring us out into the public arena. And I think the fear of getting your name on the front of the newspaper or something like that has an impact. But that's just speculation on my part. (Sgt.)
Another sergeant described the culture of fear in more forceful terms. In relation to the outlook engendered by the existence of contracts of employment he observed:

*I think a lot of the time they base their decision making on a sheer panic that they're not going to get their bloody three-year contract renewed.* (Sgt.)

In relation to the contrast between decisions based on a problem solving approach to issues as opposed to self-interest this officer commented:

*I imagine because they want to stay another three years at that rank or wanna go a bit higher. I mean the old trick is Bill is people say successful people are people who are imaginative, they're always thinking, they're always planning, they're always looking ahead, right. I don't believe that exists in this police department, this police department is run on fucking fear.*

*W.B. Fear of what?*

*Fear of losing your commission, fear of being fucking sacked, fear of being transferred, they run it on fear. That hasn't changed.*

*W.B. So is it a creative, innovative organization?*

*Nope.* (Sgt.)

The notion that members of a police department are ruled by fear is not unique to Western Australia. For example, Lurigio and Skogan (1994, p. 316) conducted some research into the level
of acceptance of community policing in the Chicago Police and noted the following in relation to officers' views of the world:

Police are particularly dubious about notions such as empowerment and participatory management; in reality their agencies are managed mostly by the threat and fear of punishment from supervisors.

A local officer summed up the status quo in the Police Service in the following terms noting how little things have progressed over the years in terms of labour management:

_I mean the rank structure now is that our police, our service is more divided now. You have now got the NCO's, the non-commissioned ranks, and you've got the commissioned ranks. Now, the way, the way you get people to work, Hitler was very good at it, you divide people, you put the fear of fucking God in them and they do what they're told. They'll drop their mates in if it advances them, right. And if you run anything by fear, if you divide everything and you put fear into those people they've gotta perform._ (Sgt.)

Some sergeants are even more scathing in their criticism of the management philosophy of the organization, again mainly in relation to how superintendents are treated by the upper echelons but also as to how that flows down to those in the lower ranks. One sergeant interviewed described a number of aspects of the control mechanisms that operate and how the fear factor plays a central role:

_Yes, totally because the system we've got here is the more cocky shit you've got on your shoulder, the louder you can shout the more, I mean it hasn't changed here ever. Can you see an assistant commissioner taking any sort of constructive criticism from a sergeant regarding his attitude, manner or anything else. I think he'd probably have him thrown_
down a mineshaft end somewhere. But, no you wouldn’t and as I said before, this job, this service they call it now, still, even worse than it was ten years ago, runs on fear. Fear of being humiliated before your peers, being stripped of your rank, being overlooked for rank, being charged for neglect or whatever, being charged internally, being charged externally. It’s like being back in school isn’t it, you’ve got the headmaster, he’s got the fucking big stick and if you don’t do what he says well fuck you sport. You’ve got all your teachers there, there his superintendents and he’s teaching them. And if they fuck up, or if you fuck up you don’t, and you don’t pass your exams at school and stand up to his appraisal over a period of years at the Education Department you get flogged. (Sgt.)

The reference to a return to schoolboy days is interesting bearing in mind the introductory comments to this section about the fearless crime fighter image and how it contrasts with the reality of the treatment that officers regularly accept within the organization.

Another officer referred to the same style of management but his comments were in relation to the actions of commissioned officers and how they use this tactic to avoid problems arising by controlling their subordinates:

I still think there’s still a degree of, one, not trusting the fellow workers to be able to do the job properly, so there’s a reluctance to let go through fear that well if I do it myself I’m going to do a better job on it. And of course then they overload themselves to where they then experience undue time delays and other constraints or there’s a feeling well I don’t want to devolve it because powers all important. While I’ve got a control I’ve got the power. (C.O.)

In relation to the levels involved this officer commented:
I don’t think. Well I don’t think it’s as much within the N.C.O. ranks, not that I’m aware of, that where an N.C.O. won’t hand down to a constable that role or function to perform and leave them to do it. I think the distrust is definitely within perhaps the older more fixed members of the Service who perhaps just haven’t been used to given that work away.

W.B. What rank level do you think it starts at?
Well again, definitely commissioner on down to probably inspector level.

W.B. Yes, perhaps I’ll re-phrase that, coming up from the bottom at what level do you think it starts to?

I think we’re the rot starts is between your senior sergeant and upwards.

W.B. Right, would that be part of the so-called police culture do you think?

Oh definitely, it’s definitely the culture, it’s definitely as I say it’s a reluctance to let go of what we’ve previously had control of, i.e. if I’m the OIC of a station I’m the OIC because I’ve got all these powers and functions and responsibilities. If I devolve those somebody might look at me sideways and say well what’s justifying your existence, therefore we’re going to reduce your level, so i.e. it becomes a very self protection, I’m going to maintain my little empire, I don’t want to lose it. (C.O.)

Another officer described the motivation for senior managers to impose such strict control over subordinates in the following terms:

But by the same token what that means is senior management have gotta have trust in the people under them and unfortunately they’ve become micro managers, the vast
majority of them have become micro managers because they fear that their promotional prospects or performance appraisal is going to be affected by something a very junior person does which might come unstuck and make a racket, you know.

One final feature of the organizational culture generated by the fear factor is the reluctance of officers to engage in open discussions about problems that they believe exist. In relation to the approach adopted by commissioned officers to any projects or programmes that they have implemented one sergeant made the following observation about the lack of honest evaluation:

So they persist and you know I think in a lot a instances no matter what the cost they will persist with it because they've set it up, it's been their idea, they're a superintendent and the last thing they want to show to people within their region is that they can't do that job properly. So they persist. (Sgt.).

A commissioned officer commented on this aspect and the feeling of vulnerability that was created:

I am aware that a lot of them are very conscious of the fact that they're under contract and to be seen to run over budget, whether it's justified or not, they're very reluctant to do and I feel that it does, it does have that effect in some ways that, put it this way, if it's justified it should be done, then the money can be sorted out later. But there has been some decisions made which really, to me, are a bad decisions and they've been caught about by this fear of upsetting the apple cart and going over budget, or, and I think it is compounded by the fact that they are under contract and they do feel vulnerable. (C.O.)

Another sergeant had similar things to say about the attitude of officers who conduct internal investigations:
I believe that the internal inquiry process at the moment is one that they don’t actually look to finding out what the problem is or whether the person is guilty. It’s been my experience that they are more inclined to lay a charge whether or not that charge is justified they really don’t care. They will lay the charge, let it go to court, if the person is found not guilty they put their hands up and say okay well at least we did our job, we were seen to be doing our job. I think they’re too frightened to stand up and say this a lot of frog shit, we’re not going to get involved in this. (Sgt.)

Although a number of officers expressed the view that distrust of the internal investigative process is widespread it would appear that the official approach is more accepting of the activities of this particular unit. Mendez (1999) reported on three incidents involving officers from the Internal Investigation Branch that gave rise to concerns being reported in the West Australian newspaper. One incident involved officers from this area losing $18000 during an operation and two other matters resulted in unfavourable findings being made the Commissioner of the Industrial Relations Court.

These comments by the Court were to the effect that officers from that Branch lacked integrity and that that unit as a whole appeared to have a poor appreciation of its ethical responsibilities.

In the same edition of the newspaper the Police Commissioner defended the unit by saying that people should ‘Be patient on police blunders’ The Minister for Police supported the Commissioner while the Opposition police spokeswoman said that ‘The Unit had proved itself to adhere to standards no higher than those of the people it was investigating”

With regard to a general reluctance to discuss issues of concern an officer commented:
I think they turn around to them and say don't make waves, don't stand up and say we can't do the job, we can't do this and we can't do that, don't tell the truth because if you do then your contract won't be renewed. And then you'll go back to being one of the rank and file. I think the contract system is bloody stupid and hopeless because the people there will be too frightened to open their mouth and tell it like it is. (Sgt.)

This officer described the reaction of those on contract as follows:

I think they're too frightened, I think they're too frightened to stand up and say this can't go on, this is clearly not working because they are then seen as unfit for command and I think their whole attitude is based on their succession of promotion. They want to go on to the next rank, which a lot of them do, they're not there to do the support function. (Sgt.)

Another sergeant referred to the reaction that would be generated by any officer seeking to highlight problems or generate free and open debate about such issues:

Well I think they know what the problem is I just don't think they know how to deal with it in terms of whether they've got the intestinal fortitude to get up. And it's not, I mean you know the corridors to the commissioner's office are littered with the bodies of messengers who brought the wrong news. I mean they've all been trained too. I mean they've all had to put their hand on their heart and swear allegiance to the system in order to get into those positions and having got there I don't think they're willing to risk them by taking on the Executive, by trying to present a contrary view.

W.B. Why do they think in that way. Firstly, who are we talking about, what level?

Were talking superintendent level at least.
W.B. And up?

. And up.

W.B. Why do they have that outlook and approach?

Well I think it's they're fearful for their own position and I think when it started off they all wanted to be part, and I'll give them their due, they all wanted to be part of a better police service. (Sgt.)

And further:

I think it was fairly well recognised by everybody you just couldn't keep up the way we were going. But once it started to be put into place on the ground, some of it anyway, not all of it but some of it, yeah, okay, it's still feeling good but then they were looking for the results and they weren't there. But by that stage they can't afford to tell the troops, yes it's a great system but it doesn't deliver what the community wants. They are then in a position where they have to say well, okay, this doesn't work boss. But they're not going to be able to do that. (Sgt.)

The extent to which this reluctance spreads throughout the organization can be gauged by the following comments of a senior member:

Assistant commissioners and the deputy commissioner, their contracts run for three years or a certain amount of years, determined years. If their contracts are not renewed they are not dismissed from the police service, they are returned to the rank of constable.

W.B. Which is several below what they're on at the moment obviously.
Exactly. Clearly that says we know we can’t sack you but you’re not about to go back to constable, therefore you’re as good as being sacked. I think that’s a relevant point. I think it’s one point, it’s not the point, it’s one issue. I think that’s an issue therefore they have a greater fear of showing their personality and showing their own flair and imagination and commitment rather than simply forming a very tight board table where we gather around and this and where we have our little lock down and then where from here we’ll all go and tell everyone what to do. So they create a Them and Us immediately. (C.O.)

Finally, the comments of another commissioned officer about the concerns experienced over actions and mistakes are very descriptive of the culture that exists within the Police Service:

W.B. Is there an actual or a fear of blame being allocated to superintendents and inspectors in relation to projects which are abandoned?

Oh of course. I think that goes without saying Bill but it’s, we are still very much in a blame culture, we, and its the fear of being labelled a poor manager because something has failed and that’s, you know if we truly are going to be, in inverted commas, a learning organization, then we’ve gotta be able to be honest enough to put up our hands and say look this hasn’t worked, this hasn’t succeeded for whatever reason. Look at it, evaluate it and move on from there and look at other strategies. But then again it gets back to the original stuff about the creativity and innovation that we allow our people to do. If we, if they feel constrained about not admitting mistakes well how can they be expected to be innovators and creators. (C.O.)

The functions of Police Service of Western Australia have clearly been affected at many levels by these issues. This situation is not unique to Western Australia. The New South Wales Police Force is said to exhibit the same environment with very similar results. An article that appeared in the
West Australian newspaper gave details of a survey that had been conducted in New South Wales about various aspects of its police force, (*Culture led NSW police to fear rank*, 1998).

The results pointed to the existence of a 50 year “culture of punishment” within that organization that lead officers to fear and resent their bosses and fear being charged for honest mistakes. Officers expressed a clear desire to be innovative in their duties but, due to the prevailing management culture, feared punishment for errors made.

Summary

The above quotes provide a very clear insight into this aspect of the culture of the Police Service in this State. As is the case with the other aspects of the organization discussed in this thesis, the construct of fear is interconnected with other factors. This is in the sense both of influencing and in turn being influenced by these other issues. This element of fear is seen to be an all pervading one that is the culmination of the effects of all of the other factors that combine towards making up the organizational environment.

It appears to be the case that officers are fearful of undesirable consequences arising from any one of the full range of duties and functions that they perform on a daily basis at all levels up to and including district superintendents.

Many members of the public would have the clear impression that police work is fundamentally dangerous. The media constantly depict examples of the dangers of this occupation from high-speed pursuits, armed criminals and violent confrontations between the police and offenders. It is of interest to note that none of the officers interviewed referred to any notion of a fear of physical harm relating directly to the duties that they carry out.
Their fears and frustrations are attributable to those elements of their working environment generated by factors such as complaints, the blaming environment and criticism from above for failing to abide by any one of numerous rules and regulations.

This dichotomy between the apparent control that police officers display in the public domain and their subservience to those internal forces that are arrayed against them has been clearly recognised by various commentators on police organizations. For example, Lidgard (1989) is cited by Bayer (1991, p. 95) as stating that:

> It is little wonder that police suffer from stress and low morale when they are regarded as 'god on the street' but at the station are treated like children, and where fear is often the most used 'motivational' tool.

This environment produces a need for officers to take active steps to protect their career from damage and to develop a culture of employing a variety of strategies and tactics that are designed to ensure that an officer survives over a period of years. Such an approach is clearly not conducive to a freethinking and creative approach to the analysis of issues and the implementation of plans based on the solving of problems by police officers.
3.3 WORKING ENVIRONMENT  (Performance Pressure)

3.3.1 Customer Focus

A major feature of the new Delta approach to policing is the emphasis on meeting the needs of that group of people referred to as ‘customers’. This term encompasses a wide range of organizations, sections and individuals both internally and externally. Under this definition police officers are required to consider the consequences of their actions on individual complainants, witnesses, suspects/offenders, other police officers and private and public organizations.

The analysis of the interviews conducted actually reveals that this topic was referred to on fewer occasions than other categories. Although a range of views was expressed in relation to the concept in general terms it would appear that the idea is not an issue of major concern for officers. There is an acceptance among officers that the Police Service of Western Australia does indeed exist to provide a service.

However, a number of those interviewed also made it clear that there is a limit to the degree of devotion to this ideal that can reasonably be expected from officers before they begin to question things.

One officer stated in his opening remarks that this is an important issue for him in relation to policing in his district and that it was linked to the Community Policing ethos. He stated:

Me personally, operationally I think that the issues of importance are our focus on management, and the strategic management, human resource management aspects of our areas of responsibility. I think it’s important, I’m not sure how wide we want to cast this net, certainly those two issues. I think the focus on community policing and problem
oriented policing style is important and is something I have a significant focus on. I think it's important that we have a strong marketing focus of what we do to address realities and perceptions in the community. I think it's important that we, as we do out here, that we have surveys so that we can get direct feedback from the community on their attitudes so that we can police according, adjusting our policing model according to their advice. That we obviously work with the community through our commitment to Safer W.A etc to form stronger strategic partnerships, they're all vital issues, from an operational level. (C.O.)

Another officer acknowledged similar thoughts in relation to the need to obtain the views of the community about policing objectives and priorities and in satisfying those demands. As the following exchange demonstrates this officer's opening comments related directly to customer needs:

Well, being the position where that the way we go about our policing is effective and the community safety that what we do and the way we go about it provides that the community's, ensures that the community is in safe and secure. That is part of our mission statement for the police service is provide a safe and more secure Western Australia or community and I think it's the way in which we go about our business, and particularly as a district officer got to ensure that we use our resources to the maximum benefit of the organization to provide effective policing services, in other words on the enforcement side and also on the community safety side or crime prevention. So effective crime prevention strategies. (C.O.)

This officer accepted that it was his responsibility to determine community needs and to police in accordance with those:
Well community surveys is very important I think but we need to, what we do, one of the big things with community surveys is we need to approach the community and what they think should be in a survey, not what we think. I think what the community thinks that they need to be seeking, seeking out from the other community members as to what they see as effective law enforcement. In other words if you're going to do a survey don't do it from purely from a police point of view of putting the question in, get the community's perception to and the community's ideas of questions that should be asked. (C.O.)

Another officer made the following observations in relation to the need for the Police Service to take account of the wishes of the community when deciding how policing will be carried out:

Yes okay, the needs of the community. I think we have finally come to the reality, from a policing perspective, that we cannot do it all alone. We cannot take a big brother approach and we cannot decide that we are going to police in a certain way. We police with the consent of the community. We reflect what the community requires and community needs is what is identified to us by the community. Now, it is us working very collaboratively and very closely with the community to identify those needs. It's very much a problem identification, problem solution approach collaboratively all the way through. (C.O.)

This officer spoke clearly about the basis for this joint police/community approach to decision making with regard to the role of the Police Service:

Bill, I think we well and truly know that we have a very robust democracy in this country and clearly the community, we are here to meet the community's needs. We do not, we cannot operate in isolation, we should not operate in isolation and we should police with the community's consent. And that is strongly aligned in everything that we do now, the
way we do our business. Particularly with, and I think the Delta reform agenda in Western Australia strongly reflects that.

W.B. Could you just expand on how the Delta Reforms?

Yes, I think the whole ethos of Delta is that, with Regionalisation, it's the local police work with the local community. And that is very very much a strong shift, I believe, away from what we did in the past and that is that the community, the police, are very much in contact with the community and get to understand what the community's needs are. They then have asked the community to take ownership of the problem, with the police, and then together we find the solutions. And it's very very, I think that's one of the successes of Delta, I believe, is that we are probably focusing more than ever on a police/community approach and I think wherever the opportunity arose Commissioner Falconer very much espoused that type of approach. And whether we want to give him credit for that at all, for that, it is very much, in my view, the case. (C.O.)

Although this concept did not occupy the thoughts of those officers interviewed to the same extent as some other topics there were some dissenting views about the use of the term customer. One commissioned officer expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the use of such terminology under delicate circumstances,

Oh there is a difference yeah. I mean, our customers, and I really don't like using the word, because I mean a rape victim is hardly what you'd want to say to my face, you're my customer, but the members of the public who rely upon us for their safety and security, yeah we do need to be able to communicate freely and openly with them and to explain to them why we do things as we do or if we're not doing them why we're not doing them. (C.O.)
In relation to the extent to which the organization itself has adopted the need to apply the customer focus philosophy to its own personnel a commissioned officer commented on the contrast between the treatment of external customers and those employed by the Police Service:

> And I think in that regard that’s the key issue, we’ve done everything for everybody else, we’ve become very customer focused for external customers, we’ve become very much partnership focused but one it comes down to the key people in the organization we’ve become very removed, almost what I say inhumane, and I call our regimental numbers Medicare because that’s how I believe we’re treated, just a number (C.O.)

A non-commissioned officer discussed the issue in more pragmatic terms having consideration to the question about how the concept affects the daily working lives of more junior police officers, the ones more likely to be the subject of internal disciplinary inquiries. He stated:

> …and there weren’t all these competing requirements of you, you know, to be all things to all people, it’s just impossible. And so that I think is, certainly in the metropolitan area in some of the busier stations, a huge problem in terms of the long term motivation of these young people. How long are they going to be able to work under those pressures before either they snap or they decide well there’s gotta be more to life than this and they seek employment elsewhere... (Sgt.)

A number of the above comments refer to the problems that are generated when the organization commits itself and its employees to the provision of a type and level of service that cannot reasonably be met.
Melchers (1993) discusses this type of situation in the context of policing in Canada. In that year a government paper had been issued setting out the future directions for police services in that country. This document emphasized the view that a community-based problem-oriented approach was the only viable philosophy of policing for the coming decades. Concerns were raised about a number of aspects of this approach and in particular, with the problems that arise when police agencies assume too many roles and tasks and, in doing so, fail to meet the expectations of the communities that they are endeavouring to serve.

The point was made that in endeavouring to ensure and consolidate public support, some police organizations have subjected themselves to an unending addition of new interventions - crime prevention units, victim assistance services, community liaison specialists and media relations personnel to name just some. It was argued that this process of superimposing new units on top of previous innovations has created a situation where the basic purpose and responsibilities of the police have been obscured. This process has placed police agencies in a situation in which they are unable to either establish acceptable limits on what their role should be or to satisfy the demands with which they quickly become assailed.

This process results in a deterioration of community/police relations due to the issues of unfulfilled expectations and unmet standards. Melchers asserts that the clientalism of community policing may exacerbate this problem rather than resolve it.

Summary
The majority of government agencies and almost all private enterprises exist to cater for the needs of others who wish to avail themselves of the products and services offered by such organizations. With the inception of the Delta reform agenda in 1996 the Police Service of Western Australia also adopted this approach to the activities involved in policing the community.
Tomaino (2001) addressed the task of creating customer-centred organizations within a policing environment and detailed the considerations that should be taken into account in order to ensure that the approach is successfully implemented. He argued that, despite claims of being ‘customer focused,’ Australian police services treat customers as a unity as opposed to an amalgam of discrete groups and have not clearly set out the desirable elements of a customer–focused organization beyond modest corporate statements, or formulated rigorous indicators allowing for the measurement of success.

Tomaino describes three strategies intended to overcome current deficiencies. These are: defining customer segments, competitive positioning and blue-sky planning, which is the process of identifying, analysing and monitoring the environment for factors likely to impact on service delivery. Inherent within this approach is an acceptance by police organizations that any lapse from the standards promised must be identified and rectified by the organization. If police departments attend to these aspects of their business they can be successful in creating the perception of a truly customer focused organization.

However, Tomaino warns that the culture of many police bureaucracies is characterised by a rather unforgiving attitude towards mistakes made by those officers who have the most frequent contact with customers - the lower ranks.

This observation supports the concerns expressed by the officers interviewed during this research project.

These officers clearly accepted the concept that their purpose was to view members of the general public as their ‘customers’ and treat them accordingly. Notwithstanding this acceptance it seems
that the existence of such a requirement does contribute to working environment pressures for officers at many levels.

There is a view that the rights of officers are secondary to those of the external customers when any dispute or complaint arises. In addition some officers see a danger in expecting members to constantly exhibit a high level of commitment to the seemingly unending demands of a public that has been conditioned to expect that the police will provide the answer to all of their problems.

This situation is compounded when the Police Service of Western Australia itself promises a level and speed of service that officers feel is impossible to supply. In the event that an officer 'fails' to provide a solution that satisfies all of the parties involved he is then very susceptible to a complaint from an unhappy 'customer.'

The definition applied by the Police Service of Western Australia to the term 'customer' is very wide. It encompasses people who make complaints and also the people who are the subject of those complaints.

A great deal of police activity involves making judgements about who is telling the truth in any dispute and then taking action against one party based on this evaluation. This provides fertile ground for complaints to be generated, as the officer involved is unlikely to be able to satisfy both parties. It is frequently the case that neither party is pleased with the outcome and will see the police officer as being to blame for the situation even though it was not of his or her making initially.
3.3.2 Providing a Service

Implicit within this function is the acceptance that the diverse range of communities throughout the State have differing needs and that to effectively cater for these requires a police service with a degree of flexibility that allows local managers to decide how best to tackle their own unique problems.

The Purpose and Direction document acknowledges that to achieve this requires considerable devolution of authority to local managers in relation to deciding priorities and the application of resources. Additionally, this aspect of the Delta approach to policing places heavy emphasis on the effective and efficient delivery of various policing services to the community.

The officers that participated in this research expressed some very strong views in relation to how these concepts are being implemented and the effects of their existence on the actual practice of policing in Western Australia.

The reference to a localised aspect in this instance is a clear reference to devolution of authority down to the District Officer level with regard to policing. In the Western Australian setting this translates, firstly, to officers of superintendent level and then down to sergeants and others ranks who are in charge of police stations and other units.

This second tier of devolution is largely dependant upon the views and wishes of the local superintendent. However, as will have become clear from previous sections of this essay, in practice the local chief of police is often severely limited in his ability to be flexible because of the restrictions and demands placed upon him or her from higher authorities.
In relation to service delivery, it is commonly accepted that policing is a labour intensive public service. Therefore the number of officers available has a major impact on service delivery plans. Additionally, factors such as the range, complexity and volume of tasks that require attention also have an influence.

A commissioned officer gave his views as to what the role of police should be in today's society. In response to an opening question about the role of the Police Service he said:

Well, it might sound like a bit of the old boring chestnut but I think that primarily police have got the responsibility of reducing crime, of maintaining law and order in the community or preventing disorder and preventing death and serious injury on the roads. They're the three main responsibilities that we've got and unfortunately my belief is that too much of our effort and too many of our people are being dragged away from those three core functions and into fields of work which are not related to that and in a proportion which is detrimental to good policing in this State. I see the policing at the moment as one of the few barriers between an out of control crime and disorder rate and it's becoming all the more important that we are as effective as we possibly can be. I don't believe that the Ministry of Justice or the courts are playing their role as they should in dealing with offenders and to a large extent therefore our efforts are wasted efforts. But until the government makes meaningful changes to that end of the justice system we're going to have to hold the line as effectively as we can. (C.O.)

Another commissioned officer commented as follows in relation to the expanding range of services that police are nowadays called upon to provide:

The Police Service, in my view, is trying to do too much alone and even now, in the days of strategic partnerships, I still think we're taking on too many things which aren't the function of police. So I think the other thing that's important is that we actually define, one
who is responsible for doing certain things, but also share the policing function as more of a wider community issue. (C.O.)

These two views relate to the official policy and the extent to which the Police Service of Western Australia is, allegedly, assuming responsibility for this range of tasks. Closely aligned to these comments are those views that officers expressed about the reality of service provision and how this excessive reliance on the Police Service is in fact causing serious consequences for officers.

One officer commented:

> But again generally I think from the Police Service we have given people an expectation of the service they can expect which we have absolutely no hope of delivering. (Sgt.)

And further on this officer stated:

> And it starts there and unfortunately, in terms of what Delta itself, I think it’s selling the wrong thing. I think it’s, they talk about responsibility and whatever, they have a, the organization has a responsibility I think to the public to tell them just what they’re capable of and what they’re not capable of. And that’s not a message which is going out. We’re getting awards for things which don’t mean anything. I mean a prime example, front-page newspaper of a superintendent at a local police office with a crèche. I know the organization, I know that police, the status of the police problems in that area, the crime problems. But if we’re going to make everyone feel better because they think that they got an award for customer satisfaction providing a crèche, when what people want is to be safe in their home and on the street, I think we’ve misjudged what they want. (Sgt.)
And finally, in relation to the need for the Police Service of Western Australia to come to grips with the conflict between the desire for a high level of service delivery and the lack of resources, this officer stated:

The last thing a victim of crime wants to be told is well you ought to join your Neighbourhood Watch. They don't want to join Neighbourhood Watch, that's what they think they've got a police force for. And although we have the duty to make them more aware of how to secure themselves, in some respects I don't think we're ever going to reconcile ourselves to what the public wants unless we're willing to say to them well, what you want we just don't have the resources to give you. (Sgt.)

Kappeler (1993), cited in Worrall and Marenin (1998, pp. 125-126) raises the issue of this mismatch between the level of service promised to the public and that actually delivered when he pointed out that:

One of community policing’s potentially disastrous results is increased claims of police negligent failure to protect. A new emphasis on building ties with community members can result in citizens coming to expect more from their police than the police can reasonably deliver. As citizens come to expect more, they may become prone to misunderstand situations where the police are simply not available to render assistance.

This link between lack of resources and the inability to provide a promised level of service has been considered by many police agencies. The solution is not always seen as simply increasing the number of officers available to deal with public calls for assistance. An improved utilization of resources, based on a problem-oriented policing type analysis of incidents and patterns, promises better results.
For example, Crandon (1996) discusses the views of the Leicestershire Constabulary in Great Britain where problem-oriented procedures were introduced in 1996. The Assistant Chief Constable of that Force, David Coleman, referred to the issues that were considered before implementing this program as follows:

Over the last eight years, in common with most other forces, calls to Leicestershire Police increased by 136 per cent, while resources went up by only 3.5 per cent. In these circumstances it is imperative to make changes. Simply rushing around ever more quickly to give an even more cursory service when members of the public call on us satisfies neither them or us.

The theme of service delivery based on the concepts inherent in well-conducted business enterprises is a view that supports much of the current thinking behind the Police Service of Western Australia’s service delivery aims. The conflict between this economic rationalist approach to government services and the realities of life for police officers today was referred to by a number of officers.
One junior member commented:

Well, it's really politics and an era thing. I mean the nineties is an era of cost cutting, outsourcing and all this sort of jargon that they use which eventually and finally means is that, and what they want is that businesses, or businesses want to operate on less money, on less, more cost effectiveness, they want to be more cost effective. So, they want to pay their staff less, cut their production costs and achieve the same or greater output. And the West Australian Police Department has adopted that sort of business plan mentality and they're trying to achieve that. You know, they're trying to implement that and it's not working because we're not a profit making organization. (Const.)

Other officers referred to the actual lack of service provision. An officer made the following observation:

Well probably the most important thing that I see at the moment is that we keep concentrating on things other than providing the service for which we're employed for in the first place. There is so much concentration on organization, structure, promotion, people building their own careers rather than the organization being about service to the public. We keep looking at placing our own definitions on what constitutes a quality policing service under the definition which they're using for Delta and it seems that it just keeps getting changed depending on what, who's who's currently driving the boat.

W.B. Right, what sort of level does that start at do you thing, in the organization?

It seems to be starting at inspector, superintendent but it's really driven probably at a step higher, commander, AC level. It seems to be everybody applies their own definitions and anybody who doesn't conform with their own or the hierarchies current really expectations
or beliefs or the buzz words which they're currently expounding is ostracized. There's immense political power placed on them, words like 'you're not on board', 'you're a dinosaur', you know 'you're old style policing' and you know they keep using these buzz words. Like the current one is 'intelligence lead policing' prior to that it was 'community policing' or 'local problem solving' and to me all that means is words. When they try and back it up or they try and to articulate it there is no articulation. It is really just words and once you take a different view on what the actual concept is and how to apply it there is nothing but pressure placed upon you to conform with their beliefs.

W.B. Right, when you say 'their' beliefs what sort of level again do you think that starts at?

It seems to be starting around inspector level and getting stronger and stronger as it goes wider. You know with our current promotional system we've gone strictly to a politics based, really, promotion system. The more and more you can convince people that you can use these buzz words and the more and more you comply with the wishes of those above you rather than the actual needs of the public that we're serving the easier it is to be promoted. And there is so many people out there who've, you can see it, their actual views of the world are changing because they just get so focused on this promotion.

(Const.)

This officer makes clear reference to the manner in which the concepts of self-interest and demonstrating compliance with people in positions of power are the primary motivators of many officers rather than the concept of service to the community.

Another officer expressed concern about how the actual function of the Service has changed since he joined. He stated:
Well, I don’t think they’re capable of doing the job that they’re required to do mainly because of the situation that exists at the moment. Perhaps I should say that when I first joined this job I joined it as a career. The main reason that I joined this job was to help and protect the public. I see my role as being not to help and protect the public anymore, my role is basically to tell them to help themselves, or show them the best way that they can help themselves to protect themselves. I think that’s probably about the biggest change that I’ve had. I’ve gotta say that that leaves a nasty taste in my mouth, the fact that I’m unable to do the job that I believe I joined to do. I don’t believe that the police role in society at this particular moment is effective. Most of the people that I deal with, including police officers and outsiders, I think that we’ve lost the plot in being able to do the job that we were actually designed to do. I don’t believe now that we actually enforce the law. We’ve become more of an administrative unit than an enforcement unit. (Sgt.)

And further:

I don’t think that we are actually seen as an enforcement agency anymore. I mean we hear this business about we provide a service but to me the service that we used to provide was one of protection, enforcement. Now the service we seem to provide today is basically a role to tell the people to protect themselves. I constantly hear, police need your help with this, police need your help with that, it’s not our fault that your car is stolen, go out and buy an immobiliser, we can’t do this on our own. Where a lot of that stuff is very relevant, it’s not the way I perceive a police officer should be acting. I believe that we’re out there to do a job not perform a service. We’re there to enforce the rules of society, we’re not out there to perform a public relations exercise. There has to be somebody at the end of the day to say hey, you can’t do that. Society says that that is not good behaviour, we’re not going to stand for that, we’re not gonna let you do that. Now, to me we’ve gone right away from that role and we’ve basically got to the stage now to say well
okay, no it's not a good thing that you break into people's houses but my role is not to
catch you, but my role is to tell the householder buy an alarm system. (Sgt.)

In relation to the need for a business type approach to the provision of policing services an officer commented:

Not that you could call this a business, I mean a lot of people try to work it as a business
but a business, to me, is you know, has a profit and loss. And in a business where you've
got a profit and a loss you're able to try different things because you've gotta get the
customer in. Yes, we have customers but there's no profit and loss, it's all loss. So I don't
really see the concept of running it as a business as such, in the true sense of the word.
(Sgt.)

Further on he states:

I think one girl was in the paper a while back. She was in the house alone, with a baby,
there was a guy trying to break in and it took the coppers about forty minutes to get there
or something. She made a complaint. The bosses in their wisdom get on there and say
well firstly it's up to VKI cause they're the ones that right, but we draw resources from
somewhere else, you know to go and put in that area, if there's an uprising. That's the
biggest load of bullshit out and the general public are starting to know it.

W.B. Why is it bullshit?

Cause they don't have the fucking resources to do it, that's why. (Sgt.)
The comments of this officer also relate to the situation where the upper levels of the police service give explanations for events that avoid getting to grips with the real reasons behind many complaints.

Another member expressed concerns about the fact that the Police Service of Western Australia actively encourages members of the public to complain when officers fail to provide a level of service that is thought satisfactory:

> It's easy for people who perhaps haven't had their complaint satisfied and who have no understanding of the legal pressures on a police officer to make a judgment call or the disciplinary pressures, but if they are not happy with the outcome, regardless of if anyone was even remotely capable of producing the outcome they wanted, the first recourse is to make a complaint. And over time you've got people being told, if you have a problem, make a complaint. It's almost, what's the word I'm looking for, we're almost out there asking them to come in and complain about something. (Sgt.)

Another officer commented, somewhat sarcastically, about the lack of after-hours assistance from other government welfare agencies:

> I seriously believe that external agencies should be the ones who are creating the forums and getting out there and dealing with the people and not leaving it to us.

> W.B. Do we have a role to play in identifying those problems and referring people to other agencies?

> No, I think we should, we have, we definitely have a role to play identifying these problems but I think we should, as far as our reporting is concerned, it
should go to the other agency, excuse me, we've identified a problem, what are you going to do about it….Instead of, you've got a problem, yeah, well come and talk about it tomorrow because I'm on my way home. No, I'm just starting. It doesn't matter, I don't work when it gets dark. What am I going to do with these people, I don't know, it's got nothing to do with me.

W.B. Who is saying that, the other agencies?

Yes. (Sgt.)

Summary

The role of the Police Service of western Australia as a service delivery organization has now become a fundamental and central element of official departmental policy. Officers at all levels throughout the organization are constantly reminded of the need to approach their duties with this role clearly in their minds. Although there is a general acceptance of this service delivery ethos, many officers expressed concerns about the problems created for operational policing when the department provides assurances of a range and level of services that the officers consider is impossible to achieve.

Police officers consider that this places them in jeopardy of being blamed by the public when they are unable to deliver the standard of service that the department has promised. Bearing in mind the issues already raised about the degree of critical scrutiny faced by officers as a result of any complaints that are made, this feeling of unease can be understood.

There is also a sense that the general community has been encouraged to believe that police officers are able to deal with almost any problem in society at any time of the day or night. The
dangers of this are apparent to some officers who advocate that there needs to be a spreading of the pressure to respond by getting greater assistance from other agencies that are supposed to provide community services. This element of the public service approach of the Police Service of Western Australia predisposes officers to complainants from the public when the level of service promised cannot be delivered by the officers due to factors beyond their control. This clearly adds another dimension to the critical working environment in which they function.

3.3.3 High Work Loads

High workloads for members of the Police Service of Western Australia at various levels throughout the organization are caused by a number of factors. As would be expected this category is very closely linked to the following category of staff shortages. These two elements are major causes of concern to police officers at all levels within the department.

The officers interviewed discussed a variety of factors that are seen as causing the current situation together with some of the consequences. One of the major forces behind this increased workload for members is the department’s commitment to a service delivery philosophy. This can be viewed as the starting point for a series of issues that are the result of an inability to cope with the problems created.

While the department is winning awards for a variety of aspects of service delivery and administrative systems, this needs to be contrasted with the views expressed about an apparent inability of the Police Service of Western Australia to effectively deal with some of the basic issues that are the core business of such an organization.

One officer observed:
Yeah, that's what I think it is, we go from crisis to crisis. And you talk to people in the suburbs in uniform and the C.I.B. in the suburbs, that's what they're all doing, they're moving from file to file to file, from complaint to complaint to complaint. And they're really not, to the extent that it's possible anyway, they're not focusing in on the priorities in terms of how do we stop that situation arising in the first place. Because that's harder to fix, it's much harder to fix. You can throw another detective at an unlawful wounding but what do you throw at crime in Balga, it's a much bigger issue, you know what I mean, and it's more, I think what it is the Police Department is, I don't know, it's trying to solve society's problems and it can't. And, unfortunately, I don't think it gets into the sort of relationships with other agencies which could possibly bring that about. (Sgt.)

The reference here to “how do we stop that situation arising in the first place” is similar to the kinds of observations made by the proponents of problem oriented policing. It is advocating an approach that avoids concentrating simply on the outwards signs of an issue but also recognising that this is difficult to achieve in practice because of the limitations imposed by factors such as high workloads.

A misguided sense of the mission of the Police Service of Western Australia is perhaps behind the comments of officers about the excessive range of activities that are entertained.

For example one senior member observed:

I think the other thing that's important for me is the direction that policing is taking overall and the need for policing to really share its role with other key agencies. The Police Service, in my view, is trying to do too much alone and even now, in the days of strategic partnerships, I still think we're taking on too many things which aren't the function of police. So I think the other thing that's important is that we actually define, one who is
responsible for doing certain things, but also share the policing function as more of a wider community issue. (C.O.)

This officer amplified these comments by reference to the resourcing aspects of other agencies and how they fall back on the Police Service of Western Australia to take up the slack:

Well my personal view is that we're at the point now where we're starting to encroach upon other agencies territory and the only reason we're doing that is because the other agencies don't have the resources or purport not to have the resources to be able to do their job. You're seeing that with Family and Children's Services who are saying they're very strapped in terms of resources and they can't provide an after hours service at all. Okay, they can't look after children after hours, and all the things we need them to do. We're seeing that with the Ministry of Justice, where we're still providing services to the Ministry Of Justice such as transport of prisoners, that just isn't our role. Now we're doing that to make up for the fact that other agencies have got a shortfall in resources. Now my argument is that we should start to pull back from all of that stuff and say yeah we'll go so far but, after that, it's somebody else's responsibility. (C.O.)

Although lack of resources is spoken of here as being a factor associated with the problem of excessive demand, this officer was careful to clarify the fact that, in his opinion, increased numbers of police are not necessarily the answer. What is required is a better definition of the exact boundaries of the police role:

I think he's absolutely correct. I think the more police you put the more work you'll find and the more your police will be committed. So more police are not necessarily the answer. I think what the answer to resourcing is to better define the role of what police do. It goes back to what I'm saying that police are getting into too many different things. We need to
re-define that, we need to go back and look at some of the support areas in the Police Service and say do we need police officers or can somebody else do this role. Now we started that process five years ago and then all of a sudden we just went away from it and went back to what we were doing before. And so I don't know whether, I certainly don't know whether more resources are the answer but better distribution of resources are probably the answer. (C.O.)

Another officer involved with community services referred to official policy in relation to the sheer number of issues that the Police Service of Western Australia requires sections and officers to become involved with:

*I mean the biggest single thing that I see is that we seem to be committed to too many projects if you like, I know in my own area that we're loaded up to the gunwales with projects and that impacts upon our ability to do our job in other ways. I mean we have to be out in the field giving support and assistance to the districts and if we're loaded up with projects and we're flat out here, we simply don't have the resources to meet the other side of the coin. (C.O.)*

Another member linked this extra performance requirement with budgetary aspects:

*There's a lot more things we've gotta get involved to and it all takes resources and money but the budget has been going down. So we've asked them to do more with less and naturally people are saying well it's all good being better managed but we're getting less and less money to do it with. (C.O.)*

There is seen to be a conflict between the range of activities that officers are now required to perform and their other daily tasking activities. One senior member commented:
Look I suppose it depends on, I mean we could give all the names in the world to Family and Children’s Services Bill, but if they’re not equipped or resourced to follow up and provide the case management the kids need then it probably ain’t gonna work. And regrettably we can’t keep up with the C.D.S. and other proactive programs that this department has thrust on us we can’t do more than we’re doing. (C.O.)

This expanding range of activities that the Police Service of Western Australia is required to involve itself with creates problems in relation to an increased administrative workload. The problems attributable to this increased workload are compounded by the expansion of sections that are not directly related to frontline policing requirements.

As one senior officer noted:

Well, without doing some sort of a research project on it myself I can’t be specific. But the general observation is that we have people going off to non-operational areas, the Major Projects Unit, Legal and Policy Branch. In the districts some district officers have created quite significant administrative support arms consisting of sworn officers, sergeants and constables, some more than others. I’ve heard of some where there’s perhaps a dozen people working in that District Office to support the District Officer. And when you multiply that by fifteen, plus the Divisional Officers, you end up with you know a couple of hundred people at least who are there in a support, almost clerical role, for District Officers. They need help but I mean is that really what police officers should be doing. (C.O.)

This officer endeavoured to quantify the scale of the problem:
Well at all levels they should be directed at those three core functions and yet so much of our work is administrative, behind the scenes work. You know I think that we're very close, and I don't think anyone's going to argue against this, very close to the army proportion of every soldier at the front line is supported by about another nine or ten people behind the lines, the cooks and the administrators and all the rest of them and I think that we're not far off that. Someone estimated recently I think it's only a matter of seven or eight hundred people who are actually in operational duties at the front line.'

(C.O.)

In addition, although there was an acknowledgment of the benefits of modern technology in relation to performing the required administrative functions, there was still criticism of the sheer amount of time that managers spend on this activity:

'I think we do and I think technology is a great enabler there, as far as better administration is concerned. But there is still a huge problem as far as paperwork is concerned. You know eighty or ninety percent of my time is taken up, I would estimate, with paper work. And it's just wrong. You know my role is leading people around here, liaising with people in the districts and the divisions and with other government departments is nowhere what it should be simply because I just haven't got the time.

(C.O.)

This problem is made worse by the increased need for senior, experienced officers to concentrate on internal complaints while junior officers deal with other serious offences. One member commented:

The Internal Investigation arena generally speaking, whether it's at this Unit or whether it's out in the districts, is out of whack. You know the amount of investigation time that is
being put into a relatively minor investigation or complaint against police is just not proportionate with the nature of the alleged infraction of discipline. And you have a quite a senior officer investigating a minor infraction of discipline and you have a senior constable investigating a rape. That doesn't gel with me. (C.O.)

During the Delta reform process the organizational structure was flattened and the numbers of commissioned officers reduced. This had a major impact on the spread of administrative duties within the organization. A senior member described this situation in the following terms:

Well a flattened structure, particularly in the commissioned ranks, what I've found is that now we seem to have gone to the point where we haven't really provided for reliefs or other contingencies i.e. we have persons in positions, fixed positions, there's no relief component built in, there's no sort of other contingency built in so that if you lose that person, unlike the old days where we had another hundred for instance commissioned officers, we could back fill that position. We cannot do that anymore so we ended up with just overloading the levels. (C.O.)

And further on:

Well I think what I mean by that is that the work has certainly increased, I think change brings about a lot of work particularly paperwork wise, administrative needs, management needs. We've got fewer officers, obviously if you cut the force by a hundred commissioned officers what was going before already had to be divided down to fewer people performing the functions and maybe it's still part of that devolution thing. It hasn't been pushed down far enough so you've still got commissioned officers still carrying out the functions that perhaps should be removed down to the lower levels. (C.O.)
This increase in the need for administrative functions is not limited to the upper levels of the Police Service. Many junior officers also detailed the problems that are created for the rank and file in trying to keep up with these demands.

For example:

The sergeants don't have time because they're obviously in charge of the shift, they're running the shift and with the skeleton crew they have they're too busy juggling bloody rosters and making sure the statistics, which is another issue because you've got the statistics for everything these days. So there's control sheets that come in and they've gotta have all you're A/R's listed on them. And not only that but on the back of your patrol sheet you've gotta have the time you received it, time of arrival, time of departure, complainant's name, not their address, and the A/R number. And then they're in twenty lot sequence, so you've gotta fill in your time span down the bottom. And that's all statistical.

(Sgt.)

Another officer made similar observations:

Now these guys who are out in the street, when they are out in the street and that's not very often at the moment because they're all tied up with administrative duties and community policing aspects and other things that they're required to do, there is just insufficient people out on the street to do the job. (Sgt.)

In relation to the practical implications of the new structure, another officer offered the following comments:

I don't think it's the one particular job, paperwork, so much as the managerial side and the way that they devolve it down all the time it comes out you've gotta invent a new form every week to take in the statistics and similarly right up to returns. (Sgt.)
And further:

And I think the police department to, in their, we're going back to our core functions, have probably overlooked that their core functions they are allowing themselves once again to get too mixed up with statistical gathering for external agencies. And, if they want those statistics, for crying out loud work shift work, get your statistics yourself. It's okay to ask us for statistics, but when it becomes part of our daily job that policy is put into place, it's purely based around external agencies statistics.

Another aspect of this situation is how both the level and the complexity of the workload of working police officers has increased over the recent years until the present day situation where officers are feeling overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them.

In relation to the complexity of the duties required to be carried out now by relatively junior members, a senior officer commented:

I'll just refer to a particular district where under the old system all frauds in the district would have gone to the particular detective office or to the detectives attached to that particular district as a suburban C.I.B. office. Now, in that district, all cheque offences are now going to the local police station for inquiry and I say what opportunity and what experience does a general duty constable, who may be a probationer, have in cheque fraud...and to give the particular, to give a constable at a suburban police station, who has many responsibilities, particularly patrolling and attending burglaries etc, to give them cheque offences to inquire into, it's ludicrous. (C.O.)
This situation is believed to have an adverse impact on an officer’s ability to carry out the modern requirements of a community policing approach to their duties as is shown by the following comment:

I think that's one of the basics of policing is community policing. Get back to the early days of a police officer, he was out there in the community, leading the people, getting with the people, listening to their concerns but unfortunately the style of policing has changed that we're more a spread over a more bigger area and we were unable to do perhaps some of the community policing tasks that were performed by your local police officers years ago, mainly because of the workload. Our population's got bigger so we increase our workload. (C.O.)

Another senior member spoke about the impact of increased workloads on junior officers and the need to ensure that their training in the early years of their service does not suffer:

Yeah, I think the overall level of effort required in policing is one which has increased. I think workloads have undoubtedly increased. That has an impact on both junior and senior ranks where it's very very important that we make the playing field as even as possible in our resource allocation… Well we're in fact actively trying to change that here by placing recruits direct into country locations with a work place assessor and a field-training officer. I think you're right, historically we have placed the most inexperienced people in often the most critical situations. Northbridge is an example. Historically we’ve seen the most raw of recruits working in pairs in probably the most hostile of situations. That tells us a couple of things. One we're not managing our people properly and two is we're not letting the young blokes learn because the young people need to learn off an experienced officer. (C.O.)
On the basis of the comments made, it is in the area of General Duties policing that the most serious problems are thought to exist. This situation appears to be the result of the uncontrollable demand from the public for service and the junior rank and limited experience of most of the officers engaged in this area of activity.

In relation to the prospect of an ever-increasing demand for policing services, one officer explained his view about the open-ended nature of the demand for the general duties policing function:

> Now one of the things that we did, like a lot of them rushed in and amalgamated completely Traffic and G.D.s. I saw danger in that because I could see the G.D.'s area is like a bottomless pit. We could put another fifty people in the G.D.'s at (place) and they'd still be busy. So but if we put all the Traffic people in there they'd be swallowed up doing G.D.'s work and the traffic side of things would be lost. (C.O.)

In relation to the levels within the organization that are affected by workloads, a senior officer observed:

> Well I'm talking about tasking so incoming tasks, what we call computer dispatch jobs, the sheer number of those computer dispatch jobs really mean that the average police officer on the street first of all is almost fully engaged just doing those and has limited time to do the paperwork and the preparation of briefs and all the other quality control things that go on behind the scenes which puts a lot of pressure on them.

W.B. Right, and what rank is that?

> We're talking at, from probationer, from probationary constable right through to senior constable and maybe, even in some instances, shift sergeants. (C.O.)
This officer also referred to the difficult task of striking the correct balance of reactive versus proactive policing in the face of the overwhelming volume of tasks that have to be performed on a daily basis to satisfy public demand:

_Alright, there’s a lot of talk about getting on the front foot, getting upstream, putting effort into community policing initiatives which prepare children and young people to be better citizens in the next generation, you see that with the school based program, you see that with community policing resource centres and juvenile justice teams and all those sorts of things. Now, that is absolutely the way to go because what we need to do is make sure we change what’s going on. But while that’s going on there is still all this reactive stuff pouring in and proactive policing requires enormous effort and enormous dedication. If you put all your resources over there then your reactive side goes un-serviced, you can’t get enough people to go out on the track and deal with the day-to-day incoming tasks. So what district officers need to do is work out what the best split is between their reactive police service, or force of people and their proactive force of people. (C.O.)_

As noted by this officer, there is a requirement for district officers to determine the correct mix of activities to generate a more efficient approach to policing the community. Any attempt to make use of the principles of problem-solving policing or community-oriented policing is not thought to be feasible because of every day policing duties.

Several officers commented on this situation. For example a senior member stated:

_Our biggest problem of course in a district like this is the amount of tasking the vehicles are getting that they don’t have this man hours to actually do the targeting patrols because they’re fully committed to tasking. (C.O.)_
Another senior officer commented:

No, look we can't deal, we can't deal with the work that's coming in now. So, I mean obviously if that was going to be our way of doing business in future then there'd have to be some very very intensive planning and direction as to how you intended to achieve your, that style of policing. There's have to a lot of training in relation to that. You'd probably have to double the police force. (C.O.)

This emphasis on reacting to calls for immediate attention is viewed by many members as having an adverse impact on the ability of officers to address other important issues. For example:

Yeah, virtually the troops come on duty, not so much in our district but certainly in Cannington and Mirrabooka, and they've got three jobs waiting and when they knock off they've got nine jobs waiting. They never catch up and they never do anything else, they're basically processing clerks in uniform. (C.O)

Again there is the reference to the seemingly unending and uncontrollable demand for policing services that must be attended to by too few officers.

In relation to the capacity of police to deal with investigation of crimes as part of their general daily duties one officer doubted the likelihood of that occurring:

Now no one's asking you to break the law but one of the other contributing factors in our inability to solve as many crimes and clear as much up is that we're totally consumed by C.D.S. and reactive policing responses. We don't have time. We can put all the people we like through general investigators courses, which we are, we can have the burglary unit, we can have all these other things but at the end of the day there is no time to go out and
walk around and investigate an offence for a whole day because your boss would strangle
you. You’ve got another ten or fifteen jobs waiting to go and do and there’s no one else to
do them. (C.O.)

In relation to being able to take a more proactive and modern approach to policing, officers made
the following comments in relation to the inhibiting impact of workloads, particularly on the very
junior officers who carry most of this burden.
One senior member stated:

To have that sort of approach we’d probably need to double our staff. They’re never going to do that so therefore it’s a lot of crook as far as I’m concerned because our people could not cope. They’re not coping with the amount of work that they’ve got to do now. Now you’re saying, or they, the academics, are saying this will lower the workload. That’s bullshit. With the amount of time that our people could give to it at the moment it just wouldn’t happen. So they’re bursting in there, they kill the problem at the time and go on to the next job. That’s what they’ve gotta do, they’ve gotta go job to job to job, and they’ve gotta realise that. If they’re gonna spend twenty minutes, and it could be as little as twenty minutes, to try and organise something and get that going, if they had that twenty minutes up their sleeve great, but they’re not going to and they never will have with the number of people that we’ve got. If you want us to be welfare workers and the rest of it they’ve got they’ve got to give us staff to do that. And it’s ludicrous to say that we’re going to do that now with what we’ve got. Get them to sit up in VKI for one night and just become back aware of what is really happening. (C.O.)

Another officer expressed similar views:

I mean it’s a bit like saying well customer focus means attending the job, getting all the details, making sure the customer feels relaxed, that the police have attended to their needs, blah, blah, blah, great. If you’ve got a half hour to spend for every customer. But when you’ve got a tasking crew from the Communications saying are you free, can you get this job, can you do that job, the quality goes because the workload is too high. (C.O.)
These factors do have implications for the morale of police officers and their continued ability to carry out their functions. There does appear to exist a high work ethic among many officers and this is recognised. For example, one officer observed:

*I think it probably puts more workload onto them. Some of them are very flexible when it comes to their rostered hours and so on, they do do, because of their dedication, they do tend to change shifts to suit the requirements. While it might be probably not the right thing to do as far in the eyes of the union but they do that through sheer dedication and the love of the job of course and I think with our young people that they’re very dedicated officers and I think we’re fortunate in that respect. But overall, across the board there’s no doubt that there’s a need for more police officers out there.* (C.O.)

But there is also a widespread recognition that dedication is not enough to overcome the pressures caused by excessive workloads. A senior officer commented:

*Again I think morale is a localised thing, it will vary from district to district and unit to unit. Certainly the average police officer in the street that is doing general duties work on a day to day basis has probably not got a high morale because of the sheer workload of what they do these days and that certainly affects them.* (C.O.)

And further on:

*Well I’m talking about tasking, so incoming tasks, what we call computer dispatch jobs, the sheer number of those computer dispatch jobs really mean that the average police officer on the street first of all is almost fully engaged just doing those and has limited time to do the paper work and the preparation of briefs and all the other quality control things that go on behind the scenes which puts a lot of pressure on them.* (C.O.)
Two other interviewees described the impact of this work pressure on officers in the following terms. A senior member stated:

There isn't anybody on the street to do the business, i.e. last Sunday night in the Warwick police district they had one van working from eleven till seven. That is common at a place like Joondalup. It is common at a place like Cannington, which I don't think, when you've given them the amount of taskings that have to be carried out in those districts it's just not good enough and it's frustrating and overwhelming to the operational people.

W.B. What do you mean by overwhelming?

When you come on shift with eight or ten jobs outstanding and you run for six or eight or eight hours and you leave ten or twelve jobs for the other shift coming on that is overwhelming as far as I'm concerned. (C.O.)

This increase in the volume of tasks to be attended to by fewer and fewer operational police officers is not a problem unique to Western Australia. Leigh, Read and Tilley (1998, p. 1) refer to a similar situation in the United Kingdom. By way of example they cite figures from the Cleveland Police Authority Annual Report for 1995-6. This report shows that:

- Between 1975 and 1995 the number of recorded crimes increased by 176% (from 26,652 to 73,513), the number of arrests by 233% (from 9389 to 31,174), the number of 999 calls by 237% (from 25,183 to 84,899), and the number of other incidents by 254% (from 45,230 to 147,907);

- Over the same period police strength increased by only 6.5%.
In relation to the national situation in the United Kingdom, figures provided by Broughton (2000) demonstrate how workload for each police officer has expanded dramatically. In 1960 a total of 80,000 police officers attended to about 500,000 crimes each year. By the year 2000 there were 125,000 police officers to deal with 4.5 million additional crimes. This is said to equate to each officer dealing with 10 times as many offences as previously.

The existence of serious problems in Western Australia arising from an excessive workload was set out clearly by a local police officer, (Plight of G.D.’s officers, 2003) in a letter in the April 2003 issue of WA Police News concerning the requirements made of general duties police officers. In the letter the member referred to the fact that between 1992 and 2001 computer dispatched tasking increased by 28 percent from 297,809 jobs to 381,517 jobs. This officer points out that in addition to this increase in tasks to be attended to, various procedural changes have greatly increased the time required to deal with matters.

These are issues such as more stringent procedures for completing case files on crimes, the gathering of DNA samples in relation to charges for most offences, video interview procedures, provision of more documentation on court briefs due to full disclosure provisions, domestic violence complaints that now invariably result in restraining orders having to be served, random breath test quotas and the increase in files relating to speed cameras as a result of speed tolerances being lowered.

The consequences were suggested to be increased response times for tasking jobs as officers try to attend to allocated files between jobs and a reduction in time available to attend to targeted patrolling of crime ‘hotspots’ due to these extra demands on officers’ time. The point was made that maps of hotspots produced by million dollar computer systems are of little use if there are no officers available to attend to the required patrols.
The officer considered that this situation was the result of senior officers continually agreeing to every new procedure or task created and handing this down to the front line police officer in the apparent belief that this would be ‘just a little bit extra’.

Kelly (2004) dealt with a report on concerns raised by the WA Police Union about the increasing trend towards officers being diverted from the front line to the kinds of office duties required to deal with procedural matters. The report referred to constables spending 26 per cent of their time at computers while sergeants devoted 70 per cent of their time to office work with more senior members devoting up to 90 percent of their available time to office duties.

The situation was attributed to issues such as changes in DNA gathering requirements, more detailed offence reports and greater demands from other government departments for statistics and other information.

The personal impact of excessive workloads is revealed in the following account of a conversation that a sergeant had engaged in with a junior constable who had come under notice for some infraction of departmental procedures:

But he was telling me that he was having problems coping the way things were going because he’d got his roster so he’s on van patrol for the day. He gets as many as ten jobs waiting for him when he starts duty. Essentially there are ten complainants who are already grumpy that the police haven’t attended at a particular job. He knows that if he doesn’t get to all those jobs in a reasonable amount of time there will be complaints of tardiness and what have you. Equally he knows he can’t do all those ten jobs as fast as those complainants would wish him to do. So he knows there are going to be complaints...
anyway. He then tells me if he doesn’t stop enough vehicles in that eight-hour shift, while he’s trying to do all these ten jobs, he’s going to get an earful from his supervisor he hasn’t kept up his traffic contacts. Similarly, if he hasn’t visited enough stores, old people’s homes or whatever, high risk area which have identified, he again is going to be copping a flea in his ear from his supervisor because he hasn’t kept up his contact list. At the end of the day his perception is he can’t win. He can only do one of those things all the time, he tries to prioritize as much as he can but there is no acceptance of his inability, no matter how hard he tries, to fulfill all those obligations which have been placed upon him. With all this just basic work he has to do when does he get time to do his briefs for court. He tells me, just like the many other young fellas, he takes his briefs home and he uses his home computer to put briefs together, he even contacts witnesses and what have you from his home phone. He raises a question about why he should have to do that. (Sgt.)

And further:

If I can’t keep one step ahead of it I’m drowning at the moment. And that’s an awful thing to think about in comparison with my days at his level, it was still quite a free and easy lifestyle. You did your work but there was certainly ample time to complete your work. And there weren’t all these competing requirements of you, you know, to be all things to all people, it’s just impossible. (Sgt.)

This officer also spoke about his own frustration with regard to his inability to do anything about this type of situation other than caution an officer about any further breaches of internal procedures:
...the best I can do, in terms of a result in terms of a breach, is to recommend that he be informally counselled. So that it's just a case of me going to speak to him and say, look this is what's happened, it shouldn't have happened and don't let it happen again. That in many ways is completely hypocritical because I know what brought it about the first time was pressure of work and I suspect it'll happen again. But that's as much as I can do in terms of having identified a breach of policy, discipline or whatever, in terms of how I deal with it. Just make a recommendation which may or may not be accepted. (Sgt.)

This requirement for officers to attend to what can be described as routine and traditional policing tasks at the expense of the current practices required for a problem solving approach has been commented on by members of other police agencies. Oppal (1994, p. C-3) received a submission to the 1994 commission of inquiry into the British Columbia Police from a local chief constable who said:

If we do not do some serious planning and eventual restructuring, it is not inconceivable that your police will be so busy with enforcement and investigations that they will have no time for problem solving and prevention.

Summary
The views of the officers interviewed for this research show clearly that they recognise the existence of a serious problem in relation to the workload that the system currently places upon officers at many levels throughout the organization. On the basis of the opinions expressed there is clearly an issue with the reduction in staff numbers within the commissioned officer levels and a widespread view that there are too few police officers in general. It is also clear that there is an acceptance that this problem cannot be addressed simply by increasing the numbers of police officers without addressing some of the underlying issues affecting the range of functions that police are expected to perform.
In relation to external factors, there is an appreciation that some serious attempt must be made to place limits on the current uncontrolled demand by the public for attention from police officers. A more rational approach to allocating policing services would require a greater understanding of some of the factors contributing to this problem. These include factors such as the failure by other government agencies to address their responsibilities, a perception that the police can fix everything and the fact that the police are the only agency available 24 hours of each day.

There appear to be many factors that are impacting on the ability of police officers to carry out their functions effectively. There has been a great increase in the level of administrative duties required in order to make the service function on a daily basis. This is with regard to the double problem of having officers who are actually engaged in police duties being required to attend to such matters - often computer based - and the number of officers who are allocated to purely administrative functions and who are never available for traditional policing duties. There is so much back room support for frontline policing that there is almost no frontline.

There is an excessive requirement to attend to internal investigations and complaints and gather date and statistics for other government agencies. The tremendous increase in the need for ‘accountability’ on the part of individual officers and the department in general also places extra burdens on the existing workforce.

There are said to be too few experienced officers to train the junior frontline police who are required to attend too much of the work that is required to be carried out. In addition these officers are nowadays given complex and protracted inquiries such as frauds to complete and this impacts seriously on their workload. The volume of general tasking jobs that must be attended to each day creates further problems, as officers are not able to spend quality time on each task before being urged to attend to the next one.
This lack of time to complete all aspects of a given job is clearly not conducive to a problem solving approach to police work. In addition it must compound the sense of unease and vulnerability that officers feel about the possibility of a complaint being made about their lack of attention to the tasks allocated to them.

The constant scrutiny that exists and the potential for complaints to be lodged generates concerns about whether or not tasks that appear to have been completed satisfactorily will subsequently give rise to complaints of some kind in the future. The inevitable investigation of any such complaint brings with it the potential to receive criticism for some other breach or omission that might be discovered.

3.3.4 Resource (Staff) Shortages

Closely linked to the category of workloads is the concept of lack of staff. The exact relationship between these two factors is perhaps unclear. Obviously a lack of staff can create excessive workloads for existing personnel. Where the type and volume of work is not controlled then there will appear to be a shortage of staff. If the full range of duties of police personnel was known and fixed then reasonable estimates about the total strength required could be made. The consequences of any staff shortages could be estimated and the appropriate adjustments made. These could involve temporary secondments from other less vital areas or cutting back on tasking requirements for a period of time.

Analysis of the policing environment in Western Australia suggests that there is a serious lack of knowledge among senior management about the process of accurately predicting the requirements of the State’s Police Service. This may of course be due to the unpredictable nature of the demands on services. It may also be due to a lack of willingness to build into the system
sufficient buffers to accommodate periodical surges in demand for policing services or the shortages caused by annual leave, sick leave and training.

There is a very strong sense among the officers interviewed that the Police Service is seriously understaffed. In addition many officers considered that there is a lack of resolve to rectify the situation in so far as increased staffing is seen as only a partial answer to the problems being experienced.

One officer referred to the apparent lack of understanding of the nature of the problem on the part of the senior executive of the Police Service of Western Australia. This sergeant also commented about the lack of awareness of very senior personnel about just how few officers are actually available for operational duties:

... (senior officer) rings (local sergeant) and he says look I want you to grab six young blokes and set up this truancy patrol at (district). And as (local sergeant) said where's the six blokes, (district) are running at a bare minimum for Christ's sake. And (senior officer) said oh just go and grab six of the young blokes, (local superintendent) knows all about it, just go and grab six of those young blokes, there's plenty there. He doesn't know, he doesn't know or he doesn't want to know, right. So, therein lies the answer. They up there seem to think because we've got four thousand seven hundred police officers that they're all working at that level, they're not. And so, by him saying to (local sergeant), oh just go and pick up four of five of those young blokes and start up a truancy patrol, he obviously has no bloody idea whatsoever of staffing levels at a particular region. (Sgt.)

In relation to an overall shortage of officers one member stated the following:
There’s insufficient funding, there’s insufficient officers to go around. One of my neighbours got broken into some time ago and I made an urgent phone call to VKI saying there was offenders on premises and it took nearly three quarters of an hour for a vehicle to respond. (Sgt.)

And further:

No I think that’s probably the fault of the hierarchy of the service in conjunction with the government. We’re clearly under-funded, the boys out there can’t do the job that they’re required to do, they want to do the job but they can’t, there’s not enough hours in the day. They’re constantly told work harder, work smarter. Well, it gets to the stage where you can only do so much and they’re being asked to do too much. And as a result, little things are falling through the cracks and it’s the little things that in the end turn into big things. (Sgt.)

Another officer spoke about his perception of a reduction in operational police officers based on his experiences at his own district:

Well in my instance, cause this office, up until six months ago, well twelve months ago, had a standing operational staff of sergeants numbered one senior sergeant and four sergeants, actually five sergeants, we had a spare. Since there has been moves in the district to set up different sections with the intention of meeting the commitments of the business plan in an attempt to make those particular forecast drops in percentages in everywhere else in crime, we have lost two sergeants. I’m now down to one sergeant on my shift, that is me, my other shift has got two sergeants. One of them is going to the senior sergeant position next week because the senior sergeant is going on leave and the other sergeant on that shift is going on leave as well. Now that leaves me as the only operational sergeant on shift. (Sgt.)
And further on this same officer observed:

Staffing numbers, operational numbers at stations, they've been reduced, they say they haven't but I would imagine five years ago there would have been up to twenty per cent more police officers on the road. Yet they say we've had no reduction in the numbers in the police service, we've had an increase of six hundred under this present government as far as I'm aware. Well where they've gone I'd love to know. I know now that every assistant commissioner has to have a superintendent, an inspector, two senior sergeants pencilling, probably a driver, four sergeants whatever right. I imagine administratively that's where they've gone. They've gone to administrative posts, they've gone to things like Neighbourhood Watch, school based, gay and lesbian mob, whatever else, whatever other minority group whatever that we have to a liaison officer with, we would have one, I guarantee it. It's a part of our new openness to the public. We've gotta be accountable so you go and join everything, we embrace everything, if somebody's got a problem we embrace it. Literally, we've got no staff, in a district like this you don't get replacements if I was crook right, whatever. We don't get another sergeant here to assist us. (Sgt.)

In relation to the concept of better management of existing resources to enable the Police Service to meet its requirements for service delivery, a senior member stated:

No, impossible, the party line at the moment from the commissioner down is we have enough police, we've just gotta learn to manage them. It is complete bullshit. We do not have enough police to keep up with the CDS work load, we don't have enough police to answer the telephones and when you take a snapshot of 4698 police, that we currently own, you divide those into three shifts, you take out weekly leave, annual leave, sick leave, parental leave and Christ knows what there's probably 25 % of those or less that we're able to put on the street at any one time. That's right across the State. (C.O.)
Another senior officer referred to the actual numbers of police officers actively involved in policing on the streets and the difficulty that they would experience in attempting to carry out any kind of problem solving approach to their duties:

Because, for a start, it’s not the role of our young people. I think we’ve got, I think out of an organization of nearly five thousand people we’ve got about eighteen hundred operational police officers. So they’re running from one job to the next. They haven’t got time to, like we’ll use your example, the domestic situation. Okay, they can go to the domestic two or three weeks running and they can tell the social workers but that, I mean they haven’t got, there’s no follow up, they can’t do anything else. (C.O.)

A more junior officer made similar observations:

That’s a very broad question there Bill, there’s many many things that concern me. Firstly is the operational side because that’s where I’ve spent twenty six years and having been at station level where the responsibility is to try and juggle rosters for want of a better word. It always seemed to me there’s just never enough uniformed staff on the ground. To the point where most of the time at a uniformed station you were working on crisis level. And I can see the reason why, what I believe the reason why. Firstly it’s because yes in line with the Delta Project many many different specialist groups are being set up and a lot of them are within the region because now, as you know, under the Delta program we have regions. And, the superintendents of those regions are allowing these different things to be set up. And those officers have to come from somewhere. And, ultimately, they come from off the road. So yes I have a lot of concerns in that area. (Sgt.)

And further to this point:
But the change, to me, is just not taking place, it still seems that you’ve got a minimum amount of men doing the actual work and, you know, the branches of the tree are still there. And growing if I can put it that way. At a recent meeting we went to, you were there yourself at that time, with (senior officer) and one of the sergeants there asked the question how many operational police officers do we have. Now I was able to answer that because my superintendent at (district) at that stage had asked the collator to find out how many operational staff there were. There’s less than two thousand. Considering we’ve got a police force of four thousand seven hundred, to have two thousand operational police officers is pretty pathetic. And of course in addition to that you’ve got over two thousand CSO officers. So to me in effect you’ve got in the vicinity of five thousand police officers looking after two, two thousand. And that’s, to me, that’s not right.
(Sgt.)
And a final comment from this officer:

We've never had so many men as we've had before, you know four thousand seven hundred for Christ's sake. And every time a car reaches its mileage quota it goes in and there's another one there for it. And that's fine, on those two aspects. So he is right. But, it's how those men are used, that's the key issue. And you know it seems to me that there's just too many people operating in a support role for the two thousand that are on the ground if I could put it that way. (Sgt.)

There is a perception among officers about the lack of any real commitment on the part of the senior management of the Police Service of Western Australia to actually addressing the issue of staff shortages.

One officer commented:

This police service adopts too many plans that they don't, they must fully realise if they read the document they must fully realise how the plan was brought into inception, what the planning was, what the basis of the, especially the resources where. I mean resources are the most important thing, I'm not talking about cars, I'm talking about human resources, I'm talking about coppers on the road, on foot, on the beat or in cars. You have that complete coverage but you maintain that coverage. They don't here. (Sgt.)

Another officer expressed similar concerns about the lack of commitment by the upper echelons to these issues:

And if you've got a well-oiled team and a management which is supportive of the required training and is supportive of the required resources that you think that you need for a task,
then the Delta plan is going to work very well. I just currently don't see a commitment by the command to provide that support. If the command, at the moment, thinks that it's more important to meet the financial budget, to put a single police officer in a vehicle in the area of Geraldton where there is increased levels of violence against police officers, and if they're willing to take that battle to the press where normal police officers have no avenue of expressing their requirements or their concerns, and if they think that that is more important than fighting for occupational health and safety for police officers then there is going to be no loyalty from their subordinates. Because you can't take personal ownership of something that you don't believe in. (Const.)

As well as these generalised comments about the problems that arise due to a shortage of staff, officers also spoke about specific issues affecting various levels and aspects of daily operations.

Some officers see issues with the shortage of numbers within those ranks that are required to deal with frontline policing. A senior officer observed:

*I don't think there's enough training down there yet to really tell them what is expected. By that I've watched the young recruits come out of the Academy day one ready to do the job and bang they're in there. They're what I call the to and from vans, it's bloody one job after the other, tasking, sort of bang bang, ricochet rabbit is my term for them. And that's all they get to really know, they don't have real time to prepare themselves, they don't even have time really to look at things strategically and say look, how can we reduce crime here because there's just not enough of them. So I think within their area of resourcing we need to be looking at more ground troops so that you can attend to these sorts of things so they can actually have that real time. (C.O.)*
Another senior member referred to the inability of officers to deal with social problems due to lack of numbers:

*I think that's, that'll never ever materialize, it'll never ever come, that day. Unless someone can completely turn around the social problems, the dysfunctional families that we are gonna have in the future then I don't think the police service will ever have time to correct some of the ills of society.* (C.O.)

Another senior officer made reference to both the dedication of junior front line officers and the pressures placed on them due to shortages of staff:

*I think vehicle wise and equipment wise we're going okay but manpower wise there's no doubt about it that we are under manned, there's no two ways about that. And while we probably wouldn't probably promote that in the public area but we're told there is no more men, we have to make do with what we got, so we have to manage with what we've got. But in my opinion we are under manned, there's no two ways about that, we haven't enough staff.* (C.O.)

And further:

*I think it probably puts more workload onto them. Some of them are very flexible when it comes to their rostered hours and so on, they do, because of their dedication, they do tend to change shifts to suit the requirements. While it might be probably not the right thing to do as far in the eyes of the union but they do that through sheer dedication and the love of the job of course and I think with our young people that they're very dedicated officers and I think we're fortunate in that respect. But overall, across the board there's no doubt that there's a need for more police officers out there.* (C.O.)
Another officer expressed concerns about the lack of senior experienced personnel on duty at major centres:

Yeah, the majority of them are kids. I actually worked a night shift supervisor last week, or the week before, I had, I started at eleven-o-clock at night and I worked till seven-o-clock in the morning and in that time I had to visit all south side police stations, I think there was nine or eleven of them or something. There was a sergeant on duty at Fremantle and there was a sergeant on duty at Cannington for a couple of nights. Every other place was being run by a senior constable or a constable. I mean it's just appalling, I just don't know where our people are. (C.O.)

Many officers believe that the absence of senior, experienced officers from the frontline is seen as having long-term implications for the training of junior officers. One senior officer discussed this in the following terms:

Well, and that's an ongoing problem and we have so many of our people who are at the sharp end who do have less than three years experience and in keeping with the philosophy of problem-oriented policing we should, we should have appropriate role models. Now we should look at mentoring, look at partnering, however to do that you must have senior people available to do that partnering and to do that mentoring. And that's got to be a commitment by the organization, to find them, to find those people and to ensure that we don't have an area like say City Station which is seen as a, well, City Station was up until recently, it's no longer in existence, they've all moved back to Central, where you have a situation where you have a large number of relatively new police officers who have very few experienced police officers to show them the way and to develop those mentoring and partnering models. (C.O.)
The lack of staff is not confined to the lower ranks of the Police Service of Western Australia. This issue also affects the upper echelons although the problems created at that level are different in kind. For example, one senior officer commented about the lack of on-road supervision by senior personnel and the extra workload placed on inspectors caused by such shortages:

Yeah, the number of people was one big problem. To try and meet demands for having police stations open longer hours and for having supervisors on duty and this type of thing. Cars on the road, that was fairly difficult. The amount of money I was given and hence things like overtime, that did limit the amount of work you could get done. (C.O.)

And:

You know one thing that Mr (name) did was to take away an inspector from each district. Well at least in (district) I lost one inspector in five so it went from five down to four, just arbitrarily done. Not because there was any research carried out to indicate that we could handle the work. And consequently it meant those four inspectors were, in the main, worked very very hard just trying to the meat through the factory so to speak as quick as they could before it banked up. So quality of work was perhaps a secondary to the quantity and getting rid of it as quick as you possibly could. Including internal investigation files. We just tended to get rid of those as quickly as we could. (C.O.)

Another commissioned officer said:

Well I think what I mean by that is that the work has certainly increased, I think change brings about a lot of work, particularly paperwork wise, administrative needs, management needs. We've got fewer officers, obviously if you cut the force by a hundred commissioned officers what was going before already had to be divided down to fewer
people performing the functions and maybe it’s still part of that devolution thing. It hasn’t been pushed down far enough so you’ve still got commissioned officers still carrying out the functions that perhaps should be removed down to the lower levels. (C.O.)

The suggestion here is that further devolution might improve matters for the commissioned ranks but this is likely to be at the expense of the sergeants who would inherit this extra workload. They in turn would have more pressure and would be seeking to devolve matters further. This is an example of simply transferring problems rather than addressing the root causes.

One officer spoke about the difficulty experienced with any attempts by officers facing these problems to bring the deficiencies to the notice of the levels within the hierarchy that are expected to address such issues:

Okay, but then again if you come to an investigator and say supervisor, who may be a senior constable, he may be a senior constable say at a big centre where he might have ten probationers under him. They’re all over the place and he needs a head like an owl to do, you know, go round three sixty degrees. And he says well I’m not the problem, I’m just the supervisor, the problem’s bigger than that. It’s got to do with the fact that there aren’t enough police officers in the station to do what’s required of us. Then of course when you start saying okay there’s something at a DO level or at an RO, a regional office level, or a command level then you start getting against, up against a group of people who have all basically got those positions on the basis that they adhere, or at least pay lip service to, the Delta philosophy. Which is all about forcing the decision making down to the lowest level so when you get to them they say well hang on, that was his job. They don’t accept that they haven’t given him the tools to do it and to suggest anything to these people, that particular strata of the hierarchy, they do not take it at all well. (Sgt.)
The comments of this officer also contain references to the lack of effective devolution to the lower ranks and the avoidance by senior management of any ownership of the problem.

In relation to the ability of officers to address issues in a problem-solving manner several officers expressed strong reservations about the Police Service of Western Australia’s capacity to accomplish this because of staffing restrictions. One officer stated:

_I don’t think we’re equipped at all to perform that type of role. To basically look at the problems before they occur so that you can take relevant steps so that they don’t occur to me is an extremely good way of policing, I have got no problem with that. But, until you find out what the problem is, you still have to deal with the people that are committing the problems. You can’t just wipe that off and say okay we’re going to find out why people are doing home invasions and while we’re doing that we won’t target the people who are doing home invasions. We’ll just let them run riot. Because the people that we need to find out why these people are doing home invasions have to come from the pool of people who are out there having to attend the home invasions. As I said before you’ve only got a limited amount of resources and unless they give you the resources to do both jobs it’s never going to work, it’s never going to work. And it staggers me that they can’t see that._

(Sgt.)

Another officer referred to the practical limitations placed on problem solving by staffing limitations in the following terms:

_But I believe the way we are structured at the moment as a police service there’s no way we’ll ever get around to problem-solving policing. That takes manpower, that takes men on the ground to identify a problem when they’re out there. Two men out there in an area answering calls from the police communications or attending vehicle accidents or_
whatever is never ever gonna be able to identify your problems because all as they're basically doing is going from one job to another. They're not solving, they're reacting that's all they are. (Const.)

A more senior officer expressed similar views on the limitations of a problem solving approach created by resources issues:

There's no way in the world that our people could be tied up arranging for welfare workers to come along and trying to convince people that they need counselling and all the rest of it when they've got about thirty seconds to do the job and get on with the next one (C.O.)

And further:

To have that sort of approach we'd probably need to double our staff. They're never going to do that so therefore it's a lot of crock as far as I'm concerned because our people could not cope. They're not coping with the amount of work that they've got to do now. (C.O.)

One officer referred to the process of using temporary transfers from section to section to create the appearance of having sufficient numbers to handle situations that arise:

We go from crisis to crisis to crisis and as one task force sort of needs to be started up then another one gets closed down, resources are re-applied. We don't transfer people any more, we second them, as if that makes it more troops than there really are. They, and I think that's what we do, we manage from crisis to crisis, and that's not problem solving because problem solving is dealing with underlying issues and I don't think we do that. (Sgt.)
This is another example of the kind of avoidance tactic that is practised in order to allow real issues to be overlooked.

Summary

On the basis of the views expressed here by officers of various ranks there is clearly a view that the Police Service of Western Australia is seriously understaffed. There has been a significant rise in the functions that must be attended to with no commensurate increase in total staff numbers. The recent adoption of the principle of accountability has given rise to an increased acceptance that police must become involved in a multitude of new roles. Specialist groups have been established and these remove officers from frontline policing.

The constant need to form new groups of police officers to deal with each new issue requiring police attention results in a constant need to reallocate staff to accommodate these requirements. As one officer remarked people are no longer transferred but are ‘seconded’. In this way the full strength of their original unit is maintained while a ‘new’ unit is created for the purpose of dealing with the latest issue that has arisen.

There is a belief that the hierarchy of the department are so focussed on budgetary requirements that they are ignoring the very real issues arising from staff shortages that impact on junior members and the public.

The fact that there are too few officers, and those who are performing general duties are inexperienced, leads to inefficiencies in dealing effectively with issues. Therefore incidents assume increased importance because they are not being dealt with properly. This is obviously the antithesis of a problem solving approach.
This issue of staff shortages is not unique to Western Australia. The founder of the problem-oriented approach to policing, Herman Goldstein, (1990, p. 21) makes the assertion that community support is vital if resource-strapped police agencies are to cope with the volume of tasks assigned to them. In support of this view he provided figures to demonstrate the point with New York having 28,000 officers to service 7.5 million people and the city of Edmonton in Alberta, Canada having only 24 officers on duty in the early hours of some mornings to service the need of 500,000 people.

A problem-oriented approach to dealing with social problems requires that the police are able to call upon other government services to provide their expertise in dealing with issues identified by police. The views expressed by the officers interviewed for this research indicate that other agencies are rarely available to assist and the effort required falls back on the already over-worked police officers that endeavour to deal unaided with complex social issues.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ACTUAL MODEL

The outcomes of the results described in Chapter 3 above lead to the proposal of a model of the Police Service of Western Australia that depicts the categories that combine to create the total working environment that actually affects the members of this organization. This is depicted in Table 4.1 below. This organizational model is the basis for the Basic Social Problem that has been termed “Feeling Vulnerable.”

The model also shows the four basic tactics that police officers apply in their attempts to deal with their working environment. These give rise to the Basic Social Process shown that has been termed “Controlling By Avoidance.” These aspects of the model will be fully explained in the following chapter.

Table 4.1 The Actual Model
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<th>Internal Organisational Environment</th>
<th>External Working Environment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Customer Focus</td>
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<td>Power</td>
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<td>Blame Culture</td>
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Officer's personal ambitions and the existence of contracts give the incentive to obstruct devolution of decision-making authority to lower ranks.

Rank and power provide the ability to achieve this.

Accountability and intense scrutiny in a blame culture create feelings of constant and biased criticism of every aspect of an officer’s actions. This generates fear.

A service delivery/customer focused ethos to be delivered by an insufficient number of officers with excessive workloads to be carried out in accordance with complex rules and regulations generates performance pressure.

When this is coupled with real potential for mistakes to be ‘identified’ after the event from complaints made places officers at great risk within the blame culture.

The Basic Social Problem - “Feeling Vulnerable”

Results in the creation of:

The Basic Social Process – “Controlling by Avoidance” by the application of the following tactics:

- Control by senior officers over the actions of members of lower rank.
- Lower ranks deferring decision making to senior officers.
- Various ranks creating the façade of meaningful action.
- Decisions by various ranks to ignore problems and avoid involvement in situations.
This research project has a two-fold purpose. The first aim is devise a descriptive model of the Police Service of Western Australia based upon what police officers consider to be the features of the organization that have the greatest influence on their daily working lives. The second aim is to consider what, if any, is the impact of this model on the implementation by officers of a problem solving approach to their duties.

The method employed was a two-stage process. Firstly, officers from a variety of ranks and backgrounds were interviewed and asked to discuss the elements of the Police Service of Western Australia that they viewed as being most important in the sense of having the greatest influence on the daily working lives of themselves and other officers. The interviews were conducted without any initial reference to problem solving. The majority of officers interviewed did not make independent references to a problem solving approach to policing. This necessitated the raising of the topic by the researcher. Once this was done however most of the interviewees expressed very clear ideas on the topic. In fact this subject produced the greatest number of quotes of all categories raised. These explored various aspects of the interaction between identified organizational characteristics and a problem solving approach to policing.

The data from the interviews was then analysed using a methodology informed by the grounded theory method and many important categories or factors were generated. These were then used to create a model of the Police Service of Western Australia.

Within this model the Basic Social Problem has been termed Feeling Vulnerable. The core category that was found to be central to the overall situation has been termed Controlling By Avoidance and is the basis for the Basic Social Process. This model is interactive in the sense that the various elements or categories have been combined to produce a particular description of the
organization. This is believed to be valid even though the model described depicts an environment that is essentially negative.

Clearly this information could have been interpreted from a variety of viewpoints and this would have resulted in the creation of a number of different models, each with its own focus. As the current research is exploring problem solving within the context of the Police Service of Western Australia the data gathered have been interpreted with this purpose in mind. The model created seeks to define the organization in terms of the manner in which these various elements combine to have an impact on a problem-solving approach.

This process of defining the organization in terms of the major categories identified from the comments made by interviewees could have been conducted without seeking specific views on the category of problem solving. This would still have produced a valid result as the model derived could then have been compared to a problem-solving organization in order to determine any variances.

In this current research the inclusion of specific questions about officers' views on the topic of problem solving has served as a cross check mechanism to further support the interpretation of the data obtained.

To demonstrate the way in which this model so fundamentally influences the problem solving activities of police officers it is now necessary to consider how these various elements combine to create the adverse environment and inhibited approach to dealing with issues that can be said to characterise the approach to their functions of the majority of police officers at many levels within the organization.
In relation to the environment in which officers function, the categories derived from the interview data have been divided into two groups according to whether they relate primarily to the internal organizational structure or the external working environment. The rationale for this separation is that the organizational factors exist independently of any policing activities that are actually undertaken by officers. They give the organization its unique structure and appear to have a significant impact on the outlook and expectations of police officers. These organizational factors can be contrasted with those affecting the working environment. It seems that these only have a bearing when officers actually conduct policing type duties.

When each of these factors is considered individually the desired outcomes or benefits can be seen. They are intended to provide the Police Service of Western Australia and its members with a well-defined structure and an orderly and predictable way of dealing with their duties. There are rules and regulations governing most matters and the personnel at various levels have well-defined tasks and responsibilities. The Police Service of Western Australia is governed by various governmental and legislative requirements and must ensure that processes and procedures are carried out in an honest, open and accountable manner.

However, the organizational elements that are considered to be the most important by the officers interviewed for this research have been imposed on them at different times and for different reasons. They have not been brought into existence as a complete model where they all work in unison and this fact has contributed to serious problems.

The modern Police Service of Western Australia places great emphasis on issues such as service delivery, customer focus, accountability and a more professional, problem-solving approach to issues. These modern concepts have been imposed over the existing police culture that still exhibits features such as rank, power, scrutiny, blame and fear.
These factors have come together at a time when the Police Service of Western Australia is faced with developments in two important areas. These are an increase in the volume and type of activity that officers are expected to achieve and real reductions in the number of officers available on the streets. This reduction in the number of operational personnel is coupled with significant increases in the amount of time and effort that must be devoted to procedural requirements and results in significant time away from frontline of policing.

On the basis of the information obtained during this research it seems reasonable to conclude that the existence of these factors is well known within the Police Service of Western Australia. It also appears to be the case that the manner in which they have combined to produce the unique model to be described here has not previously been obvious nor is it being addressed.

Both groups of factors interact to produce the adverse environment in which police officers function on a daily basis. They create the overriding sense of apprehension that pervades many activities and generates the inhibited approach adopted by a great many officers. This in turn is the catalyst for the formulation and application of the various avoidance strategies that officers practise on a regular basis. These strategies create a negative, safety-first approach by many members.

This kind of outlook is the antithesis of what is required for an effective problem-solving style of policing. It is the existence of such an outlook that operates so effectively in preventing the implementation of a working style that would ensure that problem-solving methods become a successful part of a general policing model.
An examination of the categories identified and how they interact with each other will serve now to
demonstrate how these combine to produce the model.

The first two elements, the rank structure and power, have essentially always existed within this
organization. The rank structure is one of the defining characteristics of this type of semi-military
organization and is the basis for the power that can be wielded by officers at various levels. The
existence of a clearly defined rank structure is intended to provide the organization with a
mechanism for ensuring an orderly and disciplined approach to the many and varied types of
activities that must be carried out.

Officers occupying positions at each particular rank should be aware of the limits of their
responsibilities and know when to act, delegate or defer decision making to a higher authority.
Personnel at each level in the structure would understand and accept their role, carry out their
functions accordingly and accept the responsibility that is appropriate for their rank.

In reality there appears to be much confusion about the proper limits of authority at various levels.
Many officers appear reluctant to take command and deal with various situations that they are
faced with. This appears to be due to apprehension about outcomes and being blamed for
consequences. Many officers will defer matters to a senior member or simply avoid making
decisions. There is a marked reluctance to allow junior officers to make decisions without
interference from members who are more senior. There is a feeling of constant scrutiny and
interference with decisions made, a lack of trust and a willingness to blame junior officers when
undesirable outcomes arise.

This approach appears to become more marked as officers progress up the chain of command.
For example, there is little interference and much discussion and cooperation between sergeants
and constables. This begins to diminish between the levels of sergeant and inspector/superintendent and is markedly lacking between superintendents and the upper levels of assistant commissioner and above.

In fact the use of rank by the upper levels to enforce wishes and ideas is quite extreme by comparison with the lower ranks. This approach is often demonstrated in relation to operational matters that one would consider are the province of the district officer as the local chief of police. There appears to be little evidence of high-level discussion and co-operation about the very real issues affecting district superintendents such as the shortage of staff and the problems inherent within the various systems that are in place.

The construct of power is very closely linked to that of rank. If rank is the source of an officer's ability to influence the actions of another then the power that derives from this is wielded by many in ways that are frequently seen to be for personal benefit and not for the good of the organization. There is a widely held view that a great many management decisions emanating from the upper levels are based on personal motives linked to self-interest, personal protection and advancement.

The data collected in fact disclosed a separate construct that has been termed self-interest. Many of the officers interviewed believe that this is closely aligned to the existence of a merit-based promotion system and contracts for commissioned officers. These two factors are seen by many officers as creating intense pressure to achieve promotion as this is still viewed by the majority as the only real measure of success in their careers.

The desire firstly to be promoted and secondly to maintain that level or achieve further advancement was found to be the motivating factor behind a range of behaviours. This situation affects officers of commissioned rank and those aspiring to these levels. This leads to conduct that
is designed to put the aspiring applicant in the best light with his or her superiors. This manifests itself in actions such as avoiding activities where the outcome is unpredictable or likely to be contentious, close supervision and control over the activities of junior personnel, deferring decisions about problematic issues to senior officers and blaming junior officers for undesirable outcomes.

The existence of the rank structure and the power derived from it provides the mechanism for officers at various levels to behave in this manner with little risk of censure or correction.

The Delta reform project placed great emphasis on the need for the devolution of decision making about operational matters down to the lowest practicable level within the Police Service. This was designed to enhance the running of the organization, improve effective local problem solving and the use of resources.

This new requirement was brought into being and superimposed over the existing structures that had existed within the organization for many years. In fact, the upper echelons of the Service have retained the power to make decisions about almost all aspects of the running of the organization and this is frequently used to the detriment of subordinate members who receive directives from above. Again this is based on rank and power and not on the needs of the organization or other officers. There is seen to be a major need for control and self-protection on the part of upper management.

This creates frustration and a sense of a lack of control on the part of those officers below assistant commissioner and commander. There is a belief that this in turn causes district superintendents to appear to be less than competent in the eyes of their subordinates as their decision making abilities are often compromised by demands from above. Superintendents are in
many ways stuck in the middle between senior management's demands and the need to implement these with little room for compromise based on their actual situation.

Another major reform involves the requirement for accountability. The Police Service of Western Australia is not unique in this regard as all other government agencies experience the same demands for openness and a willingness to explain policies, procedures and outcomes.

Senior officers interviewed for this research expressed the view that accountability was quite simply being open and honest about what the organization is concerned with achieving. Junior members on the other hand were far more pragmatic in their understanding of the practicalities of accountability. They are the ones more likely to be faced with demands for explanations about events that have already occurred and about which someone, for some unanticipated reason, wishes to complain.

This new requirement for openness has given rise to the expansion of the network of agencies designed to inquire into every conceivable aspect of what police officers do. There has always been an internal mechanism for carrying out such investigations. But to this has been added a plethora of external organizations designed to carry out essentially the same function.

These are organizations such as The Police Ombudsman, The Anti-Corruption Commission, (now reformed as the Crime and Corruption Commission) Royal Commissions, local members of Parliament, and various organizations enforcing racial equality and equal rights. This intense scrutiny leaves officers feeling exposed to the potential for criticism about almost any aspect of their work.
Added to this mix is the blame culture that has existed within the organization for many years. This attitude is coupled with an inquisitorial approach to any alleged transgression, however minor. There is a perception among police officers that they are guilty until proven innocent and also of the existence of an excessive willingness to appease people who lodge complaints about officers.

These factors work in unison and add another dimension to the feelings of vulnerability that many officers experience. If there was accountability without intense scrutiny or an effective means of examining police conduct then the requirement would be ineffectual. Similarly, if there was an effective means of examining officers’ actions that was viewed as fair and objective then the inevitable attribution of fault that is seen as a consequence of a blame culture could be avoided.

This combination produces an atmosphere of fear among officers at many levels within the organization. In addition, an inquisitorial approach does not encourage officers to openly discuss all factors pertaining to any given situation. This reduces the possibility of discovering underlying causes of problems due to the focus on apportioning blame to individuals for outcomes.

The above factors create a particular outlook within the organizational structure. While an officer’s actions are confined to departmental activities few problems arise. However, it is in relation to the external working environment that these factors have their most serious impact. The real dangers lie with activities that involve the actual work of policing in dealing with the public.

There are two fundamental features of the modern the Police Service of Western Australia. that were brought to the fore with the inception of the Delta Project. These are the concepts of customer focus and service delivery. These are part of a new economic rationalist approach adopted by many government agencies that encourages the concept of running departments like a business.
As a part of this process the name of the organization was changed from the Western Australia Police Force to the Police Service of Western Australia. This was a clear indication of the new philosophy of providing a service to the community as opposed to being a force. All manner of people dealt with by police officers are now referred to by the term ‘customer’ and this also was designed to create a more professional image centred on attending to the needs of the public. A great deal of effort was expended in advertising this new approach to policing and in providing the public with clear details of what they could expect from their police as a matter of right.

This new outlook has created problems for the organization and individual officers in particular. A number of those interviewed have mentioned the dangers of promising the public a level and speed of service that cannot be sustained. One officer explained that police are expected to be all things to all people 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. Another comment about service provision was that the organization has promised a level of service that members had absolutely no prospect of being able to provide.

When this promised level of service does not eventuate an aggrieved public often make complaints. The department in turn does not treat this as a symptom of a more widespread problem. The response is usually to seek out one or more officers who have ‘failed’ to utilise the resources available to provide the required service. If the issue is serious enough, or if the media decides to make an issue of the situation, then senior officers will resort to the use of rank and power to apportion blame.

Even if the majority of officers are content to do their best to provide a decent level of service to the community, their capacity to achieve this is affected by the two factors of workload and staff shortages. As is made clear by the comments gathered for this research, officers at many levels
from superintendent downwards are currently quite overwhelmed by the variety and volume of tasks that they must attend to on a daily basis.

The total number of commissioned officers was substantially reduced in 1996 and the remaining members were required to attend to all of the functions that still had to be carried out. Although the total number of police officers has increased over the years, the members interviewed for this research expressed concern and confusion about the disposition of these personnel as they were witnessing continuous serious staff shortages in relation to frontline policing.

There was a general acknowledgement that there had been a great increase in the number and range of purely administrative functions carried out nowadays by police officers and a dramatic increase in the range of procedural/processing activities that frontline officers must deal with as part of their everyday duties.

In describing the range of functions that officers are required to attend to each day, a number of interviewees commented on the overwhelming pressure that officers face. They are required to attend to calls from the public for assistance and this demand is often continuous in the sense that the radio dispatcher is constantly making them aware that there are further tasks waiting to be attended to.

In addition they must attend to inquiries and investigations relating to offence reports allocated to them for attention, briefs of evidence for persons that they have processed, service of summonses, warrants and restraining orders. In relation to warrants and restraining orders, if such documents are not served forthwith, and the named person commits another offence, the police officer is at real risk of being held responsible.
Another aspect of the new approach to policing under the Delta Reforms is the requirement to adopt a problem-solving style in dealing with situations. This approach to their duties, although not as fully implemented as other new procedures, will give rise to new and greater responsibilities for officers.

All of these duties must be attended to in accordance with the many rules and regulations that govern a police officer’s activities. Any identified departure from these requirements can result in disciplinary action against an officer. This is often accompanied with the threat of more serious action being taken against his or her supervisor for allowing such events to occur.

In addition officers function with the constant knowledge that members of the public are frequently displeased with the level of service provided and are actively encouraged to complain if they feel aggrieved by any aspect of an officer’s performance.

As discussed above, any complaints made are likely to be dealt with under the regime of scrutiny, a blame culture and the self-protection mode of thinking engaged in by the upper levels of the Police Service of Western Australia. There is a widely held belief among many levels of the organization that investigation of complaints is likely to focus on the actions of individuals and ignore any organizational deficiencies identified. This interaction of factors generates a pressure to perform one’s duties against a background of inability to satisfy demands and avoid complaints or completely justify one’s actions if called upon to do so. This must be accomplished in the context of the organizational factors of the rank, power and self-interest of the officers who have the task of investigating such matters.

When faced with such unrelenting pressure it appears that officers resort to a variety of tactics to deal with their working lives. These are essentially avoidance mechanisms that are designed to
achieve more predictable or controllable outcomes and create the appearance of dealing with issues.

They involve actions such as officers declining to attend potentially difficult situations, creating the appearance of handling a matter without actually exposing themselves to unpredictable outcomes, passing responsibility for decision making up the chain of command, blaming others for unsatisfactory outcomes, creating the façade of actually dealing with problems and moving officers from one location or group to another to create the impression of sufficient staff to address the new issues that are constantly arising.

These issues will now be more fully detailed in the context of explaining the Basic Social Process that lies at the core of this situation.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS: CONTROLLING BY AVOIDANCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Police Service of Western Australia exists to service the needs of the people of the State. The official aims of the organization are as follows:

1. Prevention and control of crime
2. Maintenance of the peace
3. Traffic management and road safety
4. Emergency Management Co-ordination
5. Assisting members of the community in times of emergency and need

In practice police officers carry out an enormous range of tasks in the course of attending to the above functions on behalf of the community. They are afforded a range of powers to assist them in carrying out these responsibilities. They have considerable official power such as the right to use firearms, take citizens into custody, drive vehicles contrary to the traffic laws and execute search warrants on private premises. In theory they have considerable unofficial power to take action in a great range of situations where citizens look to them for assistance.

In relation to the type of occurrence that police officers are expected to deal with, Bittner (1974) is cited by Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1990, p. 49), as stating that police officers are responsible for events described as:
“Something that ought not to be happening and about which someone better do something now.”

This description of the nature of police work contains three important observations about the considerations that should operate to support decision-making and action by officers. Firstly, the category of event envisaged as requiring police intervention is very wide. Police are called upon to attend to an extraordinary range of situations many of which are not in fact a breach of any statute. Secondly, the type of action that is envisaged is also sufficiently broad as to permit considerable latitude to an officer trying to decide on the most appropriate response to a given set of circumstances. This implies considerable freedom to tailor a solution to what will often be the unique set of circumstances that the officer is faced with. Lastly, there is the sense of urgency that attends this requirement to take action. Police officers frequently are not afforded the luxury of time to gather information, analyse facts, seek advice and contemplate the best option. They must assess situations in an instant and put actions into place forthwith. Once they have committed themselves to a particular course everything else flows from this decision.

Bittner 1974 (cited in Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1990, p. 18) also provides a more formal description of the police role and the public understanding of the capacity of the police to deal with problems. His thesis is:

That the police are empowered and required to impose, or, as the case may be, coerce a provisional solution upon emergent problems without having to brook or defer to opposition of any kind, and further, their competence to intervene extends to every kind of emergency, without any exceptions whatever.

Bearing in mind the formal role of the Police Service of Western Australia and given the above description of the power, authority and capacity of police officers to take control over situations and
impose solutions, it would seem that the role of a police officer would be relatively uncomplicated.

It would be reasonable to assume that the focus of the members of such an organization would be the efficient and effective pursuit of these objectives on behalf of the people of the State. It would appear that this is not the case in practice.

An important element of the organization’s preferred range of strategies is to encourage the application by members of a problem-solving approach to dealing with the great variety of issues that require attention.

In the past police officers carried out their functions within an environment that was not especially sophisticated in terms of administrative systems and where their promotional needs and prospects were catered for by a seniority-based process. Under this system most officers who aspired to advancement were almost guaranteed promotion to at least inspector level and in many instances to the rank of superintendent.

In addition, their actions as police officers were rarely subjected to a great deal of scrutiny. Any investigation that did occur was invariably carried out by other police officers attached to internal sections and external oversight was virtually unheard of.

This situation has changed dramatically in the past decade or so. The internal administrative systems have now reached such a state of complexity where officers must devote as much attention to using them as they do to delivering policing services to the public. This places considerable stress on officers due to the need to comply with the procedures relating to these requirements.
Police officers are no longer guaranteed promotion but must compete intensively for each stage of advancement within the organizational structure. In addition, those who achieve commissioned rank, and it would appear that many officers aspire to this level, must be continually aware that their contract of employment is only for a temporary three-year period. Renewal is dependant on them performing to the satisfaction of those above. Their suitability can also be affected by the performance of officers under their command for whom they are held responsible as supervisors.

The majority of police officers are involved in tasks that require them to be in constant contact with the public as opposed to performing administrative duties at various levels within the organization. They now face the daily prospect of scrutiny from a variety of internal and external agencies. Moreover, this scrutiny is conducted in an essentially negative atmosphere of criticism, personal accountability, fault finding and the apportioning of blame to individual officers and their supervisors for many events and outcomes.

The model of the organizational and working environment of the Police Service of Western Australia described in this thesis is based upon the information derived from the quotes of the officers interviewed. This data has been interpreted and combined to generate the elements of the model and these have been ordered in such a manner as to provide the basis of a theory for estimating how officers will respond to the forces that impact on them.

The individual elements of this model have existed for many years and the impact of each factor on its own would be well known to the majority of police officers. What this present combination provides is a new way of linking these factors and showing the interactions and consequences that arise from this interplay of forces. This provides the basis for an analysis of the consequences that are produced.
This combination of factors has a major impact and is a powerful influence on the way in which police officers relate to their working environment. This in turn conditions the manner in which they view issues and act with regard to the situations that they are exposed to.

This environment is inherently risky for officers and there are three distinct aspects that they must cope with in their daily working lives. Firstly, there is a great degree of uncertainty about various aspects of many of the tasks that they carry out. Secondly, the concept of accountability may be invoked under certain circumstances. Finally there is the potential for almost any outcome to be deemed as undesirable after the event for any one or more of a variety of reasons.

Uncertainty is an unavoidable feature of human existence, many occupations and also a problem-solving approach to all manner of situations including policing. In relation to police work this is the result of the complex interaction between factors such as the human element, social forces and the existence of a complex set of laws, rules and regulations. Additionally this interplay of forces takes place within an environment that is inherently adverse.

If those engaged in police work or problem-solving within the policing environment merely had to contend with uncertainty in relation to the sorts of issues they could be faced with, or when these might occur, the situation would likely be manageable and officers would feel free and able to function in an unconstrained manner. As will be demonstrated the reality is considerably different.

Not all police work requires a problem solving approach. Much activity can be conducted in a non-problem solving manner by simply following set procedures or by acting in a somewhat automatic way. Police officers carry out a great number and variety of tasks every day. The vast bulk of these activities are never scrutinized in relation to the steps taken or the outcomes achieved. There is no
system in place for routinely examining such activities such as would be required for a quality control function.

It is true that many tasks result in the submission of various reports by officers but these are rarely scrutinized in any real depth. There is, therefore, no great body of knowledge about the theory and practice of police work such as would be generated by having a system of regular analysis or the production of case studies, practice notes etc.

There is no activity that results in an accumulation of professional knowledge that can be used to evaluate current practices or provide the foundation for improving the general standards or methodology of policing as occurs in such professions as medicine, law and engineering. A consequence is that police officers do not have access to a set of guidelines that they can use as an authoritative basis to support the decisions that they make.

This element of uncertainty also arises as a result of the fact that the limited numbers of actions that do receive examination only receive this as a result of an objection being lodged about some aspect of procedure, demeanour or outcome. These complaints come from people who are displeased - usually with the outcome achieved by the officer involved. The objection will be received and examined within a blame-oriented culture. This approach tends to emphasise appeasing complainants, avoiding getting to grips with the actual facts of the incident and applying disciplinary action against an officer as a means of demonstrating positive action and disposing of the complaint.

Furthermore, such events are treated as incidents to be investigated by standard police practices. This entails procedures such as the taking of a formal 'complaint', interviewing witnesses, taking
statements, gathering and evaluating evidence, making findings and dealing with the ‘offender’ and very often also his or her supervisor.

This concept of treating issues as ‘complaints’ is an important one as it has an influence on how police officers view the world. Much of a police officer's work involves dealing with incidents where there are two sides to a particular issue. This is the case even in those situations where no breaches of a statute are actually involved or where the officer decides not to invoke a law that, in theory, applies to the problem.

In many such incidents, officers classify the parties by fixed terms. The person who first calls for assistance is usually termed the complainant. The other party is commonly referred to as the suspect, the person of interest or the offender. Police officers are conditioned to accept that, if at all possible, the ‘complainant’ must be kept satisfied as to police action in order to avoid the creation of further problems for the police officer involved. This state of mind influences both junior and senior officers and also The Police Service of Western Australia as well. In fact the worst type of situation that any officer can face is a complainant who decides to lodge a further complaint about the actions of an officer who was given the task of dealing with the original issue.

In fact, as a number of comments from officers interviewed for this research will suggest, such issues often lead to policy on the run and can result in previously well thought-out plans being changed or abandoned in order to accommodate such events.

This situation serves to continue and exacerbate the element of uncertainty for police officers in two ways. Firstly, officers are unable to estimate beforehand which tasks or problems are going to generate a complaint. Secondly, there is the problem of the lack of any strictly applied yardstick of what constitutes an acceptable outcome in relation to any actions taken by officers attempting to
deal with a given situation. If they are so minded, officers investigating complaints are able to use their position, rank or power to impose their own standards of what constitutes acceptable conduct.

As this research shows the circumstances under which an officer might be required to provide an explanation of various aspects of any situation that they have been involved in are ill defined and unpredictable. The processes of accountability operate when someone in authority decides to invoke the concept. There is such a degree of flexibility and personal opinion operating in this area that it is very difficult to predict what outcomes will be acceptable to an officer given the task of evaluating matters after the event. This question of acceptability is frequently decided on the basis of the personal views of the officer reviewing the complaint or outcome.

This ability to pass judgement is often based on the power or rank of the decision maker. The system of investigation will invariably dictate that the investigating officer must be of a higher rank than the member whose conduct is being examined. It would appear that it is not acceptable to allow a decision to be made simply on the basis of the evidence and the logic of the case. Even when these elements exist the officer applying them in a decision making process must be one selected principally on the basis of holding superior rank to the one being investigated. This is in contrast to the situation that exists when police officers investigate members of the public. Officers of junior rank often deal with important people accused of very serious offences.

The final difficulty that faces police officers under this system arises from the potential that exists for declaring that a particular method of dealing with a situation and/or an outcome produced is undesirable. As noted above there are no clear cut standards that dictate what is an acceptable outcome in many instances of police work. Many of the situations that officers face each day are unique and the course that any particular event will follow is usually unknown at the outset. Many
situations that at first seem fraught with danger are resolved without any great difficulty. Others that seem routine can suddenly escalate for no obvious reason and turn into major incidents.

One consequence of this type of situation is that police officers can be placed in a situation where they have to account for their conduct and decision-making in minute detail at some time after the event. If their recollection of the event is faulty, if they did not have time to make copious notes about the situation as it was occurring due to pressures experienced or it simply did not appear at the time to be serious enough to warrant such action, this may later reflect badly on them. Such a situation can be further complicated if more than one officer is involved in a situation, as is often the case. If their versions differ too greatly from one another this will raise suspicions. Similarly, if their explanations match too closely, they may be accused of colluding.

As would be expected, police officers attempt to deal with these issues by exerting some degree of control over their situation. They are faced with a working environment where tasks and outcomes exhibit features of unpredictability and undesirability. The first aspect is a part of policing, the second is decided by people who can exert power over officers. Police officers can attempt to control or avoid unpredictability by various means. They cannot exert the same degree of influence over undesirability as this is often controlled by senior members or outside agencies.

Police officers therefore focus their energies on two goals. Firstly they try to avoid the stress and aggravation that accompanies complaints about their conduct that are received and dealt with within an adverse and blaming culture. Secondly, many officers concentrate on achieving personal goals linked to promotion and/or the retaining of an existing commissioned officer's contract of employment. The first desire is closely linked to the second because many officers accept that
successful complaints about them or their subordinates can have serious consequences for their promotional aspirations.

The necessity to focus on these goals, rather than the provision of policing services, causes officers to adopt a number of tactics that permit them to consciously and openly involve themselves with their working environment while simultaneously exerting a considerable degree of control over the outcomes of any such interactions. Such tactics appear to be designed to allow officers to create the appearance of engaging fully with issues while also avoiding any outcomes that experience tells them have the potential to generate results having a negative personal impact.

It is also clear from the interviews that officers accept that these influences that exist within their environment are capable of producing essentially negative outcomes and that the sources are from both internal and external agents. Therefore the counter measures applied must take account of these facts.

These measures can be categorised under four general headings and one or more of them can be resorted to for the purpose of avoiding undesirable outcomes. The tactics are as follows:

1. Control by senior officers over the actions of members of lower rank
2. Lower ranks deferring decision making to senior officers
3. Various ranks creating the façade of meaningful action
4. Decisions by various ranks to ignore problems and avoid involvement in situations

A fuller explanation of the tactics employed and their relationship to the goals that officers seek will now be given.
5.2 AVOIDING STRESS

Throughout their careers the majority of police officers are exposed to the workings of the organization in relation to the treatment meted out to those officers who become involved in blame worthy events. They may be directly responsible for such a situation, they may have been operating in a supervisory capacity and suffered the fallout that arises from problems or they will at least have personal knowledge of such events. They become conditioned to the existence of this kind of culture and develop various avoidance strategies. This approach appears to develop early on in an officer's career and stays with them as they progress along their way within the organization and, in many cases, upward through the ranks.

Control by senior officers over the actions of members of lower rank

The need to control the actions of subordinates appears to start at the top of the organization and flow downwards. Although the following observation was made about a previous commissioner there is still a suggestion contained within the quote of a continuing situation that seems almost entrenched in the organization:

> And I guess there's a couple of reasons for that, one is the previous commissioner was, my opinion is he is basically an autocrat. So that he actually set that style of management, he wanted to control things so all his assistant commissioners, because they were under so much pressure, also wanted to control things and so on down the line. And it's never really let go. (C.O.)

Another officer referred to the need that senior personnel, from inspector upwards, have to exert control over junior officers. The officer believed that this is linked to feelings of insecurity and a fear of undesirable consequences occurring:
W.B. At what level of the organization do these micro managers commence their activities?

Well, I think inspector, from what I’ve seen they seem to be more insecure at inspector than anywhere else. And again, then you get to the superintendent and they’re almost as insecure if you know what I mean. They’ve got a bit more power certainly, they’ve got more responsibility but, again, they’ve got these concerns about, well if I delegate it to him can I trust him to do the right thing. And this is why I’m suggesting that people who train up a management team in an area try to get that same management team with them. What this means is that there’s no general improvement in the level of management, outdoor supervision out there. What it means is there are these little nodes of working relationships that sort of travel around if you know what I mean. And if you’re lucky enough you’ll become a member of one of those little work nodes.

W.B. Do those nodes exist because they are brilliantly effective at problem solving or do they exist simply because they are in tune with the man in charge of that particular node?

They may be effective but I think perhaps that’s incidental to the comfort level of that boss. I don’t think they like to be challenged by the people under them, really I don’t think they do. (Sgt.)

There is a perception among some interviewees that officers at various levels experience a reluctance to trust those below them to manage their own affairs without interference. One officer observed:

It always seems to me that they will never ever let a region run as it’s meant to be. They always still control all the strings up there. (Sgt.)
An officer referred to the fear of losing control that appears to exist in senior management and also commented on the manner in which this appears to commence with junior level managers:

‘Cause they’re, you’ve just answered that, because they’re afraid they’ll lose control and because I’m an acting, you know, the A.C. up there I must have control. He doesn’t want the overseeing side of things, right, so that’s your region, you run it, let me have a look at your figures to make sure it’s right. He doesn’t want that because he’s very much a, what’s the authoritarian figure, you will, you will, right. Very much that, that’s my opinion of him, I don’t know what yours is but mine certainly is because that’s what he comes over as.

A commissioned officer linked the personal concerns that senior managers have about internal complaints and the manner in which this can be translated into a type of control over the activities of junior officers:

Only to the degree that they get sick and tired of, they can pass that over zealoussness on trying to prevent their people from doing the things that generate complaints because it increases their own workload. So that the same thing is, they’re always passing on the fear so that people won’t be overzealous or maybe affecting the effectiveness of those people by drilling into them this fear of complaints again. (C.O.)

Lower ranks deferring decision making to senior members

This situation has created an approach whereby officers at many levels are very likely to defer decision making to higher authority rather than risk criticism at a later time.

For example one officer stated:
I know a very few autocratic superintendents.

W.B. A very few?

Very few in this organization. The ones I've had contact with are very, very few of them are autocratic. But they would certainly, every one of them was certainly, what's the word, they were, not worried about, they were, everything they said they were concerned about the repercussions from above. And that's not the word I was looking for. I mean if I can just say that if you asked a superintendent for a decision he would say this is what's going to happen, but I'll just check with the assistant commissioner. So it goes to the assistant commissioner and he'd make the decision, this is my decision, but I'll just check with the deputy and the deputy says I'll make this decision but I'll just check with the boss. Now I don't, there's a word that, and I know there is but I just can't think of it here. But it just didn't, that's the way at the end of the day you know where the decision, the ultimate decision, was coming from. (C.O.)

A junior officer made similar observations about senior officers:

But I'm talking about areas where, I mean an inspector is in charge of say, the crime area of that region. I mean, he shouldn't have to, there shouldn't have to be this to-ing and fro-ing where an OIC of say, for instance the detectives, puts a proposition to the inspector and the inspector say's I'll just check with the superintendent'. So, he is in charge of the crime area yet he can't, he won't make a decision and can't make a decision because he's always afraid of what the superintendent will say. (Const.)

In relation to the reason for such behaviour this officer made the following comments:
W.B. Why do you think that happens?

Because the people above them don't want to let go.

W.B. Why is that?

I don't know whether it's a power struggle, I don't know whether it's insecurity of their own ability to be in charge. I don't know whether they trust the people below them. Maybe some of those people who are below the man in authority they don't believe can do the job. But they are put there and therefore the only way to keep an eye on them is to keep a strangle hold on what they do and everything goes through them and they feel that every thing's okay. I suppose it's a butt covering exercise because if no one makes a mistake down their chain then they're going to be all right. (Const.)

Another officer explained how junior members adopt this approach and the reasons for this:

But by that, yeah, I worry about the hesitation I also worry about whether it's a lack of training or it's the fear of recrimination that is preventing a lot of our guys from decision-making. Very few constables will make decisions without referring it up, very few sergeants now will make decisions without referring it up and I think that in itself shows an increase in insecurity in their own ability to make those decisions. And that if they make a wrong one that it will not be dealt with fairly and it will be, bang, you know, throw the book at them. (C.O.)

Another officer expressed his views about the factors that create this attitude. His comments suggest an acceptance of the approach by the senior management of the organization and actions that impose it on junior officers:
So, I think that when I first came to the Academy what I observed was the perception of discipline by the police officers that I was given is whatever you say, whatever I say or tell you to do you must do without question and you must do what I say and not what I do. And that is a cultural perception which has lasted with me in the police service these three years. And I see it nearly every day. The real test of discipline as I have observed it in my career as a military officer is if somebody tells you to do something you evaluate, you then decide upon whether you wish to choose that aim and objective and you make an informed decision. You will always carry out a direct order and then you can question the order after it is carried out. But if it comes to a decision in which you can have influence, in the military subordinates decisions are more readily accepted than here in the police service. (Sgt.)

This officer provided an example of how this approach impacts in real life upon the decision-making ability of officers:

The lack of leadership in the hierarchy that I have seen is so tangible you can taste it. A sergeant can have, when placed at the scene of a crime, have a fantastic amount of resources available to him, but I've observed in instances where that individual has been reluctant to make the simplest of decisions because he has not had the confidence in his ability to make what is perceived to be the right decision. (Sgt.)

And further:

But I do believe, sincerely, that lack of leadership and lack of the middle management's ability to make decisions and carry through them without consultation with five or six other bloody supervisors and then their officers in charge is of detriment to the police service. (Sgt.)
Finally, in relation to the extent of this need to defer to higher authority, one officer stated the view that this approach influences entire branches of the Police Service:

In terms of decision making I mean as an organization I think in many respects firstly from my point of view from here, we've almost given up our right as police officers to make decisions and solve problems, you know, by extension. As I've said with all my years of experience I'm not trusted to make a decision in terms of a particular charge, whether or not a charge should be preferred, any of those sorts of things. Whether or not that's because they just don't trust me and the rest of the guys here or they're looking for some consistent response on an organizational basis I don't know, no one's ever discussed it with me in all the whole of the time I've been here. But it's bigger than that. Some times I think...at Professional Standards have given up... decision making powers to external agencies. ...will refuse to deal with things, or what ... do, ... refer them to the Ombudsman, ......refer them to the A.C.C.,... refer them to the D.P.P. ...... refer them to everybody in the hope that someone else will make a decision and then we ah well, as per the opinion of so and so this is what we're gonna do. And I find that very difficult to take. (Sgt.)

Various ranks creating the façade of meaningful action

Another tactic that interviewees referred to on many occasions was the practice of creating the façade of meaningful action to cover up the absence of any real efforts to address various issues. This is a practice that is engaged in by the department and individual officers at various levels.

For example:
I mean our mission is to provide a safer more secure environment for the community, we don't concentrate on that. It's how we look to the government, to the public, we're putting up facades and, going to the point of some very senior officers telling lies to protect this facade. (C.O.)

Another officer linked the creation of a particular appearance to the existence of the media:

The new police culture is, we will take the subject which is the highest priority, which will give us the best media coverage. The best overall look for us and we will deal with that and we will make it warm and fuzzy.

A more junior officer commented on the emphasis that is placed on appearance over substance:

Well problem oriented policing should be looking at a problem that has manifested itself in society, whether it be a perceptual problem, i.e. people are feeling unsafe because of a certain issue, or a crime problem i.e. cars being stolen or certain other issues happening. Now, rather than looking at them issues we, and trying to solve them, so ie we look at that problem-solve that we're constantly looking at presenting ourselves in such a light that people should believe that we've done something when we haven't. (Const.)

Officers described a number of specific activities that they believed arose from this approach to current issues:

It's my perception that the command now is more worried about providing a knee jerk response that will satisfy the public outcry rather than thinking the problem through in using good, sound managerial and leadership skills to come up with a long term solution to the problem. (Const.)

Another officer referred to the practice of crisis management:
We go from crisis to crisis to crisis and as one task force sort of needs to be started up then another one gets closed down, resources are reapplied. We don't transfer people any more, we second them, as if that makes it more troops than there really are. They, and I think that's what we do, we manage from crisis to crisis, and that's not problem solving because problem solving is dealing with underlying issues and I don't think we do that. (Sgt.)

In relation to giving the impression of sound management of the organization, one officer commented about the creation of business management systems:

No I think they're playing at it I believe. I think that they're trying at the end of the day to look like they're doing something which they don't have a bloody clue how to do. Business plans are an absolute classic. Police officers, at supervisor level, have had no training at doing business plans, don't know what a business plan is, haven't got a clue how to put one together, yet are required to do that. And, at the end of the day, there has to be a tick next to, have we got a business plan, yeah, tick, everything's hunky dory. It doesn't matter if the business plan is off the wall, can't possibly work, that's not the point. The point is, we've got one. (Sgt.)

Another officer spoke about the emphasis the Police Service of Western Australia places on business management systems while apparently ignoring the fundamental requirement of actually providing a policing service to the community:

Well, in some respects I think it is because in many ways I mean we're like the legal system, they're not called courts of justice, they're called courts of law. There's no promise of justice, there's only a promise of the law and I think perhaps the law has become sort of like a self-perpetuating process which first obligation is to employ the
people in it whether they be involved in it and I think in some ways you can apply the same to policing. You know, marvellous operation but you know the patient died but never mind, we met our targets in terms of our business plan, you know, we’ve done our special assessment plan and we survived B.A.M.A., oh shit, look at the dead people in the street, you know it’s almost an after thought. (Sgt.)

This officer commented on the conflict between the concept and ideals of the Delta programme and the practical requirements of policing:

But once it started to be put into place on the ground, some of it anyway, not all of it but some of it, yeah, okay, it’s still feeling good but then they were looking for the results and they weren’t there. But by that stage they can’t afford to tell the troops, yes it’s a great system but it doesn’t deliver what the community wants. They are then in a position where they have to say well, okay, this doesn’t work boss. But they’re not going to be able to do that. So then you get tied up in the mechanics of it and you start drawing up business plans and risk management plans and B.A.M.A., you name it there’s a plan for it. (Sgt.)

Some interviewees commented on the willingness of the Police Service of Western Australia to spend money in areas that are designed to create favourable impressions but which have little relationship to real policing issues:

I personally think that the budget that we are given is sufficient to do the job if they’re concentrating on the right things. You will see extraordinary amounts be spent on things that you wonder, where that’s taking this organization. It might be making us look good but if it’s at the expense of, once again coming back to policing on the streets, it’s crazy. And yet this is another thing that I’m, I was talking about before where they can make themselves look good. They’ll come up with some brilliant idea and it looks good and it
sounds good, politically it's great and all the rest of it and away through it goes. And you watch them, you watch some of these shining stars, and two or three years down the track it's all fizzled out to nothing. (C.O.)
Another officer observed:

*I think that's all that they’re concerned about, is at the end of the day they can stand up and say my region is better than his region because we did this and we did that. Whereas I believe the core function of the regions out there is to protect the public from the stuff that's going on and they don't do that. They come up with these wonderful little initiatives that are going to make them look good and pull resources off the streets to do these little initiatives and of course at the end of the day it's the people who are sitting at home who are now unprotected. (Sgt.)*

And further:

*A classic example, and I hope I'm not telling tales out of school here, but there was an initiative put forward a little while ago about putting, giving everybody stopped in a random breath testing area a car freshener. I believe that they spent certain amounts of money on that. Guys who are actually out at the police stations don't have computers. Now to me it would have been much better to spend that money on equipment so the guys can do the job properly rather than come up with some airy-fairy initiative to make them look good. We're not here to make us look good. (Sgt.)*

Another officer described a situation where the Police Service of Western Australia received an award for an initiative that the officer considered to be outside the fundamental purpose of the organization:

*We're getting awards for things which don't mean anything. I mean a prime example, front-page newspaper of a superintendent at a local police office with a crèche. I know the organization, I know that police, the status of the police problems in that area, the crime*
problems. But if we're going to make everyone feel better because they think that they got
an award for customer satisfaction providing a crèche, when what people want is to be
safe in their home and on the street, I think we've misjudged what they want.' (Sgt.)

Another aspect of the management of the organization that generated criticism was the creation of
false impressions in relation to the true situation regarding personnel numbers. For example:

'I think vehicle wise and equipment wise we're going okay but manpower wise there's no
doubt about it that we are under manned, there's no two ways about that. And while we
probably wouldn't probably promote that in the public area but we're told there is no more
men, we have to make do with what we got, so we have to manage with what we've got..
(C.O.)

The true situation is thought to be obvious to the public:

And, as I said earlier, the general public, now, are getting to know a lot of what these
commissioned officers are saying as far as I'll draw resources from here and there is
bullshit. And they tell you that to your face, it's just fucking bullshit. Right. I'm still waiting
half an hour for someone to come round and see me. So now it's having an adverse
effect by getting on there in the first place and saying yes we're here to service you and
yep, we're going to do this and we're going to that and this is all nice and warm and fuzzy
and we're the great Police Department, and give us a hug and all this sort of shit, it's
turned to shit.

W.B. Because we can't deliver?

Because we can't deliver. And that's how we're judged by the general public. (Sgt.)
Another officer commented about the attempts that are made to create an impression about strategies on matters such as road safety campaigns:

Okay, so over about the last five years we’ve had the situation where the public out there we used to hoodwink all the time by saying, we’re going to have a massive campaign, all police leave has been cancelled ra, ra, ra. Now I think the public have actually woken up to that, that’s just actually crap. It just doesn’t happen and I think we’ve lied to them enough and too long now to able to get away with it. (Sgt.)

Other officers commented on the manner in which official departmental figures are adjusted to create pre-determined outcomes:

They are forever trying to show a downward trend, they are forever trying to show that in last month’s period crime went down. They’re forever trying to show that they’ve used less and achieved more. It’s all about manipulating the figures to show a positive result.

W.B. Use less of what?

Manpower, resources, spend less money, achieve more results. That’s what they’re trying to do, they’re trying to police a region on a shoestring budget and also achieve the highest results.

W.B. How do they do that, how do they try to do that?

Well, at the end of the day the way they do it is by basically holding back funds and resources and not providing the over time and everything that’s required and telling the staff that that’s all there is and you’re gonna have to deal with it. Make changes in order to
save as much money as possible. Just cost cutting throughout the way in order to achieve that result. And manipulate the figures so they look greater than what they really are. (Const.)

Another officer provided a more concrete example:

I just know, I mean one personal experience, when a person from Crime Information Unit came up to our office here. We wanted to reduce the car theft by 5%, we wanted to be able to say that car theft has reduced by 5%. So what we want to do is remove certain categories of things from the stolen vehicle list so that it makes it look like car theft has been reduced by 5%. That's, I mean that is just a direct doctoring of figures. That's, you know, they're changing the way they've gathered their statistics to make it look like there's been a 5% reduction in car theft. When, in fact, I know personally that the car, their figures are way, their figures are way over what they were at this time last year. (Const.)

Another tactic employed is to quote figures about activities in the hope that it will create an impression of productive activity:

Remember we started faxing through the arrests every day, so they could start putting them in the paper. I mean they said oh we had thirty arrests here, that's bullshit, that's bullshit, that doesn't prove anything. It proves you arrested a lot of people, so what. I mean that's the scenario. Their perception of how to cure the public's, how to put into the public's mind that we were doing our job was to say we arrested this many people for that many bloody things, right. … But all they're doing is feeding the public what they want to as much as they can to keep up the morale or what we appear to be doing. They're the public face of the police force, they are there if the problems occur they are the ones that wear them, in parliament and everywhere else, right, not us. (Sgt.)
Some interviewees referred to officers who generate the façade of creative activity or avoid being honest about the outcomes of plans that they have instigated. One officer considered that senior managers should be willing, on occasions, to take calculated risks in dealing with issues. In his opinion the contract system inhibited this process and produced an approach that was safe and designed to create the illusion of productive activity:

*Far less likely to take a risk unless it's a, they on many occasions like to appear, because if you do management courses they say that managers should be risk takers, they will do things that appear to be risks but really aren't. Do you follow what I mean, I'm trying to think of an example. They go out on a limb on something but they've already found out that the person up above them is favourable to that point of view or something like that. I've seen it happen, it's just another form of crawling as far as I'm concerned. I've seen it happen that they go, oh all of a sudden they're very strong on some point and you wonder why. And then you find out that the A.C. was very much in favour of that and that's why the particular superintendent. So they appear to be risk takers and go out on a limb for this point and then when you analyse it later you find it was never a risk there at all. They were just, they had sounded out the, their superiors view first. Sometimes they don't even believe in what they're saying. I think that's part of this contract business, that they've just got to make themselves look as good as they possibly can in their three years. The focus of policing, or their staff, looking after their staff or getting the job done takes a very much backseat. Its me, I've gotta look good. (C.O.)

This officer considered that such an approach often commences early on in an officer's career:

*Sometimes it starts at constable, some constables are very good at making themselves look good through a facade. You would know, you would have seen many of them the*
same as I have. So it's, once again, if you've got that dishonest streak as I call it to display a facade then you don't have the honesty required to be a good copper.

Another officer linked the activities of the department's Professional Standards Portfolio and other investigative bodies to the creation of an avoidance mentality within the ranks of the Police Service of Western Australia:

> It is, it is rapidly destroying the ability of police officers to do the job which the public expects of them. There's so much review, and the review, like I said I've used the words 'bad light'. They're constantly looking for matters which they can place on police. Whether it be using incorrect methods, they constantly want to criticise police. That appears to be the entire idea of the so-called Professional Standards Portfolio, the A.C.C. and the Ombudsman's Office. It appears to be 'We want to stop police doing their job'. We want the police to be so lame that they will never, ever get a complaint against them again. (Const.)

This officer went as far as asserting that the actual purpose of these investigative bodies is to maintain control over the police rather than develop standards of professional conduct:

> I think it's actually the informal aim of them bodies. Obviously, if you look through the formal stuff that's placed, the publications and the way they try and place things that's what they're saying they're about you know, professional standards, accountability, community policing and all that sort of stuff. But that's not the way it's applied. It's applied to criticise police at every turn, every turn. They honestly believe that the police need to be pulled back. (Const.)

Decisions by various ranks to avoid involvement in situations
It is common knowledge in the general community that police agencies around Australia and the rest of the world have an extensive history of corruption and various improper practices. This fact may well justify the institution of various methods to combat this undesirable situation. Notwithstanding this, the comments reported throughout this research support the view that a result is the creation of a culture of avoiding a great variety of situations with which officers are confronted. This strategy, although in many respects a recent phenomenon, has been imposed within an organization with an existing history of conservatism and a desire to prevent situations that may lead to any kind of controversy or criticism.

There is a perception among officers that the Police Service of Western Australia and the senior administration avoids confrontations with external forces and also avoids facing up to real issues within its own ranks. For example one officer observed:

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\text{I have a right to say well hang on, it is the organization that's wrong, what do you want to do about it. The problem with the organization accepting people like me in these instances is that they don't know what to do about it either. But to acknowledge the fact that I have a legitimate grievance or complaint on behalf of someone else means they have to something about it. So it's easier to pretend it's not said. (Sgt.)}
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A number of members referred to a culture of avoiding risk, mistakes and criticism.
One officer commented:

Well we came from a culture where we had mistake minimisation, we rewarded that didn’t we. (C.O.)

And further:

Oh risk taking is, again, the very nature of the organization that we’re in, we’re ultra-conservative, we do not, we haven’t survived, the people who are making the decisions now have got by and succeeded through not sticking their neck up. And that’s very much, that’s self evident in the way that we do our business even today. (C.O.)

One officer gave his views about the process that gives rise to this fear of making decisions and the desire to avoid getting to grips with issues:

I don’t know where they get that perception from. It’s probably, I would think it’s a misinformed perception that they’ve brought with them along their journey through the ranks of the police force. They use their knowledge of the police force, I mean they think to themselves, am I going to get into, I mean, if I make this decision how is it going to look for me. How am I going to farer at the end of this. Is it going to satisfy the boss.

Another more senior member believed that the Professional Standards Branch had played a significant role in the creation of this focus by officers on safe decisions and the avoidance of situations that may lead to personal problems for them. He commented:

You know, they’ve gone overboard in that fear, but we’ve generated it, this portfolio’s generated that. So, I mean, coming back to that, I agree that they will analyse, they will
think about that and maybe leave him there, pretend they never saw him. They can't be brought to account by that because no one would know. And to the detriment of a member of the public who's probably no problem to anyone but himself and he could of been rolled ten minutes later and robbed and killed. Because the coppers were too frightened to just do the general right thing. And that's sad. (C.O.)

Another officer linked this excessive focus on internal investigation to the avoidance by the department of a more positive approach to this aspect of police affairs:

W.B. Right, why do you think there is this unrealistic stance on the part of the whole internal investigation mechanism, why do you think that happens?

A lack of preparedness from our leadership to stand up to people.

W.B. Outside agencies do you mean by that?

And complainants, and you know, a desire to go on investigating issues ad nauseam instead of telling someone to go and plat their shit or something you know. (C.O.)

Senior officers, such as superintendents in charge of police districts, are also pressured into ignoring issues that they personally deem to be important in order to avoid severe criticism from above. For example:

Oh sure, look one of the things that comes up here is that because I only have to report monthly on burgs and graffiti and stuff like that maybe that's all I concentrate the resources on, not because that's the problem out there, the problem out there might be something else, but because I only have to report on that that's what I have to keep
sending my resources out to do because that's the only thing that I'm gonna get flogged for if it doesn't get done properly. So there may be a problem over here which, because I don't have to report on it, it would be all too easy for me to ignore it, so I'm not going to worry about that, we can let that sort of ride along a bit because I've gotta worry about these things. Whereas if I was setting my own KPI's I'd say there's our problem over there, forget about car theft for now, we want to concentrate over here. (C.O.)

A number of interviewees referred to examples of behaviour that indicate that members have adopted an attitude of not caring about performing their duties as police officers. For example:

Look, I don't think there's any doubt that the attitude that the existence of the A.C.C., the Ombudsman and the determination by I.I.B. and I.I.U. to have every little stone overturned to get to the bottom of something has put the fear of Christ into people. And they're not working to capacity. We are not locking up anywhere near the number of crooks that this agency used to arrest. Because people aren't prepared to go beyond the line ever so slightly or even to do their job completely for fear of coming unstuck. (C.O.)

And further:

Oh absolutely and again I think the very existence of these other people and bodies looking over our shoulder probably inhibits that to a very great effect. Rightly or wrongly we hear anecdotal feedback from our troops that I'm just not going to go to the trouble. I'm just not going to go any further than this because my family's future depends on this. (C.O.)
A senior member commented that officers are quite able to generate solutions to problems and make decisions but their willingness to do so is compromised by the existence of the internal investigation system:

No, I don't think that internal affairs would necessarily stifle their creativity.

W.B. You don't think so?

No. I think that internal affairs tends to stifle, if anything, an officer's preparedness to make decisions. But where he's got an idea or a plan which is creative, which he can bounce off his sergeant or his mates in plenty of time or in a reasonable time frame I don't think that's a problem. But I do think that internals would temper an officer's preparedness to make decisions. (C.O.)

Another interviewee referred to the fact that the overriding aim of most officers is to survive their shift without creating any problems for themselves:

What I think today is that the morale level is so low that these people just don't give a stuff any more. All they want to do is get through their eight hours with the minimum amount of fuss. The potential for getting into trouble I believe is a great deterrent to people doing their jobs…. And I think that an awful lot of officers out there have lost the will to become effective police officers. (Sgt.)

Other officers made very similar statements. For example:

I think some of them, some of the junior ones I suppose, think that it will get better and some of the more senior ones don't put themselves in the situation, where they don't give a damn. Just come in and do what they have to do over the eight hours, don't expect to
work anymore, don't look to work anymore, knock off on time and go home and don't worry about it. (Const.)

And another member observed:

But in his mind, now, he is now going through a stage where he'd say what the hell am I bothering for. I can go out on the road and drive around and do nothing, why do I bother. (Sgt.)

A more senior officer referred to this attitude among members:

Well they resent it for a start but then what flows from there, I mean being a police officer you can come to work, do what's sort of put in front of you, don't take any risk whatsoever and still get paid. If you want initiative and that from your police officers to go, you know, to the next step then there's gotta be support. What this is basically doing, coppers are saying I get paid for working eight to four, coming in, driving around in the van or doing whatever I do, look at me computer, I'm a detective and I'm writing things off….(C.O)

Another officer described the impact of budget restrictions and how this contributed to this climate of indifference:

Well, basically it will breed contempt towards the job because you'll just come in and you'll turn up for your eight hours and you'll go home. (Const.)

One interviewee described the general ethos of avoiding involvement in policing issues as a means of controlling stress:
We’re constantly looking at mistakes people make, or we look at issues looking for mistakes rather than backing up the decisions or working on which decisions are working, which decisions aren’t, which decisions are valid, we’re constantly saying we want things done in a certain way. So, what you’re doing then is taking the core competency, which is the initiative of the police officers on the street, away from them because they would rather do nothing because they’re encouraged not to make mistakes…. But as soon as they start looking for offenders and, you know, taking an initiative, you know in dealing with the people who are committing the offences or creating the public safety issues, you’re putting yourself at risk. You get no greater reward for driving around for eight hours, attending two break-ins during the night or driving around looking for people dealing with, you know speaking to hundreds of people during the night, making twenty arrests, you know. All you’re doing by doing the job is creating more stress and more chances of criticism for yourself. More risk to yourself. (Const.)

And another member made similar comments:

Now, problem solving means you need to develop yourself and apply more and more initiative and knowledge on problems. Now, we constantly withdraw from problems to avoid criticism. (Const.)

Junior members made similar references to the impact of this need to avoid the consequences of criticism:

I certainly think that they’re more inhibited now than they ever were and they’re quite happy to be, I mean more and more now people are encouraged not to worry about life and property but worry about one’s own well being both financially and physically and are more willing to draw a line and say well that’s as far as I go because I can’t afford to go any further. (Sgt.)
And another officer stated:

*I mean people aren't going to stick their necks out now because they don't want to get into trouble, it's not worth the drama, so it's just as easy not to do it. (Const.)*

A tactic that is resorted to by many officers involves simply deciding not to perform a range of policing duties when faced with such situations. The constant threat of complaints and being the subject of investigation is the major factor that lies behind such decisions.

One senior officer observed:

*Well for a start it's probably overzealous policing of the police instead of concentrating on managing the police. We have generated this fear to a degree that, it could have serious ramifications in that people will hesitate to do the job that they know should be done. However, I think that the pendulum has swung too far in that people will avoid doing the work, the hard work, for fear of recrimination, criticism, complaints. And they've come away from that so much that their own self-protection becomes the most important thing. Without, we don't have risk takers. Or, we still do have risk takers but there's not so much risk-taking going on and really a good manager needs to have that element of risk taking.*

(C.O.)
Another officer voiced similar concerns:

They know by making complaints that it is having an effect on the fellas. They are a bit more reluctant to get in and solve problems that they probably should be because at the end of the day they’re going to get complained about anyway so I don’t need the aggravation. (C.O.)

One junior officer with considerable general duties experience described a number of situations of which he had personal experience. These highlight the differences between what some would consider active and efficient policing and the modern approach to avoiding activities that might lead to complaints:

They’d rather not become involved in controversial issues. If they can avoid a controversial issue they will.

W.B. What is your definition of a controversial issue?

An issue which might lead to criticism. I remember a situation where I turned up at a job which involved police officers. And it would have been very easy just to turn my back and walk away but I managed to get through the problem and more and more, as soon as the police officers are seeing themselves placed in a position where they might be criticised they are withdrawing from it as quickly as they can. (Const.)

This officer described how other members become skilled at assessing and avoiding the types of situation that have the potential to cause them difficulties:
Now if you're dealing with people who are running around on the street creating problems and as soon as you start dealing with them they start claiming racism, harassment and all that sort of thing, you know you're much better off not trying to solve the problem but gloss over it so you don't become criticised. I think it's reasonably easy to work out on a lot of occasions when you're sailing into troubled waters. (Const)

This officer also made comment about the frequency with which an active police officer is likely to encounter such situations or persons:

_In my opinion, if they're doing they're job it should be a daily occurrence._ (Const.)

This member also included observations about his own style of policing by way of contrast with that of other officers who avoid involvement:

_But as a patrol/inquiry officer about eighty per cent of your work should be what you see when you're driving. Now, over the course of that month I averaged about two arrests, or two apprehensions a night. And some of these blokes would be driving around for months and never have an apprehension or discovered anything on patrol. I think, what are youse guys doing, are you just walking around blind. And the truth was that's precisely what they were doing. That is what the culture said they should do, that is what their sergeants said they should do. Go to the jobs you're sent to, do the minimum required of you rather than solve any of the community's problems._ (Const.)

Another officer referred to the general lack of commitment to a positive style of policing and the links to self-protection against criticism:

_Well obviously being under scrutiny, anybody that's under scrutiny to the extent that we are, I mean it's got to have some effect on, for instance, on their thinking. And on how_
they perform their task because at the back of their mind will be not only must I do this job properly but I must also make sure that anybody who comes behind me to review what I've done won't have any complaints against me. (Sgt.)

And further:

Probably because of the scrutiny we're under, we've become less entrepreneurial, less committed perhaps because we're more concerned about who's looking over our shoulder and what's going to happen next. (Sgt.)

Another more senior officer summed up the contrast between what the organization appeared to require from its police officers and what society deserved:

And that's the difference, people expect you to be, I call young coppers nowadays the kissing babies set. That's what they want you to do, they want you out at shopping centres kissing babies, holding people's hands. Okay, when that role arises you do it but how often as a police officer should you be doing that. Or should you be out there grabbing hold of some scumbag who is performing and taking appropriate action to curb his behaviour? (C.O.)

This particular method of dealing with the environment takes a variety of different forms. For example one officer stated:

Probably without that so-called accountability or the harping on it all the time they'd probably say, right I need to do this, right. This bloke's told me there's drugs there, I'll go and get a search warrant and do it. But, because you're subject to accountability, this bloke's told me there's drugs there, will I get a warrant or won't I. You know, what else do I need to do. I don't know, maybe I'll just toss this up and throw it in the bin. (Sgt.)
Officers are said to be hesitant to become involved in situations requiring quick action due to concerns about possible consequences:

I think we've come with the heavy handed approach to, as I mentioned to somebody funnily enough even this morning, we've got staff now that if there's any doubt at all as to what you're doing is right or wrong they'll hesitate. Given a situation perhaps with an armed offender or something equally dangerous that hesitation could be one step removed from them being alive or dead. (C.O.)

Officers are reluctant to display any degree of positive interaction with suspects for serious offences. For example:

But then you'll have a nucleus of people, probably the great majority of operational police will be thinking Jesus, I've got a problem here but I can't solve it if I've got to stick absolutely to the rules. If the trooper and his partner can see that they've gotta go over there to find what they're looking for, but the law doesn't allow them to make that transition as smoothly as they like they'll simply turn around and say to each other, look we know he's done the break, we know he's whatever he's supposed to have committed but I don't think we should take a chance and go any further with this. So, did you do the break Bill, no I didn't, well thanks for coming and turn him away. The crooks must be laughing at us. (C.O.)

In relation to the way in which police officers are less forceful with offenders nowadays as a result of the fear of complaints and the attendant time consuming complications, one officer commented:
Yeah, and of course by the time you get through all that it can take up sort of two and a half hundred percent of your day which is two and a half days so that does cause a lot of concern and that's another reason why a lot of people nowadays you'll find will back down and say yeah okay what I'll choose to do is caution you on this occasion and fuck him, I let him get away with it. (Sgt.)

Reference was also made to some practical examples of why officers choose to ignore matters rather than deal with them fully. For example:

And another one, a very similar one, is when they're dealing with kids. On many occasions they don't appear to deal with kids properly because they're sick and tired of all the Young Offenders Act and all the rest of it, the parlarva they've gotta go through. They don't bother, so they ignore. They just piss em off or something like that. So I mean that's, there are quite a few I think of things like that. Domestics, we've always ignored domestics because of the ramifications that come out of it afterwards and things like that. So I mean, and yeah they would, they're, that's again they're not prepared to take that risk whereas before you didn't have a hesitation, you'd just do the right thing by the bloke. If the bloke's not, just a problem to himself and no one else you'd take him home or do whatever you liked. And you would do the commonsense thing, rather than lock him up or all the rest of it. Now they hesitate and they analyse what they're doing first because of this fear. Can I be brought to book on this, can I get in the shit. And sometimes they think they can get in the shit when they damn well can't. (C.O.)

5.3 ACHIEVING/RETAINING A PROMOTION

The second feature of the model that motivates many police officers with regard to their duties is the desire to achieve or maintain a promotion to sergeant or commissioned officer. As explained above there is a tremendous amount of prestige attached to such an outcome among a very great
number of police officers. The power, influence and recognition that attaches to this outward symbol of success within the semi-military type system that exists ensures that this is a powerful and continuous factor driving the actions of many police officers.

As is the case with the previous section covering the avoidance of stress, many officers use similar tactics to address their promotional needs.

Control by senior officers over the actions of members of lower rank

For example, officers with senior rank will impose their demands over junior members in order to control activities with the aim of preventing outcomes that could reflect badly on them. One officer stated:

I think you are exactly spot on, it’s something I certainly noticed is the lack of devolution, of people not prepared to let go because they don’t trust anybody else to do a good job. Ultimately they’re responsible and they don’t want to front up I guess at the end of their contract and say oh look I failed, but it was his fault down there. They want to be able to have the control of that stuff. I guess that’s a negative side. But that’s something that needs to be managed by the district officer or the assistant commissioner. That these people, one of the things they need to be assessed on is their ability to devolve responsibility. (C.O.)

Another officer referred to the need that senior personnel have to exert control over junior officers and the link to a fear of undesirable consequences affecting their promotional prospects:

Well, it’s my understanding, but it’s all about local problem solving so presumably if it can be, if the constable on the day can make that decision fine, then he should make it. He should be the one to make it. If he’s got to seek advice from anyone, from that point, you
should never go more than say two levels above that. In other words his immediate supervisor and his senior supervisor or his OIC. I mean that’s what I think it should do and of course that flows right through the system. If the supervisor’s got a problem then they should go no higher than the next two levels of supervision or management. And I think that’s appropriate because that’s where it should be done. But by the same token what that means is senior management have gotta have trust in the people under them and unfortunately they’ve become micro managers, the vast majority of them have become micro managers because they fear that their promotional prospects or performance appraisal is going to be affected by something a very junior person does which might come unstuck and make a racket, you know. (Sgt.)

This officer also commented on the existence of a climate where questioning or criticism by junior officers is heavily censured:

Certainly I think they, in many respects, they need to get in touch with their troops. Unfortunately, the times they meet they’re not in a, they’re in a very much a master servant relationship when they come to these meetings. The boss say’s oh have you got any problems, and no-ones going to open their mouth, a problem, negativity, bang, another dead messenger. You know, and certainly if you’re in a, a junior constable’s in a meeting with a senior officer and his OIC’s there, and a sergeant supervisor is there, and he says something I don’t think he could expect you know a pat on the back at the end of it all. And that’s certainly a perception I think that they have. (Sgt.)

One officer made reference to the degree of control exercised by many senior officers:

And I don’t know what the reasons are, whether it’s because these district officers are taking total control of the regions and instead of managing a region they appear to be
managing every police station that's in that region, because I think there's just so much on the line for them. I don't know whether it's their contract or it's for their advancement within the service, they just seem to look at every station and every decision that's made, they see how it will reflect on them before they do it, whether it's good or not that doesn't matter it's how it's going to reflect on them at a later stage. (Const.)

A junior officer referred to the perceived link between senior officers exerting control and the existence of contracts:

I think it's got more, it did in a way but I think it's got more prevalent, there's a lot more of it now since Delta came in. Because it's, again I believe they think they can be held accountable for what you've done in the street which goes back on them and how they look and that may affect their promotion and I believe that's what it all comes down to. Their contract is for two or three years whatever it's set at. And I believe that that's what they look at, 'I've gotta get through this contract so I can't have anybody down there making a decision that might affect me up here. So I'll guide them in the decisions they should be making. (Const.)

Another junior officer spoke about the degree of control exerted by senior management over events around them:

I don't know whether it's a power struggle, I don't know whether it's insecurity of their own ability to be in charge. I don't know whether they trust the people below them. Maybe some of those people who are below the man in authority they don't believe can do the job. But they are put there and therefore the only way to keep an eye on them is to keep a strangle hold on what they do and everything goes through them and they feel that every thing's okay. I suppose it's a butt covering exercise because if no one makes a mistake down their chain then they're going to be all right. (Const.)
Again, this officer attributed the situation to the existence of contracts:

> That is the reason why everyone's holding on too tight, because everyone wants to make sure that for the twelve month period they are doing what is expected of them to ensure that they get another twelve months, and another twelve months and so on it goes for everyone. (Const.)

**Lower ranks deferring decision making to senior members**

Other tactics involve compliance with authority and actions motivated by self-interest. A junior member made comments about the pressure that contracted officers feel to comply with the wishes of higher management regardless of the true value of any such actions:

> Well they appear to be wanting to please the next level up. It's all, all gone towards compliance, it's just been another piece of political pressure that's placed upon the commissioned officers to comply and put in the changes or do the things in the manner that the higher management wants. (Const.)

This officer linked the feelings of vulnerability experienced by contracted officers with their willingness to be compliant with the wishes of higher authority:

> And, you know it appears that those who wish to get promoted you know they're vulnerable because they are automatically subservient to those who are able to promote them. So you've got that power relationship. If you want to either maintain your position or become promoted you must comply with what I've decided. (Const.)
Some officers expressed views about the interaction between the pressures caused by the contractual system and the need for the upper tiers of management to be able to select candidates over whom they are able exert control. For example:

Well it’s probably got the propensity to ensure that people toe the party line which is always a bit of a worry. I wouldn't like to think that people would be that narrow minded that because some one has a differing view then they might suffer the consequences of not having their contract renewed. However, having seen the way that things are done that could well happen. (C.O.)

And further:

I've seen other peoples just yes sir no sir three bags full sir and it could be said that a lot of those sorts of people are being promoted and placed in their positions. Now whether that's the contract that's causing that or whether it's just the system that's picking that's picking those people it's debatable. I don't think the contract of employment has changed those people, I think they're probably just there.

W.B. They're attractive to the system are they?

They're very attractive to the system because they get told something and they're quite happy to just to toe the line, bang, don't query anything. (C.O.)

Another officer commented on the bias that he saw in the promotion selection process:

One of the things that struck me is the, I'm just trying to find the correct term, or the terms that the Delta programme used I think it's, they say that now you can get promoted on
merit and they base it on a merit based promotion system. And my personal perception is that that is not in fact what I've observed. That there is a considerable amount of nepotism, there is still a lot of old school tie associations and there's also a lot of your face has to fit in order to gain selection into specialist sections. (Const.)

And further:

Subjectively, if your face doesn't fit you don't get promoted, if you're not willing to carry the party line, even if all the objective evidence is such that you are a better manager of people, if your face doesn't fit, if you don't carry the party line, if it is envisaged that you will later become an adverse affect on the current hierarchy it is likely that that will influence the decision for promotion, as opposed to the other objective accountability methods. And even with the merit based promotion system its still happening. (Const.)

Various ranks creating the façade of meaningful action

Officers who have a focus on promotion or who are subject to contracts of employment are said by some interviewees to be susceptible to activities designed to show themselves in a favourable light:

It certainly causes the people on contract some concerns knowing that it's going to be renewed in three years. Some of the attitudes of those people overtly change as renewal of their contract approaches. They become concerned at trying to put forward ideas that shows them in a better light....You can see a change in attitude in them, that they know they're coming up for contract so that they've gotta be doing things that shows that they are a high performer. Where they might not necessarily have been for the whole time that they've been on their contract. (C.O.)
This officer referred to the perception among junior officers that the slightest transgression on their part can be prejudicial to their future promotional prospects:

"Okay, so I would say the number of people that I've spoken to, especially junior officers, they now think that if that happens their career's over because the way, the perception at the moment from a lot of the younger officers that I certainly deal with is that if you blot your copy book, don't bother applying for a promotion. (Sgt.)"

One interviewee spoke about officers who use the process of appearing to deal with issues to gain advantage for themselves:

"You know, they used to call them STARS, Situation, Action, Outcome. I mean you can almost hear the wheels motioning, you know what I mean. There's certain people we've all met and their motivation is purely, not how can we solve that problem but I make the solving, or the perception of the solving of that problem something I can use to support my advancement. (Sgt.)"

Some interviewees described situations where officers made decisions for reasons related to their personal advancement and then demonstrated reluctance to amend them when circumstances dictated that this was the correct course of action. This was said to be due to a fear of being seen as less than competent.

For example one officer stated:

"Perhaps I haven't said that very well but they may be influenced to make decisions that they otherwise would not have made because of this fear that they will be returned to their previous rank. Therefore, what it does is that fear has basically stemmed down the"
hierarchical ladder. If a particular individual is more worried about being accountable because his three year tenure might be up he might make decisions that are politically favourable as opposed to being good leadership, good management. (Const.)

And further:

This is where this merit based promotion system, in my opinion, falls down. There are, there are instances in any organization where things will and where things will not work but it is the perception, it is the perception among my peers and myself that on far too many occasions decisions are made for career purposes and not for management obligations. (Const.)

Another officer clearly linked this need to create the impression of productivity with a focus on promotion and the almost transient nature of many such ideas:

Yeah, I'd take that from two sides, I'm conscious that a lot of people that are very promotionally orientated are thinking of ways of being, of making change for the sake of change. And they're putting in these initiatives. Now I've seen many of them never been evaluated, never been followed through once the blokes moved on 'cause he really had no intentions. All he wanted to do was get something up and running to show that he had another star.' (C.O.)

In many instances, once initiatives are put into place, the originator of the plan displays a reluctance to admit that the project did not come up to expectations:

For example one member commented:
And a lot of the times when these things are set up again, if they don't work people don't have the balls to say well it doesn't work, I'm going to change it. They still persist with it because, I think what they, what their idea is, is that if they said well this doesn't work and I'm going to change it, it would show that their credibility is lacking or they've made a mistake. And, really, that can't be for the benefit of the police department, really. I mean if you set something up and it's not working for Christ's sake have enough balls to change it. (Sgt.)

There is seen to be an element existing here of avoiding reality and a desire to preserve reputation:

So they persist and you know I think in a lot a instances no matter what the cost they will persist with it because they've set it up, it's been their idea, they're a superintendent and the last thing they want to show to people within their region is that they can't do that job properly. So they persist. (Sgt.)

One interviewee made reference to the lack of willingness within the Police organization itself to allow officers to acknowledge mistakes and learn from the process:

...re-visiting goals and objectives, evaluating the success. Being prepared to put our hand up and say that a programme hasn't worked and to move on from that. To not keep, to, yeah I think just to be able to say that something hasn't worked. Okay, we've learnt from that, move on rather than failing to acknowledge when a programme or a strategy hasn't worked I think, and no I don't think the honesty is or, I don't think we feel safe enough yet in this organization to be able to say look, no look this hasn't worked, we need to move on because it's akin very much to telling the emperor he's got no clothes. (C.O.)

Decisions by various ranks to avoid involvement in situations
One officer spoke about the increased potential for junior members to avoid addressing poor performance by senior officers as a result of this fear of jeopardizing their own future careers:

Oh well, I mean particularly now with the type of promotional system we’ve got of contracts and things like that it has a great effect because people are very reluctant to do anything about somebody who’s causing a problem above them through fear of jeopardizing future promotion. Very few people have got the courage to go and say report an incompetent officer or report some sort of decision making that is flawed. Invariably they’ll just cop it and that in itself will probably just drop morale a notch. (C.O.)

A non-commissioned officer expressed concerns about the willingness of senior officers to protect their own image by ignoring difficult issues in order to preserve the appearance of being in control of their particular areas:

I think again whereas it becomes an attitudinal shift for the younger constable not to get into trouble, it becomes an attitudinal shift from the inspector to think, and above, to think there can’t be any problems, we don’t want to see any problems, to get promoted I have to be seen to be doing a brilliant job, so therefore irrespective of what happens I’m basically going to say that everything is hunky dory…. Now, you can hide your head in the sand all you like, the problems are still there. And unless you address them they’re not going to go away, they’re just going to get bigger. And I don’t believe this hierarchy has addressed any of the problems that we face. (Sgt.)

This officer clearly attributes this willingness to preserve a false image to the competition and pressures arising from the contractual nature of senior officer’s employment:
I think they turn around to them and say don't make waves, don't stand up and say we can't do the job, we can't do this and we can't do that, don't tell the truth because if you do then your contract won't be renewed. And then you'll go back to being one of the rank and file. I think the contract system is bloody stupid and hopeless because the people there will be too frightened to open their mouth and tell it like it is. (Sgt.)

A number of officers interviewed described a range of behaviours and actions that they considered were motivated by a desire to avoid real issues and present themselves in the most favourable light. There is a belief that notions of self-advancement motivate this type of behaviour.

One officer commented:

I think that the contract generates a self-centred approach. You're always conscious of the fact that how am I going to look its coming up to renewal of contract. You're more self-centred and anything that could create sort of ripples on the water you're jumping on, it generates that distancing themselves from the area and blaming other people and things like that. They don't want to take responsibility because it doesn't look too good when they come up for renewal I don't think, and that sort of thing. I think definitely that we can see a lot of examples, particularly with superintendents, that they'll back away from their responsibilities if they can and distance themselves or else try and make every post a winning post in making them look good, to hell with everyone else. (C.O.)

Other officers described how this approach is the cause of decisions being based on self-interest or fear of problems arising rather than what the circumstances really require from an effective policing viewpoint:
Well I think to a great degree because they're going to be thinking, instead of perhaps making a decision based on the best available evidence they'll make a decision based on what is, what can produce the best available result for them. Now that may well correlate with a good action plan that will have a good community result. But to, in cases, I think the decisions are being made to promote themselves rather than the organization. (C.O.)

One officer referred to decision-making based on fear of being harshly judged as managers in relation to exceeding budgets:

I'm personally not under a contract, I was promoted under the old system but, I am aware that a lot of them are very conscious of the fact that they're under contract and to be seen to run over budget, whether it's justified or not, they're very reluctant to do and I feel that it does, it does have that effect in some ways that, put it this way, if it's justified it should be done, then the money can be sorted out later. But there has been some decisions made which really, to me, are a bad decisions and they've been brought about by this fear of upsetting the apple cart and going over budget, or, and I think it is compounded by the fact that they are under contract and they do feel vulnerable. Because the threat is there, well if you can't do it under budget we'll get rid of you and get someone else who will and, yes, it is an underlying factor and I can see where the young blokes are coming from. Cause I have seen some what I consider to be some very poor decisions based on that. (C.O.)

Another officer referred to the potential impact on junior officers of this self-centred approach to avoiding actions that are genuinely intended to address issues rather than provide grounds for further promotion:
Because they've got confidence that the person's going to be around for a while. That they're, that they'll be in that position for some time, they haven't taken the position as a stepping stone to go further and every decision they make is not a S.A.YO. or a S.T.A.R. or call it what you like. And any strategy they put in place, there's not a hidden agenda behind the strategy that that is, I put, they're putting this into place to use it to go further. It doesn't matter about whether it's going to be effective or not but within their application for further promotion they can claim it as something that they've initiated. And I think that's important. (C.O.)

In relation to the level within the organization at which this occurs this officer commented:

Well it's becoming harder and harder because one the inspectors don't wanna know about problems, they just don't wanna know because as soon as a problem lands on their desk that's something that they've gotta deal with and try and get it in the manner they want. They'd rather gloss over the real policing problems, which is the offences being committed, the public safety issues and all that, and put in some sort of change initiative in, which may or may not solve the problem, and look good to those above them rather than getting under and working out a way, which might not be political, politically well viewed. You know that's all it becomes. It seems from inspector up it's all about being viewed in a positive light rather than being viewed as somebody who gets the job done. (C.O.)

Many of the officers interviewed reported actions that can be described as avoiding involvement with a range of issues or situations. This tactic is engaged in by the organization and individual police officers at many levels within the agency.
For example, in relation to the willingness of the head of the Police Service of Western Australia to confront issues affecting the organization openly, one officer praised a former commissioner in the following terms:

….but he stood up for his police force. He did not care which party you belonged to or how high up you were in a political field at all. If you criticised his police unjustly, or if you criticised his police anyway, he would go to bat for you. And he would honestly come up and say well this is why we’ve done things. I admired that and from that time on in my experience we haven’t had a commissioner who would stand up and say things honestly.

(C.O.)

Many comments made by interviewees concern the apparent willingness of senior officers on contract to simply avoid getting to grips with issues problems or situations that have the potential to generate problems for them. For example one member observed:

I don’t know, we haven't actually seen that yet. I mean I guess we’ve got to look at getting back to these contracts. I don’t know whether we have too many risk takers out there I'm not sure. But I mean that would be the thing that would be foremost in most of their minds I would think, they would think about their contracts. I don’t think we have too many people who would be able, too many risk takers who would take that sort of a risk. I think by far and large the majority of them would be safety-first people. (Sgt.)

This officer linked a conservative approach to matters to the promotion system and the failure to select leaders with the willingness to confront issues that demand positive action:
That's right, safe decisions, safe for them I would say. And I'm convinced that goes back to the quality of the leaders we've got, which goes back to the selection system we've got.

(Sgt.)

Another member spoke about the practice of commissioned officers avoiding taking responsibility for problems that arise, and again this was linked to promotion issues:

W.B. If they don't have these man management skills do, when something goes wrong do they accept the blame for it?

Yeah, I'd love to see the day when I saw one of them stand up and say it's my fault, but they don't. They can't afford to because if they do stand up and say it's my fault then they know they're not going any further and the only reason they're in those positions at the moment is to go as high as they can go. I'd really like, genuinely like to see somebody at the commissioned rank turn around and say I am here to support the most lowest officer.

(Sgt.)

Another tactic that officers resort to in seeking to control their environment involves recognizing potentially dangerous situations and taking steps designed to avoid placing themselves into a position that might create undesirable consequences. For example, in relation to roles within the police service officers seek positions where they can be more certain of avoiding contentious situations:

People who are senior constable are applying for a sergeant's rank, there was a hundred and eighty five positions ranging from shift supervisor at Central to a staff officer to the superintendent at Broome, as diverse as that. I'm talking about road patrols, traffic sergeants, I'm talking about DISC sergeants, I'm talking about Policy and Planning, I'm
talking about the Academy. The number of people applying for positions, and they have to list their order of reference, where there first order of preference, they wanted to be a sergeant in this organization and they applied to go to a non-operational position as their first choice. If they got promoted within the Advance system, if they’d be given a choice what position they were going to go to they’d picked a non-operational, a non-coal face one.

W.B. What does that tell you?

That tells me that people don’t want to be on the streets.

W.B. Why do you think that is?

Because they, there is a perception that if they’re out there and they make a decision and the decision is found to be wanting or wrong then they’re going to be crucified so they’d rather not, they want the rank, and they want the money but they don’t want the responsibility of being out there on the streets where they can be subjected to, subjected to a complaint and if they are subject to a complaint they’re not going to be supported by the person making the investigation. (C.O.)

And once again an officer linked this apprehension about doing one’s job to the existence of the promotion system:

When you put people in competition with each other, for their livelihood and we’re talking about livelihood here, and their careers you’re dead set going to go off the rails. I mean you’re not going to go out and try something new if you’re gonna think that’s gonna affect your promotion or is going to affect your career down the track you don’t do it. And
whereas before, I think before the ADVANCE system came in guys clearly would go out and take risks and, when I say take risks, try things just a little bit different just to see how they work. Because we had an understanding at that particular stage that yeah look, if you came unstuck you came unstuck, the boss would give you a kick in the bum and that would be it. But now your livelihood's on the line. (Sgt.)

A senior officer linked this attitude to the fear of formal criticism arising from any complaints made:

*Because as I said they say, they take every time that there is some, see an informal counselling is in fact, is formally recorded although it's an informal counselling. They take it that that admonishment will have a deleterious impact on their career further down the line. And so they don't put themselves in a position where that's going to happen.*

W.B. They become what, very guarded about how they do things?

*Reserved, yeah, I don't say they neglect their duty but just, maybe they don't, they're not as forceful in the way they police a situation as they would be if it wasn't for that.* (C.O.)

**Summary**

This research has identified many aspects of The Police Service of Western Australia that members believe impact on the way in which they approach their duties. These have been combined in the model described and this construct is an entity that exhibits some very serious obstacles to the implementation of a free and creative approach by police officers to their duties. The existence of these factors within the organizational structure of the Police Service of western Australia obviously presents the question about how members deal with the limitations with which they are faced on a regular basis in going about their duties.
More specifically the question at the centre of this research is how officers reconcile the existence of such elements with the requirement for them to apply a problem solving approach to their work.

The traditional view of police officers is that they wield very great power in the community. This power would appear to be based on factors such as their official position, knowledge of the law and their willingness and ability to assert themselves over other members of the community. Police officers are the ones that ordinary members of the community turn to in times of trouble and need. They are the ones who are called on to use their powers to rectify a wide range of problems when no one else can or will do so.

Notwithstanding the general view held about the power residing with police officers to deal with all manner of things, the existence of so many negative elements could cause them to withdraw completely from such a critical environment. It would not be surprising to discover that police officers in fact suffer from feelings of powerlessness resulting in a refusal to become involved to any degree in such potentially controversial activities.

However, analysis of the data gathered indicates that officers at many levels within the organization do in fact engage with a range of issues in their working lives. They adopt a more subtle approach to handling their environment and exerting some degree of control over events and possible outcomes. The Basic Social Process that officers adopt has been termed Controlling Avoidance. The data gathered has been interpreted to show that members assess the level of danger that a given situation presents and then implement one or more tactics that are designed to control the risks identified and avoid consequences that are deemed to be undesirable for them.

This process is conducted while appearing to deal with the problem with which they have been presented. When such activities are carried out they are designed to avoid undesirable
consequences for the officer. Any results that actually aid in the solution of the problem at hand, while not unwelcome, would appear to be purely incidental to the primary goal of self-protection.
CHAPTER SIX: PROBLEM SOLVING

The idea of employees adopting a problem solving approach to their work is not a new concept or indeed one that is unique to the Police Service of Western Australia. The need to adopt this approach to policing is clearly set out in Purpose And Direction and the expected benefits are detailed in various other publications.

The officers interviewed for this research expressed opinions about a variety of specific aspects of the topic of problem solving. Many officers referred to the needs of the organization and the influence of the existing culture.

A senior officer described the basis of this requirement in the following terms:

*I think what we've seen with the evolving police theories is that the problem-oriented policing approach is the way forward. And it's definitely a way for us. And it simply means it's a contingency approach to policing and that is it depends upon the situation as to what type of reaction we will have or strategies we will adopt. (C.O.)*

And:

*W.B. Right, is a problem-oriented approach unique to Western Australia?*

*No it's not. A problem-oriented approach, problem-oriented is Goldstein. Goldstein is an academic who has looked at policing on a broader perspective, largely more to do with the United States than anywhere. And it is a, it is a more holistic approach to meeting the community's needs through policing strategies.*
W.B. Is that linked in any way with the other philosophy if we can call it of policing the community, of community policing?

Yes it is, I think that community policing has a strong role in problem-oriented policing. It's largely saying that, and we learn that from Britain too with the community involvement, that we are seeing the community work very effectively with the police to address the needs of their community. Whether it be anti-social behaviour or offending behaviour and we are seeing some very very good evidence the world over that the problem-oriented approach is working and it's working very effectively. (C.O.)

This officer referred to the clear links with the Delta reforms as being the authority for the adoption of the problem-solving approach to policing:

Bill, I think we well and truly know that we have a very robust democracy in this country and clearly the community, we are here to meet the community's needs. We do not, we cannot operate in isolation, we should not operate in isolation and we should police with the community's consent. And that is strongly aligned in everything that we do now, the way we do our business. Particularly with, and I think the Delta reform agenda in Western Australia strongly reflects that. (C.O.)

Another senior member expressed his opinion about the need and benefits of a problem-solving approach in the following terms:

Well I think that it's a good thing, it's the only way to go. Not the only way to go but it should form the nucleus of modern policing. You've obviously still got to have specialist areas, you've got to have components of policing that can't involve the community but problem oriented policing, which, by definition, must involve the community, is the only
way that we're going to be able to win the battle. And that means, when I talk about the community I don't just mean the Neighbourhood Watch and volunteers who come along to the meetings and that sort of thing, but I mean the broader community, the government departments and businesses and so on. The whole of the people living in Western Australia taking some sort of responsibility for crime and disorder and safety issues.

(C.O.)

A senior officer referred to his focus on this approach to policing and the flexibility that is required in implementing such a methodology:

Me personally, operationally I think that the issues of importance are our focus on management, and the strategic management, human resource management aspects of our areas of responsibility. I think it's important, I'm not sure how wide we want to cast this net, certainly those two issues I think. The focus on community policing and problem oriented policing style is important and is something I have a significant focus on. (C.O.)

And further:

So problem-oriented policing to me is nothing more than problem solving but taking it to a level where we actually walk through and get it finished and then have a look. And then if it still doesn't work we need to come back and work some more. I think, I think we see examples of it because if we use the phrase POP and read the American versions you're right, I think it's an academic little anachronism that's suggesting it's something more than plain old bloody common sense where people are committed, committed to resolving the problem. (C.O.)

The views of the senior officer in the above quotation contain a comment indicating a tolerance of mistakes and an approach that is accepting of the fact that problems are sometimes not solved at
the first attempt. The general organizational culture would appear to be at odds with this sentiment in that many officers feel a certain degree of concern in relation to actions that are not successful.

In relation to the need to foster and support a creative approach to policing issues this senior officer stated:

That would also ensure the district superintendent's promotion of the policing ethos of Community Policing slash Problem-Oriented and the risk taking aspect. Now, risk taking, to me, there is being nothing more than let's do this, let's spend six hours trying to fix this. If it doesn't work we've just wasted six hours. I'm prepared to support my people to make that decision based upon a quality group doing the best they can. That's an example of risk taking. Not any illegal or bordering on illegal activities. So it's as long as they're attempting to achieve within obviously any limits then that's the risk taking that DO would support. (C.O.)

This quotation also has a reference to a tolerance of a lack of success in relation to problem solving activity. This ability to cope with uncertainty is an important element of a problem-oriented approach. It could be argued that it is at odds with the current organizational model that arises from this current research.

Other writers on policing have raised this question of the need for acceptance of the possibility of lack of success in relation to problem solving initiatives. For example Moir and Eijkman (1992, p. 5) state that:

Policing must orient itself towards, and learn to live with, the stresses of experimentation and innovation. Rather than an either - or approach to innovation confined by criteria of assured success or abandonment, our book implies the need for a greater sense of
organizational and individual openness to allow for trial and error, and the continual process of ‘constructive alteration’ to policies, programs and practices.

The acceptance of this type of risk as a natural element of a problem-solving approach to policing has featured in the approach of police agencies. Mastrofski, Worden and Snipes (1995, p. 545) described the implementation of a program to solve community problems by the police in Richmond, Virginia in the United States.

During this process the administrators of that police department stressed the importance of rank and file participation in solving community problems. They also encouraged a policy of “creative failure” whereby officers who tried innovative solutions would not be punished if they failed, provided theirs was a good faith effort.

During the current research a senior officer raised the concept of promoting a creative approach to problem solving by encouraging independent action by officers in conformity with the Delta ethos:

Yeah and I think that's starting to happen from what I've seen and certainly I encourage it here that, you can talk about delegation and empowerment but ultimately it's about trust, giving people an opportunity to have a bit of a run. You know clearly setting out for them what their roles and responsibilities are but allowing them to have their head and be creative in the way they do things. As opposed to simply being task focused. If they're just focused on, this is my task and my job and that's what I'll do then they're not going to get I think as clear an understanding of what the agency wants them to do. I think really Delta's telling them we want you to be, I'm certainly interpreting Delta to be something which is wanting people to be far more flexible in the way they do their job.

W.B. How does creativity?
Although the above comments indicate an acceptance by some senior officers of the concepts surrounding problem solving policing, other members expressed views indicating their belief that the department experiences problems with a full and free implementation of this approach to policing. For example one senior member stated:

*But what I've not seen is any form of education about problem-oriented policing. I haven’t seen any courses being conducted on it, any short seminars or courses nor am I aware of problem-oriented policing being part of an officer development course or Applied Policing. Two but it may well be. But it just seemed to me that we've started throwing this latest little bit of buzz terminology around but nobody really knows what it is and I'd suspect that if you asked a lot of police officers what’s problem-oriented policing they’d say oh it’s where you police, you look for a problem and you find a solution. (C.O.)*

And further:

*But I'm a fan of it and you know I think it's the way to go but I think at this stage it's given a lot of lip service by people in this organization right up to the senior levels who don't really understand it. Because nobody is specialized in it at this point of time to the extent where they're able to teach the department what it's all about and so on. (C.O.)*

In relation to the department’s role in promoting a problem-solving approach to policing this officer stated:
But, as I said probably half an hour ago, I don’t think that this department’s marketed it, there’s no doubt about that and you obviously can see that too. It’ll be interesting to see just what is in training now, development courses and so on, about problem-oriented policing. (C.O.)

Other comments by senior officers highlighted the divergence of opinion about the extent to which local chiefs of police should be left to their own devices to decide priorities within their areas of responsibility. Some officers expressed concerns that the organization has an excessive focus on dealing with traditional policing goals in a purely reactive fashion. They believe that this approach constrains their ability to target real issues within their areas of control.

For example one senior member stated:

I, now this will be controversial. Regionalisation, regionalisation is a classic case where we must be very very careful as an agency to make sure we don’t focus our problems to narrowly. Now I’ll give you an example. I hear from some of my peers, who are targeting or deploying their resources in particular areas. Now one district perhaps may have a district officer that has a particular bent towards dealing with traffic management, traffic safety. Another one might want to get the crime figures down and might throw a lot of resources at burglary teams. Now there’s a danger, I believe, in the way the structure is presently, not necessarily flawed, but the way it’s managed as to the way we address problem solving, a problem-solving approach to policing because you can skew your approach to solving problems to what you perceive as a problem. (C.O.)

And further on:
Very true and I mean and I need to balance what I said earlier. It's a sweet and sour argument because you can adopt this and say, well look, the sweet side of it is that the local chief of police can address the local problems and they are best placed to manage local problems. But they can become also quite insular in respect to their own local problems. So while you've got that sweet side of it the sour side of it is that their insularity in looking at e.g. Broome District, and the problems you know with aboriginal violence, alcoholism, perhaps drug misuse, you know boat people coming in, is very much a local problem which, when you place that against Cannington and Mirrabooka, it is quite a different environment. Now, how Broome and Mirrabooka inter-relate in solving the agency approach to solving problems is one that needs to be very carefully managed because we are a very diverse community. It's not, we're not the Thames Valley Police Force. (C.O.)

In relation to everyday aspects of policing and the extent to which a problem-solving approach might impede a traditional, and sometimes necessary, response in certain extreme situations, another senior member commented:

And we have, we say that our philosophy is a problem-oriented policing philosophy or an intelligence lead philosophy, that's all well and good, however when you have a riot down Saint George's Terrace or when you have the Fremantle Dock dispute or something similar then you need to revert to a command and control structure almost instantaneously and you need to have people who aren't so entrepreneurial about how they police. That they don't have a degree of liberal interpretation of what the order of move those people along means and so if you say that the philosophy is a problem-oriented philosophy, and that's all you're ever going to do, then you don't need an organizational structure. (C.O.)
This comment highlights what seems to be an ongoing problem for the Police Service of Western Australia. On the one hand there is the need for a workforce that is sufficiently independent and free thinking to be able to adopt a creative, problem-solving approach. On the other there is a need for a disciplined, corruption free group that will respond instantly and in a disciplined and regimented manner to emergency situations. This second requirement, and the successful strategies that have been put into place to achieve it, seems to have overshadowed the first.

Many commentators on policing have referred to the disadvantages of this bureaucratic, command and control model.

For example, Bennis (1965) is quoted in Beyer (1991, p. 94) as describing the severe limitations of this approach as follows:

- It does not adequately allow for the personal growth and development of mature personalities
- It develops conformity and ‘group think’
- It does not take account of the existing informal culture within the organization
- It has difficulty coping with emergent and unanticipated problems
- Its systems of control and authority are hopelessly outdated
- It does not possess adequate means of resolving differences and conflicts between ranks, and most particularly, between functional groups
- Communication (and innovative ideas) are thwarted or distorted due to hierarchical division

With regard to the problems inherent in a command and control style of management Kelling, Wasserman and Williams (1988) are quoted in Beyer (1991, p. 95) as asserting that:
• Individual discretion is driven underground.
• Creative/productive adaptations go unrecognised and un-rewarded.
• The organization fails to tap the potential abilities of its officers.
• The ethos of ‘stay out of trouble’ stifles officers who are otherwise resourceful and assists officers who merely sit in their positions.
• It helps foster a police culture characterised by suspiciousness, perceptions of great danger, isolation from citizens and internal solidarity.

Most senior officers interviewed did however express the view that district police chiefs are severely constrained by the actions of the senior executive when they have a focus on resources, activities and success measures based on traditional crime related considerations.

This insistence on a set of objectives that is decided and rigidly enforced by the central command is seen as being detrimental to the new style of a local problem-solving approach that is in accordance with the Delta philosophy.
For example:

Well again it comes down to this issue I think of managerial maturity and I would hope, I mean at the moment I’m acting assistant commissioner, so looking at various district officers from an assistant commissioner level I would hope that they were only looking at the incidence of crime as one specific indicator of performance within one of our core areas of business. So if I had a district officer who was preoccupied with have burglaries gone up or down and you know have stealings gone up or down and have arrests gone up or down, I’d be very concerned because while they should be giving a degree of attention to that, that’s within an output mix that includes traffic and road safety and it includes services to the judiciary and it includes investigation of offences, not just prevention of offences. So, so again it comes back to this area of who’s ready to receive what at district level but across there’s gotta be a clear understanding that one performance indicator shouldn’t be driving your entire policing strategy at a district level, let alone at a state level? (C.O.)

Another senior member commented on the general lack of understanding about a problem-oriented approach as follows:

Oh I don’t know whether everyone understands what problem-oriented policing is at this point in time. That’s one of the fundamental problems we’ve got but we’re still running with a lot of people who are focused on re-active policing and that’s very much driven by the accountability mechanisms in the police service at the moment where district officers are likely to get the most kudos for having a big investigative task force out there and taking out a couple of burglars or taking out a couple of armed robbers but they don’t get no kudos at all for getting on the front foot and having proactive things going to cut that off at the pass. And that’s the thing, we need to change the reward system, not the reward
system but the recognition system, the reporting system so the accountability systems actually look at what we're doing pro-actively to solve the problem, not reactively. (C.O.)

This officer offered the following example of a traditional approach that he believed demonstrated this lack of awareness of contemporary methods:

Well, we only have to look at the Northbridge incident over the last few weeks to show that it manifests itself at least at assistant commissioner level because the solution we've come up with for the Northbridge problem is to send in the cavalry. That's not problem-oriented policing. I mean that sort of stuff, the problem in Northbridge could have been identified twelve months ago and something else could have been done to solve that. Now what we're doing is we've got tasks forces going in there every Friday and Saturday night basically to kick arse, that's not problem oriented policing. (C.O.)

This officer suggested that a range of strategies could have been employed in the above situation instead of resorting to the standard approach:

Well, look I think there's a lot, there's several things, one of them is that we could have done a lot more work with Westrail and the Westrail Police on being in the right place at the right time, where are our problem times, lets deploy our Westrail Police to the area at that time. Lets look at the council, the City, the Perth Council or whoever is responsible for that, what are they doing, what sort of surveillance have we got in place, what's the environmental design like, what attracts kids to that area of Northbridge anyway, can we remove that thing or change that. They're the sorts of things that are problem-oriented policing, not sending in the cavalry. (C.O.)
The current reporting and accountability structures that senior police officers are subjected to cause inflexibility and imbalances in relation to the setting of priorities and resource allocation. A senior officer described these aspects in the following manner:

Oh I think more flexibility, undoubtedly. The things that affect Cannington are not the same as the things that affect Mirrabooka or Joondalup or Midland, they're quite different.

W.B. So, this lack of devolution, is that a failing do you think in the current structure of the organization?

Oh sure, look one of the things that comes up here is that because I only have to report monthly on burgs and graffiti and stuff like that maybe that's all I concentrate the resources on, not because that's the problem out there, the problem out there might be something else but because I only have to report on that that's what I have to keep sending my resources out to do because that's the only thing that I'm gonna get flogged for if it doesn't get done properly. So there may be a problem over here which, because I don't have to report on it, it would be all too easy for me to ignore it, so I'm not going to worry about that, we can let that sort of ride along a bit because I've gotta worry about these things. Whereas if I was setting my own KPI's I'd say there's our problem over there, forget about car theft for now, we want to concentrate over here. (C.O.)

This officer considered that a different set of considerations should be driving decision making with regard to the policing of local communities:

Not just the crime rate, we measure problem-oriented policing on successes based on, or we want to, based on crime. But what are all the other things that affect local government, that affect social security, that affect education. I mean one of the things we might look at
is school retention, are we retaining more kids in year eleven and twelve or are they still
drifting away into the ether and joining the unemployment queues. So we’ve got to look at
a wider group of social indicators as indicators of success. So as long as the police
service is sitting there looking at crime they’re ignoring all the other benefits that problem-
oriented policing might bring. Which may be in the long run be much more important.
Maybe reducing the number of burglaries today isn’t as important as making sure that we
have better educated kids tomorrow and more people in the workforce which takes them
out of that cycle you know. So we’ve got to start looking outward instead of looking at
ourselves all the time. (C.O.)

This officer also expressed concerns at the lack of training in the kinds of thinking skills that would
assist in tackling the issues that are currently facing the Police Service:

Oh I think so, I think what we need to do is we need to change the way we educate our
people too. The thing is that we don’t encourage in this organization is strategic thinking.
You start at the Academy and the Academy today is very much lock step, learn this block
of information and regurgitate it. We’re still not encouraging our people to think, to look at
the wider social problems that they’re working in and that continues right through. I mean I
do a lot of rank related assessments, mostly for inspector and superintendent and the
biggest thing that comes out is the lack of strategic and conceptual thinking and I think
that’s directly a result of the fact that we don’t encourage it or develop it through the way
we train or you know or bring our people through the organization. (C.O.)

Another senior officer referred to the same issues as they affect corporate thinking and the
restrictive influence on members’ attempts to be more innovative in their approach to policing:
So again when an AC may say to you well we’re not happy, you have not achieved specific S.A.S. targets, Strategic Action Statement Targets, the reason is they’re too prescriptive about numbers that have gotta be achieved, not achieving outcomes, or not identifying x amount of incidents per year required a POP approach if you like and identifying outcomes and saying listen we had thirty eight problems this year, we spent five hundred hours and we solved thirty six of them. That’s a way of measuring more effectively our policing outputs, strategically measuring them rather than saying you did not get four hundred RBT’s this week and three hundred infringements and two hundred cautions. Which then demands us to focus on those things and ignore the long-term strategic planning approach to policing generally (C.O.)

This officer stated his opinion regarding the negative view that more senior officers have of the problem-oriented philosophy and the benefits of additional training for police in this area:

Yes, yeah of course. It’s very much seen as a soft approach, a non-specific, sorry, a non-defined outcome therefore can’t be of value, can’t measure it, oh yeah we did a good job but gee we’ve still got all these targets to meet. The key issue is we’ve got to go back and review Strategic Action Statement documents corporately, to reflect what we really are trying to achieve. (C.O.)

And further:

Until everyone in the entire agency is thinking and aware of the concept of POP then it will be picked up far earlier and therefore the issues will become far less and become easier to fix. You see the longer you leave a problem the bigger the problem becomes. So I think we’ve got to try and promote, and it gets back to the community policing/POP issue, if we could implement training, and there’s gotta be a significant training aspect, and whether
that means another week in the Academy so be it because it's not a one day subject. I think there's a wide range of issues and topics within community policing that have gotta be picked up and focused on. And probably the first topics, before we worry about shooting our gun and jumping through the hoops, lets talk about what we really believe is real policing today. (C.O.)

One senior officer described the general approach and problem solving abilities that many police officers have always demonstrated and the manner in which the organization acts to inhibit this capacity:

Really when you think, Sir Robert Peel and all the others where out there to solve problems. You know they were there to solve problems as police officers. Whether they had a clearer theoretical understanding of what they were doing you know I wouldn't like to say but I would like to think that police officers have always adopted a problem-solving approach to the way they do their job. Corporately they probably haven't, the agencies probably haven't on a corporate level.

W.B. The whole of the police force you mean?

Yes, yes, the way that the whole police service has been engineered and managed probably hasn't been on a problem-solving approach. But on an individual basis I think police officers have always had a good understanding of solving problems. It's one thing I think they're very very good at.

W.B. Why do you say that the agency on a whole of service basis has not been doing that particularly well, why do you say that?
Well I think if you look historically at ours, the way in which we have deployed our resources hasn't really, I don't think, addressed problems in the community. It's been a case where individuals may in fact solve problems at a local level and again I saw that working quite well in country situations. If you had a particular e.g. public order problem you would keep hammering that particular problem until it was solved. Or you would put in some strategies to try and deal with it. You'd lock up the car thief if car thieving is going on. But on a much more strategic level, agencies, I don't think, have matured or understood the nature of problems in the community on a much grander scale. It's really been reactive to I guess isolated problems. You know, if there's a higher incidence of armed robberies well you throw resources at solving the armed robberies as opposed to looking at some of the causal factors to it all. (C.O.)

Some officers perceived the existence of a sense of fear on the part of the organization in relation to the dangers inherent in any departure from old styles of dealing with issues or in allowing officers to practice any degree of freedom and creativity in the way in which they deal with current issues.

For example, one officer described the traditional approach of the department and the resistance to innovative methods:

*Bil, I think this is largely a problem with the police culture and I think, in my view, we are an ultra-conservative organization. We have a very strong culture and we are very very resistant to change. (C.O.)*

And further:
And I think what we’ve gotta understand to is by its very nature, by the very bureaucratic nature of police organizations that it’s very very difficult to say to most managers that you now have autonomy, empowerment, the right to be creative, the right to have your own ideas and to put your hand up and think of solutions. It’s very very hard to suddenly say that when they’ve come, when they’ve grown up over many number of years in an organization which hasn’t allowed that type of em, because of the bureaucratic nature that hasn’t allowed them, they’ve been in a very very tight paradigm and they’ve been very restricted. And that has restricted them in their ability to take risks and I don’t think we’ve ever, well I don’t think this organization, like any police organization or law enforcement agency’s ever tolerated risk taking to a large degree because of the conservative nature of the business we’re in. (C.O.)

In relation to the need to encourage a creative approach this officer stated his concerns about the nature of the organization and the impact on this desired style of policing:

I think that a creative approach is very much going to have to be for a lot of us in this organization a learned process, a trusting thing. People have gotta, we’ve gotta turn around and, as far as the accountability side of things go, and say we will, we know you will make mistakes, we will trust you to make mistakes and we will be tolerant. And I think it’s that tolerance, or the fear of making mistakes is stopping the creative processes in this organization.

W.B. You mentioned something before, risk taking is not liked.

Oh risk taking is, again, the very nature of the organization that we’re in, we’re ultra-conservative, we do not, we haven’t survived, the people who are making the decisions
now have got by and succeeded through not sticking their neck up. And that's very much, that's self evident in the way that we do our business even today. (C.O.)

And further:

And I think the big thing, getting back to your question, is that the people in the management positions, it depends on what their view on risk taking is and if they're prepared to be a little adventurous, be little forward thinking, they can have creative and innovative problem solvers, problem solving solutions coming from their area, from their people if they're prepared to empower them to do so.

W.B. Does risk taking on the part of a senior officer aid in training junior people to make decisions?

Of course it does, of course it does, it's a role model approach and it encourages people to, the people immediately under that manager to have similar modes of behaviour. Particularly when they see the success that it can bring.

Finally, in relation to the restrictions that such a conservative, blame centred approach places on problem solving this officer observed:

Oh, of course. I think that goes without saying Bill but it's, we are still very much in a blame culture, we, and its the fear of being labelled a poor manager because something has failed and that's, you know if we truly are going to be, in inverted commas, a learning organization, then we've gotta be able to be honest enough to put up our hands and say look this hasn't worked, this hasn't succeeded for whatever reason. Look at it, evaluate it and move on from there and look at other strategies. But then again it gets back to the
original stuff about the creativity and innovation that we allow our people to do. If we, if
they feel constrained about not admitting mistakes well how can they be expected to be
innovators and creators? (C.O.)

This need for the police service to become a leaning organization and for managers to be more
accepting of mistakes is addressed by Stipak, Immer and Clavadetscher (1994, p. 120) in an
article that posed the question for many American police agencies about whether they were
actually doing community/problem-solving policing. With regard to the need for patrol officers to
exercise greater autonomy in decision-making the following comments were made:

Under community policing, the main role of management and specialized units is to
support the front line, rather than to keep officers from making mistakes. This means
treating officers as responsible professionals and not trying to prescribe their every
possible decision option in voluminous "general orders". It means valuing individual
initiative that is grounded in reasonable action and tolerating the occasional mistakes that
will occur. It means allowing officers to commit not only themselves but also appropriate
public resources to problem solving effort.

A more junior officer also referred to the existence of this institutionalised unwillingness to admit or
tolerate mistakes:

Yeah, as an organization we've never let our people make mistakes in the past. This is
where a lot of the perception of Internal Investigations, or Internal Affairs, comes from. In
the past we've never allowed our people to make mistakes. In the old days when you
were taken in as a detective and you brought a body into the office he was never allowed
to go unless you charged him. I mean it was seen to be not quite right if you let somebody
go because you didn't have enough evidence to charge him, it was one of those things.
You weren't allowed to say, em, we haven't got enough on him or we've made a mistake.
And this reflects through the organization, we've never allowed ourselves to make mistakes. Why, I don't know. It's probably a deep-seated cultural thing, I don't know, but I think this is where a lot of this attitude stems from. (Sgt.)

Another senior officer supported this view that the organization has failed to come to grips with a creative approach by members:

I'd say to some degree it is but I think it's also the organization hasn't come to grips with it so it's not encouraged or promoted as much as it should be.

W.B. What isn't?

This creativity and problem solving because it gets back to the old supervisors, don't give me that warm and fuzzy stuff you know, I've got another job on me plate, you go out and do that bastard, it doesn't matter if he does the same thing every day for the next six days. (C.O.)

There is a concern that this emphasis on safe decisions is detracting from the willingness of officers to develop solutions to problems that present themselves for attention. An officer commented as follows about this situation:

I think there's always been a need for people to be allowed to make a few errors. I don't know how you expect people to be innovative without giving them the opportunity to fail. Because all that happens after that is you promote mediocrity, the people who play safe. I don't know anybody that I've ever heard about in business who struck it lucky every time, there are failures. But obviously there's got to be some parameters under which they can exercise their judgment and what have you. But certainly there's gotta be a perception in the organization, I mean I know it's said, you know just because you make one mistake

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it's not going to be held against you for the rest of your life. But, there's still a perception out here that it will. That if you make a blue that it's pretty hard to recover from.

W.B. Innovation, what is the link between innovation and creativity in your mind, in relation to problem solving?

Well, you've gotta be I think prepared to perhaps go outside the procedures in order to achieve a genuine result. It's about being a lateral thinker I suppose. I suppose being innovative, well, innovative, creative, in some respects I see they're very similar. But, yeah, but I mean like creative is just basically getting that idea if you will. Being innovative is I suppose translating that creativity into some practical product, for want of a better word, at the end of it. So certainly I think there's a need to encourage creativity. I mean, we get, well we remember the days, which hopefully they are long gone, of saying you know oh why am I doing it like this sergeant, that's the way we've always done it and that's the way it's gotta be done. I still think there's some of that left in the organization and that's only going to change when you have young people who are encouraged to question the status quo. (Sgt.)

In relation to the concept of the organization failing to come to grips with solving its own internal problems this officer made reference to the existence of an excessive willingness to defer to outside agencies in this regard:

In terms of decision making I mean as an organization I think in many respects firstly from my point of view from here, we've almost given up our right as police officers to make decisions and solve problems, you know, by extension.....Some times I think. ... at Professional Standards have given up our decision making powers to our external agencies. We will refuse to deal with things, or what we'll do, we'll refer them to the
Ombudsman, we'll refer them to the A.C.C., we'll refer them to the D.P.P. We'll refer them to everybody in the hope that someone else will make a decision and then we ah well, as per the opinion of so and so this is what we're gonna do. And I find that very difficult to take. (Sgt.)

Another officer expressed similar views in relation to how this lack of commitment to solving even internal problems limits the development of a more professional approach to policing in general:

We should be a professional association. We've gotta become learning. I don't know about you but I read the Police Journal, the Police News. I've never read anything in there that's helped me in my job in my entire life. I've been reading them for fourteen and a half, fifteen years. There's not been one good idea out of that. The Police Journal, which is supposedly the peak learning publication of the police in Australia, all it does is interesting anecdotes, you know, interesting cases which you know, yeah we're all curious about it but.

W.B. It's not instruction on professional practice or the latest in professional practice like accountants, doctors and lawyers get.

Yeah, we totally ignore that. We sit back and we let our own hierarchy, the Ombudsman's Office, the A.C.C., the Law Society, Parliament, political pressure groups, all tell us how to go about our job rather than say hey we know more than you about our job, these are the standards we set. What I really want to see is the Union set a higher standard in certain areas than the A.C.C. and anybody else expects. You know, we know more about how to do things than they do. (Const.)
This officer also expressed concern about the limiting effects of this situation on the ability of police to deal with issues within the framework of a problem-solving approach:

Well the actual concept, it should compliment it, you know learning, you know professional bodies are learning organizations. You should learn more from your own profession or people than anybody else. Now, we've got no mechanisms in place currently for us to learn from each other. Apart from, we used to have the bar upstairs and the bar down at Central. I think a lot of people learnt a lot more at them than they've ever done in the police academy because that is where information was exchanged. Now we've got no mechanism in place to do that anymore, it's all gone. Not that it was probably very good anyway. But we've never, ever tried to develop ourselves. Now, problem solving means you need to develop yourself and apply more and more initiative and knowledge on problems. (Const.)

In addition to these concerns that are attributed to the organization itself, a number of officers also referred to the fears that individual members experience in relation to actually applying a problem-solving approach to their work. For example one member observed:

However, on the down side there is, in my view, little doubt that accountability has also created a fear. Particularly from what I have seen, particularly crime investigators, young detectives who, where once would have been encouraged or felt that the organization was accepting of the strategies and methodologies they would utilise to gain convictions. And I'm not talking illegal activities but certainly pushing the legal boundaries when obtaining evidence, particularly confessional evidence, where these days they're very, well not so inclined to, well disinclined to do so because of the fear of being investigated and having complaints made against them and the outcome, the possible outcomes of those investigations so I think in many ways I think we have a situation where a lot of very
good young crime fighters, if I can use that term, are em, have been hindered by the accountability network that now exists in this organization. (C.O.)

And further:

W.B. How does the emphasis on avoiding complaints about you affect their creativity, problem solving?

Well of course it does, you soon learn to put your head down and not take risks and that invariably stops the creative process. (C.O.)

Another senior officer spoke about the restrictions generated for a problem-solving approach by having supervisors who are too rigid in their dealings with junior members:

W.B. What effect do you think that has on the lower ranks when it comes to things like problem solving?

Problem solving initiative, it has a very dampening effect on all of it.

W.B. What, on initiative?

Yeah, and that's what we're asking, we're asking you to show a bit of initiative and solve the problem before it happens again. And when you've got a boss up there, don't go and give me that shit, get out and do the other job. (C.O.)

This officer also spoke about the impact of the threat of complaints and internal investigations on an officer's performance:
Yeah, I know exactly where you’re coming from and it’s a reality and it’s always been a sore you know and the argument has been that you know, the bloke doing the work’s going to get complaints and the bloke not doing anything is not going to get em, he shouldn’t get em. And it has become a tactic. They know by making complaints that it is having an effect on the fellas. They are a bit more reluctant to get in and solve problems that they probably should be because at the end of the day they’re going to get complained about anyway so I don’t need the aggravation. (C.O.)

Another member linked poor decision making and problem solving ability to the serious concerns that officers at many levels experience over career advancement and remaining free of the inevitable blame that often accompanies decisions that are deemed to be incorrect in the light of future events or complaints. For example:

Well, that’s an interesting term. A lot of decisions made at District offices are probably anxiety-relieving decisions, they don’t actually solve problems. They make life a little bit easier and a little bit more bearable for the people who have to make the decisions and live there. But real decision making, I don’t know whether we see a lot of real decision making. (Sgt.)

In relation to the reasons behind this type of approach this officer stated:

Because I think a lot of our decision makers are looking after themselves and they’re not, they don’t make decisions, they don’t look at the problem and solve the problem for the sake of the organization for instance or for the betterment of the community. They look at the problem and say now I’ve gotta do this right otherwise I’m gonna get a kick in the arse. (Sgt.)
This officer considered that this reluctance to actually get to grips with real issues and problems is attributable to the poor quality of senior officers selected:

Well that's exactly it, on the basis that it's a self-protection thing rather than lets really solve the problem. This goes back to the quality of the managers we have in a lot of cases.

W.B. So where do they get their perception from that some decisions are right, whatever that means, and some decisions are wrong, dangerous, courageous or whatever.

....They're not thinking is this going to solve this problem, is it going to benefit the community in general, is it the best decision to make, is it, I mean is it the decision that's going to bring about the most good. They don't think like that.

W.B. They're looking for safe decisions?

That's right, safe decisions, safe for them I would say. And I'm convinced that goes back to the quality of the leaders we've got, which goes back to the selection system we've got.

(Sgt.)

Finally this officer spoke about the fact that the majority of managers within the Police Service of Western Australia. will avoid risky decisions and opt for a personal safety-first approach when given the opportunity:

W.B. If you could describe accurately people as falling into two groups, the people who make safe decisions which conform with what somebody else in authority over them tells
them is a correct decision, as opposed to people who are, let's say entrepreneurial, creative risk takers. Which group do most of our senior management fall into?

Oh, certainly the former, the safety first managers.

W.B. So they're not creative, entrepreneurs?

No, no, no, I don't think they dare to be.

W.B. What are the sorts of consequences which can befall, if you're a creative entrepreneur and you take a risk and something works well then you get the kudos for it, if it doesn't work well in our organization, what happens.

I don't know, we haven't actually seen that yet. I mean I guess we've got to look at getting back to these contracts. I don't know whether we have too many risk takers out there I'm not sure. But I mean that would be the thing that would be foremost in most of their minds I would think, they would think about their contracts. I don't think we have too many people who would be able, too many risk takers who would take that sort of a risk. I think by far and large the majority of them would be safety-first people. (Sgt.)

Another officer referred to this lack of creativity caused by being overly concerned about personal welfare:

Now I think where we really went off the rails was when this S.T.A.R.S. stuff came in for the ADVANCE systems. When you put people in competition with each other, for their livelihood and we're talking about livelihood here, and their careers you're dead set going to go off the rails. I mean you're not going to go out and try something new if you're gonna
think that’s gonna affect your promotion or is going to affect your career down the track you don’t do it. And whereas before, I think before the ADVANCE system came in guys clearly would go out and take risks and, when I say take risks, try things just a little bit different just to see how they work. Because we had an understanding at that particular stage that yeah look, if you came unstuck you came unstuck, the boss would give you a kick in the bum and that would be it. But now your livelihood’s on the line.’ (Sgt.)

In relation to the question of whether or not the working environment is conducive to a problem solving approach this officers stated:

No, we’re too frightened, we’re too frightened. At the moment there is a perception out there that if you do take a risk or you do become innovative, and something goes wrong, you are going to get crucified. We don't have the climate in this Service for that to flourish because people are too frightened. People are too frightened A to do their job that they're actually paid to do at the moment and B certainly to try anything new and innovative. I don't think that the climate is there for that to happen. (Sgt.)

Many officers had firm views about the level within the organization at which problem solving should occur. No one expressed the view that only certain ranks should have the right to perform this function. Some did express reservations about letting very junior officers make decisions about situations that could have serious or widespread consequences but there was a general acknowledgement that all levels of the organization should have at least some input into the decision making process. This view was conditioned by factors such as the experience of the officer and the implications of the consequences of any decisions made.

One senior officer clearly linked the need for a decision making/problem-solving question to the new style of management that is part of the Delta reforms:
Oh I think em, I think one of the big things we talk about with Delta is that we have regionalisation but more particularly we have a devolution and empowerment and that means that decisions should be made at the local level. And I would like to think that that is largely happening.

W.B. What's your definition of local level?

I believe if there's a problem in a particular community the local police officer, sergeant, senior constable in charge of that area, would be assessing the situation and hopefully will be supported at the district office level to make decisions about the crime management plan for his area. (C.O.)

Another senior member referred to the need for a generalised approach to problem solving and creativity throughout the organization:

Problem-oriented policing I have anguished with over the last twelve months as to how we might introduce it. If you want to we can spend a minute or two on this, if that's your question. I think yes everybody needs to do it, I think everyone needs to be aware. The difficulties generally are, as you say, to promote this creativity, entrepreneurial flair, also takes time. Now they either find the time during their working hours, and workload is precluding that from actually happening, in reality, it's still great to say there's always time, yes there is but to do it often enough, regularly enough and well enough is the problem. (C.O.)

A senior officer expressed the same views about the need for junior staff to get to grips with situations:
W.B. How widespread do you think it should be in the organization in the sense of what levels should be, levels and ranks should be implementing the various procedures that are required by problem oriented policing?

Right down to probationary constables, there’s nothing to stop them getting involved in problem oriented policing. I mean really what it’s all about is, my understanding of it is, if an incident occurs more than once then it’s a problem. (C.O.)

And further:

So, therefore, it’s not just the district officer or the commissioner, it’s right down to the very most junior constable. If they are attuned to what problem oriented policing is about then they should be able to, even at their level, address what might be a minor problem but a problem nevertheless. (C.O.)

Another member linked this requirement to the Delta inspired commitment to local solutions to issues:

Well, it’s my understanding, but it’s all about local problem solving so presumably if it can be, if the constable on the day can make that decision fine, then he should make it. He should be the one to make it. If he’s got to seek advice from anyone, from that point, you should never go more than say two levels above that. (Sgt.)

Yet another member expressed the same views but added an explanation for his opinion:
Problem solving should occur among the ranks of sergeants and senior constables and constables. You draw your intelligence from the blokes that are on the road, you draw all intelligence from them, you don't get any intelligence sitting in an office. (Sgt.)

Another officer spoke about the need to involve the most junior staff in problem solving but cautioned against putting this kind of authority into the hands of very junior and inexperienced officers:

I would think they have, realistically I think it really has to be with the people in the street. I think there has to be some input by the people in the street and not just the hierarchy and say upper management of all levels of departments, I'm not just talking about the Police Department but I think the people who are directly affected by the problem need to have some input. I'm not saying they will have the solution but whatever strategies are to be put in place should be at least discussed with the people who deal with the problem every day to give their first hand experience. (Const.)

And further:

I suppose it depends on the problem but I would say if you were looking for a rank I would say a constable with at least three to four year’s experience. I think it would be unwise to ask a recruit or a brand new constable who had only been dealing with the problem for a very limited time to ask for a solution. However, not taking away from them that they may have an idea that may work but to listen to them alone would be foolish. (C.O.)

It is accepted by senior members that having such a high proportion of very junior, inexperienced officers carrying out frontline policing duties does have the capacity to detract from the ideal of officers of constable level carry out extensive problem solving activities.
One senior officer observed:

Well, and that's an ongoing problem and we have so many of our people who are at the sharp end who do have less than three years experience and in keeping with the philosophy of problem oriented policing we should, we should have appropriate role models. Now we should look at mentoring, look at partnering, however to do that you must have senior people available to do that partnering and to do that mentoring. And that's got to be a commitment by the organization, to find them… (C.O.)

Another member referred to the official policy relating to the role of junior officers in finding solutions to problems and how this is compromised in practice by other organizational restraints:

Well they talk about empowerment, bottom-up change, local problem solving. That means you give the power to the person with the problem to come up with a solution and you support that. But what we're constantly doing we are, we're constantly second guessing patrol/inquiry officers, detectives. We're criticising their work and we keep loading on more and more paper work and obligations upon them to comply with other things rather than letting them say, you go out and solve this person's problem. Like I said the underlying concept of Delta was that. Bottom up, you know the most important person in the organization is the man or the woman in contact with the member of the public. (Const.)

This officer also referred to the resistance to a problem solving approach created in the mind of supervisors by this climate of criticism and the flow-on effect to junior officers:

And some of these blokes would be driving around for months and never have an apprehension or discovered anything on patrol. I think, what are youse guys doing, are
you just walking around blind. And the truth was that's precisely what they were doing.

That is what the culture said they should do, that is what their sergeants said they should do. Go to the jobs you're sent to, do the minimum required of you rather than solve any of the community's problems. (Const.)

Braiden (1991, p. 6) described how this old police culture impacts on the willingness of officers to employ a problem-oriented approach to policing. In his opinion the old professional model of law enforcement cannot give quality policing since rules and regulations alone will not encourage officers to become energetic, imaginative or creative.

Ownership is the core of problem solving and problem solving is the core of quality policing. Policy will not cause people to bring their brains with them when they come to work.

In relation to the degree to which the various ranks are placed to become problem solvers another officer stated:

I believe that the ideal ranks to be dealing with setting up a youth, we're talking about setting up a strategy to, I believe that maybe sergeants, senior constables and senior sergeants because they're the men that's out there. The inspectors and above really are then administrators, they're not out there, they don't know what's going on. A senior sergeant, a sergeant especially a senior constable because he's, he may be the lowest of the supervisors but he's the one out there, he's the one 90% of the time is going to be out there working with the young officer on the street. He is gonna get to see the problems as well as identifying them. (Const.)
A senior officer agreed that junior constables should be encouraged to become involved in problem solving but also referred to the fact that it is not always within the power of officers at such a level to deal with some issues:

*I don’t really have a problem with the devolution of that because I think what I said earlier is that I believe that in many respects police officers have often done that quite well. But they’ve often only done it on a piecemeal basis. They perhaps haven’t had a wider perspective of how to solve the problem. It may well be that they can solve an initial investigative problem but they don’t perhaps address again causal factors that go as to what lead to that problem in the first place. Yeah, your question’s a bit difficult for me to answer because I’m very much in favour of, you know, the most junior of constables confronting the problem, analysing what the problem is and addressing the problem. But, the problems can’t always be addressed at constable level. Particularly where multiple agency issues exist.* (C.O.)

In relation to the capacity of junior officers to be creative, innovative and risk taking this officer also spoke about the fact that their willingness to become involved in such activities has been reduced by aspects of the accountability mechanisms that have been installed:

*I think in some areas we are very well placed and in other areas were not and I don’t want to sit on the fence here. We spoke earlier about some of the concerns that I anecdotally hear that some of the junior staff feel about external oversight and accountability. I don’t think that environment lends itself to risk taking in that sense. People are going to become more cautious than ever in doing that.* (C.O.)

 Officers described a variety of factors within the organization that they believe are impacting on the implementation of a more widespread application of a problem solving approach. These related to
issues such as lack of skills, lack of managerial ability and lack of actual delegated power often motivated by self-interest and fear of poor outcomes.

For example one member stated:

*It's a question of personality, it's a question of interest, it's a question of education if you like, a question of interest. You've gotta have a particular bent in that direction. I don't think most policemen are problems solvers. This is what I see as a problem with our promotion system. We don't promote the right people because we in a lot of cases we don't have the right people there.* (Sgt.)

This officer also differentiated between problem solving and simple decision-making in relation to members of the Police Service:

*I think you've gotta distinguish between decision making and problem solving. I mean the fellows on the streets make decisions every day, or solve problems every day on some basis or other. I have no problems with that. What I'm saying is the organizational decision making process shouldn't be left in the hands of those people. But problem solving isn't, I see a difference there.* (Sgt.)

This officer expressed concerns about the ability of the average police officer to become a competent manager and engage in the kind of problem solving required of people at that level:

*Well, they're lacking the ability to be able to manage, to make decisions. I mean I don't mean to be rude but policemen aren't the brightest people in the world, neither do they have to be. That's not a bad thing. But we're demanding our leaders to be something that they're not.* (Sgt.)
And further:

I don't think the average police officer has those abilities. Not unless he extends himself and goes and skills himself in those particular areas. But they would be few and far between who would do that.

W.B. So are you saying that lots and lots of senior police officers now, particularly those who've been promoted under the current system, do not have the capability or the experience or knowledge to be effective managers?

That's exactly what I'm saying. (Sgt.)

Bearing in mind the comments detailed in other sections of this dissertation concerning factors such as the lack of real delegation of autonomy to the lower ranks and the self-interested motivation and power of officers of senior rank the above factors compound this already serious situation. The members with the almost exclusive power to make and enforce decisions are not seen as being competent to manage the organization.

A senior officer commented on the lack of understanding and training with regard to a problem solving approach to policing:

I think as far as community policing, crime prevention and so on is concerned there's practically nothing in the recruit-training course. I can't remember where I got that impression but I did look at it at one stage and there's very very little in there. It's certainly I don't think problem oriented policing is addressed because again nobody really knows
much about it sufficient to develop an interest in it and making sure that people understand it. (C.O.)

In relation to developing these abilities in officers another member commented on the lack of willingness on the part of senior personnel to provide opportunities to gain exposure to such situations:

Whereas if we had the decentralization and the devolution of power that’s supposed to happen the superintendent should make a decision for his own region and therefore be accountable for it. The Inspector, who is paid accordingly, to make decisions should make a decision in his area and, therefore, be accountable for it. And if at the end of the day if he makes a wrong decision that’s where his Superintendent can tell him ‘well, I don’t agree with that, you’ve gotta change it or it’s wrong or let’s modify it’. And that’s the only the way the inspector is going to learn how to make a decision and therefore the superintendent is allowing the people below him to mature as leaders and to be able to develop their own problem solving and solutions without having to always to run back to him for clarification and agree to it. (Const.)

One officer described the consequences of this lack of autonomy concerning any meaningful input to decision-making:

In my opinion not enough of the, when I say junior staff the less experienced staff, don’t get consulted about problems that they deal with readily every day. I believe that the problems are, the problems are or solutions are decided, thrashed out and made higher up the echelon and therefore, and sometimes, it doesn’t happen all the time but sometimes the so-called solution is actually not really a solution at all. (Const.)
In relation to the style of management that leads to this lack of lower level input to problem solving this officer stated:

Some of the decisions that are made are very autocratic and every leader, any leader worth his salt will know that being autocratic or being laissez-faire, you're not a very good leader. You've gotta be a democratic leader obviously with some autocratic traits. But to rule with the iron fist and be autocratic is not a style of leadership which works. (Const.)

Finally this officer commented on the impact on the lower ranks of this approach to decision-making and problem solving:

I just think they feel like they're mushrooms. They just keep getting fed nothing and kept in the dark. And, but having said that it does vary from area to area where you work. You know I've worked in some areas where it was common that all staff were asked their opinion and everyone was consulted about a problem looking for a solution. Maybe, obviously there we're talking about a more localised problem but still everyone was consulted and so therefore we had a wider spectrum of solutions from varying experiences. And so, therefore, we were able to get a better, perhaps at the end of the day, maybe the solution was the best solution because all parties had been, I couldn't say whether that was definitely what happened but. (Const.)

Another officer described how the need felt by upper levels to control the activities of junior ranks impacts on problem solving:

W.B. Do they like the lower ranks making decisions?

No I don't believe so. I believe that they think that they should be, the lower ranks should be controlled. And as I say I know that if you read the Blue Book they turn round and say
that they wanna give more power to the lower ranks. That, it's all right saying it but they
don't seem to do it.

W.B. How does that affect problem solving?

Well you can't solve a problem if you don't have, if you can't make that decision on how
you're gonna solve it because by the time you get an answer back from your bosses on
how you want to solve, the problem's already there. (Const.)

Peak and Glensor (1996, p. 275) refer to the contradiction between what police officers are
officially selected and trained to do and the manner in which the organization treats them. They
observed that:

Much of the reserve of knowledge possessed by patrol officers has gone untapped. We
hire the best persons we can for the job, and then ask them, as Herman Goldstein
bluntly put it, to behave like automatons when they arrive at work - leading officers to
complain that they are treated like children.

Another member referred to the fact that, in relation solving internal problems, senior management
are often reluctant to confront issues. Therefore they have a vested interest in ignoring the views
of junior officers and avoiding issues:

I have a right to say well hang on, it is the organization that's wrong, what do you want to
do about it. The problem with the organization accepting people like me in these
instances is that they don't know what to do about it either. But to acknowledge the fact
that I have a legitimate grievance or complaint on behalf of someone else means they
have to something about it. So it's easier to pretend it's not said. (Sgt.)
In spite of the above views officers were well aware that there do need to be some limits placed on the problem solving activities of members at various levels. For example:

Yeah they're as I say they're gonna, they're gonna identify it but hopefully that's gonna come through your supervisor because everybody's gonna see a problem. If you go out in the street every officer that goes out there's gonna see a problem. And it's then it's gonna be too much to handle because no matter how much man-power you get you can't handle every problem in society. Whether it comes from domestic situations to burglaries to assaults to robberies, you've gotta set a target and say if we're gonna problem solve let's look at the serious problems.... And you need someone with a bit of experience to say alright that's not really a problem. It could be but at the moments it's not but this looks as though it's really going to build into a problem, this is what we can look at. And I think you gain that with experience. (Const.)

Other officers also expressed this view:

W.B. So what you're saying is that, given that we've got literally hundreds of junior people out there, if everyone of them was going to be an identifier of problems, and a solver of problems you would be overloaded with problems and solutions?

You could be. (Const.)

Another senior member stated:

Yeah, yeah but I mean there's problems of the big kind and there's problems of the little kind. And they mightn't be able to tackle the problem of ongoing armed holdups within the
district, that's probably something that should be addressed by the district officer in consultation with the local detective OIC's and so on you know. But there are all sorts of problems in the community. It might be a problem simply of, as I said, a noisy party or something, or a problem of graffiti in a particular area. You know those sort of things can be addressed by a constable if they've got the time and they're given encouragement by their supervisors to do something about it. And that's probably one of the biggest difficulties. (C.O.)

Another officer referred to the need for the different experience levels that are required to handle more complex issues:

It certainly should but there are some things that can be solved at the sergeant level and there are other matters which are beyond his area of expertise, his area of responsibility so therefore he, even though he could probably solve the problem it's not his area, or it's not his authority, or it's just not for him to solve. And so, therefore that's when he should hand it up because like, it's not for him to solve. He may have an opinion, he may identify the problem, he may have identified it himself. Having seen something or heard something he may have identified the problem himself but because he's not in a position to solve that problem he may then pass that information up with the A the problem and B a possible solution. (Const.)

Finally, in relation to the issue of collaboration between the various ranks designed to attend to problems identified, a senior member made reference to the need for a more organised approach on the part of supervisors to encourage a problem solving approach by their junior officers:

I'll mark all men that I've got on the day shift, you're in the office, you two are attending jobs, you're out, take the other car and I want you to go down and deal with this problem
and see what you can research and look into it and come back and tell me what you think
we can do about it, see your local government, whatever the case might be. But that's
something that's gotta be an attitude on the part of the supervisors. That's why I keep
coming back I think to that, the station supervisor or the shift supervisor. If they're not on
side well it's just not going to happen. (C.O.)

A number of officers referred to a range of practical difficulties and obstacles to the full
implementation of a problem solving approach that are created by cultural factors such as the
blame culture and self interest on the part of senior officers.

For example, in relation to evaluating solutions that have been implemented, one member
described the methods used to apportion blame when outcomes are not as desired:

_The District Office, I got sidetracked, getting back to the problem, I put in certain actions. I
put into inception. Now, I was then, had a visit from a commissioned officer, who started
talking about the same problem but he then wanted it done a different way and I was
given all these pamphlets on why it should be done a different way and some stuff from
America, some stuff from England, some stuff and items from the Eastern States. They
wanted it done this way, it would work this way, it worked there, it'll work here regardless
of the topography of the country. The problem was I was given, I wasn't given an option, I
was told, this will happen, this will be done, this will be done. Now, that's fine, if you
walked up to me Bill and said, (officer), you'll do this and this and this and this, right and
we'll do this and we'll achieve this and these are our objectives, this is how we're going to
do it, these are our goals, this is how we'll measure them. All right, now, if I do what you
say, exactly the way you say it right, and it fucks up, I expect you to take the
responsibility. (Sgt.)_
W.B. Is that what happens?

No.

W.B. What happens?

He comes back and says you’re not doing it right, you’re not doing it right, something’s going wrong, you’ve gotta alter that, you’ve gotta, the big catch word is, I can’t think of the word they use, there’s a word where they say you’ve gotta be flexible, flexible, flexible, you’ve gotta have flexible ideas, you’ve gotta have, each day you got to go through your intelligence, see if it’s working, if not, alter, always be flexible, always be aware. They have given us the parameters on how to work, they have told me how to work, they have told me what to do, they have told me how I’m to do it. It’s not my bloody fault it doesn’t work. My way worked and I’m a sergeant, what would I know? (Sgt.)

This officer was also critical of the standard approach of the local Police Service to problem solving:

You don’t solve a problem by saturation policing. Problem solving policing, to my way, and I’ve read, it’s finding the optimum operational procedure or patrol method to maximise your staff, minimise your crime rate. Not for a week but for a year. Now you’ve gotta, there’s gotta be, you’ve gotta be able to plan something that will work with the resources available to you. (Sgt.)

And further:
Now that was thirty years ago and they're using the same methods to do the same thing and they have the same fucking results they had thirty years ago. You cure the problem while you dump on it, as soon as you leave it then goes straight back up again… As far as I'm concerned the way this service goes around it's problem solving is fucking archaic, it is something we did thirty years ago, they have got no perception of what that word problem solving means. It means operating within the parameters of the staff you have to solve a problem or to curtail a problem for a period longer than a bloody week. (Sgt.)

Another officer spoke about the general approach to their work that is adopted by junior officers as a result of a concentration on the avoidance of situations than can result in stress for them:

Well they don't want to know about problems. Nobody wants to know about problems. Solve the complaint that's on your desk. (Const.)

This officer expressed the view that active, problem-solving police officers are constantly faced with the threat of a complaint being made about them due to the very nature of the task that they are faced with carrying out:

I've certainly seen police officers who have a lot of skill in dealing with people but I don't think I've ever seen a police officer that has been very active in trying to solve problems, not just gloss over things and make everybody happy, that hasn't received criticism from the public. It's just impossible for that not to happen, at some stage.

W.B. So you're obviously a subscriber to the theory that if you're out there doing your job you will have complaints made about you, inevitable.
It's inevitable. In my view it is. By the nature of policing you're looking at taking the power from one person and putting it on another. You interfere in a problem and you say put one person under scrutiny and help the other. There's inevitable bloody, you know, power relationship people object to. Sooner or later they're gonna complain about it. (Const.)

Another aspect of the current culture influencing senior officers is the need to appear to be an innovative and creative person. This leads to members becoming involved in various projects but being unwilling to fully evaluate results for fear that the reality might detract from their appearance of competence.

One officer made the following observations about commissioned officers and the plans that they devise in response to issues and problems:

But it seems to be bit of a topsy-turvy side of things because they, in order to justify their position are putting forward different ideas. Now, some of those ideas might be accepted, some might not. But those that are there never seems to be the counter balance to say well are those ideas working. Right, so it just seems a bit lopsided. So in order to justify them being inspectors on a contract basis that's fine, I don't have any dramas with that. But in order to show that, and that's the idea of the contract to my mind, they've gotta show that they're doing something, they can't just oh I'm an inspector now and sit there right. They've gotta show initiative and all those aspects of it. So, they have a think about it and put ideas forward. Some of those ideas might work, some might not. Some might be implemented that don't bloody work but we're getting back to, they won't take em away. But there's no counter balance to it. (Sgt.)

Other members discussed an aspect of the behaviour of officers in relation to their reluctance to honestly disclose or receive facts about events that occur. This is seen as being based on fear of
blame and a contributing factor to a poor internal problem solving ability. In relation to junior
officers the following comment was made:

W.B. What do you think are the affects of having that sort of adversarial system on the
rank and file, what does it do to their approach to their job and their work and colleagues
and senior officers?

Well I think one big thing is it doesn't facilitate honesty. Now if an officer knows that
they're going to be punished at the end of a determined investigation then they're not
going to be, or they're going to be unfairly punished, then they're not going to want to tell
the truth all the time. It just doesn't facilitate honesty, they're going to like anybody, like a
criminal, if the system who is going to make it difficult for the police to gather the
evidence. (C.O.)

And further:

Oh I agree you never do because what Internal Investigations need to do, firstly they need
to discover the truth and then they need to be a bit strategic about making sure that those
situations don't occur again. But if they never discover the truth then they can never solve
the problem. Somebody said it's a little bit like being at school and being honest and then
getting the cane for it. That's not going to encourage a kid to come up and be honest at
all. (C.O.)

An officer with experience of the internal investigation process and the reactions of officers who
are the subject of an inquiry made the following observations:
Oh yeah, I'd say very few would come in and engage in a discussion with me on that basis. They're already well into self-protection mode by the time they come here. And it's due to that overriding fear of a negative response. Even if they feel they've done nothing wrong, there's in the back of their mind a little thing of they might get me for something. You know, if they can't get me for biffing him under the ear they'll get me for not wearing my hat at two-o-clock in the morning on a wind swept night, you know what I mean. (Sgt.)

This interviewee also made a reference to the kind of self-defence tactic that officers resort to in order to avoid what they believe will be a serious outcome for them. Clearly such a defensive approach limits the possibility of the organization dealing with events as problems to be solved:

And that makes a problem for us in itself because, as you say, in order perhaps to address the problem you need to know precisely how things happened. But unfortunately they tend to colour their version of events to produce themselves in the best possible light. And, at times, they act to their own detriment. Not only theirs but, if it's happening to them well it's probably happening to a lot of other people in a lot of other areas as well. (Sgt.)

Other officers considered that the Police Service does not promote officers with the ability to function as problem solvers:

One of the problems that I've always perceived with the Police Service in general is that they ask people to do tasks that they're not qualified to do. To do these sort of things you need, you've gotta have some form of specialised training to be able to look for these sort of things and we don't get that. One of the biggest problems that I can see with the Service at the moment is that they have people in place that are given tasks to perform who have neither the qualifications nor the ability to perform those tasks. (Sgt.)
Another member related similar concerns in relation to the tendency for senior officers to surround themselves with compliant junior staff and the problems generated:

"I mean let's face it, I mean if you were in a position of power, I mean it's surprising in this organization because I've always had sort of doubts about a lot of people's ability. I would like to think that if I was ever in the ultimate position I would surround myself with the most competent people in the world to make my job easier. I think that in a lot of instances people surround themselves by people who say yes sir and they're happy with that but the problems associated with that are just untold, untold.

W.B. What sort of problems?

Well, I mean you've got no innovative thinkers there. You've got no cross section of opinion, you've got your mindset being and what you perceive to be the correct way implemented and let's face it, none of us have got a complete overview on everything.

(C.O.)

In relation to the question of whether or not police officers should be required to act as problem solvers this officer spoke about the problems caused by a staff shortage. He also discussed the more important question of whether or not the police have a right to take action at such a personal level:

"Because, for a start, it's not the roles of our young people. I think we've got, I think out of an organization of nearly five thousand people we've got about eighteen hundred operational police officers. So they're running from one job to the next........ the problem stems from the family environment, what right have we got to go and knock on the door
and say look I think you should be a better parent, you should tell your kids that they
shouldn’t be stealing. It’s impossible to achieve. (C.O.)

Officers also face difficulties in relation to obtaining assistance from other agencies in dealing with
problems. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the majority of these other organizations do
not provide the twenty-four hour, seven-day coverage that the Police Service of Western Australia
is required to maintain:

W.B. Do you think that police officers are in a position to deal with those sorts of
problems?
Well we have to be, there is, because they don’t all happen between eight and four you
have to deal with them, or you have to ignore them and just get on with your job, because
people who are designed to assist you in those matters only answer the phone between
eight and four. (Const.)

Another officer described this issue in the following terms:

No, I think we should, we have, we definitely have a, we definitely have a role to play
identifying these problems but I think we should, as far as our reporting is concerned, it
should go to the other agency, excuse me, we’ve identified a problem, what are you going
to do about it.

W.B. Yeah, exactly.

Instead of, you’ve got a problem, yeah, well come and talk about it tomorrow because I’m
on my way home. No, I’m just starting. It doesn’t matter, I don’t work when it gets dark.
What am I going to do with these people, I don’t know, it’s got nothing to do with me.
W.B. Who is saying that, the other agencies?

Yes. (Sgt.)

This officer also made comment about the power of the media to influence the perception of what actually constitutes a ‘problem’ and the department’s reaction to the situation:

That’s what this encouraging new system is to do. And then the lower priority ones you can kick under the rug, you can deal with it any way you like, it doesn’t really matter I won’t bother about checking that because this is far more important. Briefing notes don’t necessarily go through on your average nine year old fight at the primary school. Briefing notes do go in on a large bullying brawl at the high school. And it depends really on the way that it’s prioritised. As a nine-year-old fight, nobody cares. But as soon as you put the media terminology, a bullying, on it, it becomes a political hot potato and it must be dealt with to the fullest extent and I don’t care how many people it takes but it will be done now.

(Sgt.)

Officers believe that senior management allocates resources to issues on a short-term basis to provide a quick fix solution and create the facade of action and avoid complaints.

For example:

Well if he gave unlimited overtime for a month crime would be reduced for a month and then as soon as that stopped and everything went back to normal crime would just increase again. It would just be, how would you say, a bit of window dressing, spend some money to doctor some facts so perhaps an illusion will be created that crime is
down when in fact is, it only is or has been because X amount of dollars has been thrown into a certain area to solve a problem there for a little while. (Const.)

Another junior officer expressed the same views:

W.B. In relation to problem solving, do you think that our approach in relation to the time frames we think in is appropriate?

I think in some areas they are appropriate and in other areas they just want a quick fix. I think some, some problems they do look at the long term, they do realise that it's a long term thing and it can't be solved overnight yet there are other times when I think the quick, the quick fix solution is what they think will, will do, will fix the problem when in actual fact it may not. (Const.)

And further, in relation to this creation of a façade of action:

I think every problem's gonna, got to be judged on its merits and if for the time being a quick fix solution is what's required there, pending a longer term solution being best obviously yes that's what's required. But if all they're gonna do is just implement these quick fixes here and there, like to poly-fill to gaps to make it look good so it looks good for the time being then handball it on to some one else later well then obviously no it's not. I think we've gone away perhaps from the quick fix solutions and we're trying to do the long-term solutions. I think we see that we can waste a lot of time, money, manpower and resources on these quick fix things. (Const.)

A major restriction preventing the organization and its personnel from engaging in a widespread and effective problem solving approach is the serious lack of staff. This impacts on such activities in a number of ways.
One officer observed:

As I say I call them beat cops but they're not beat cops, they're more like patrol officers in vans. They're the ones who can identify where a problem is but they, as I say, because of the way things are and the lack of resources they're not able to concentrate on doing that so, again, instead of being able to identify the problem they more or less leave the problem then react to it later on when it arises.

W.B. When you say lack of resources what specifically do you mean?

Well I think manpower is a big lack, the lack of resources. I'll go to suburban offices during the day, you've got plenty of staff. You go back there on afternoons and nights and you'll find that that staff's been cut to less than a third of what should be working. (Const.)

In relation to the control mechanisms that restrict the lower ranks from carrying out effective problem solving practices this officer stated:

And that's just a way of controlling again, and as I say, through him controlling, through the commissioner controlling his superintendents they control their supervisors below them who control the officer in the street who's trying to do the problem solving policing. That's why you'll never, in Western Australia, unless you put the manpower out there and you sort the problems out within the service itself it'll never take off. (Const.)

Another officer referred to the fact that officers are simply left to their own best devices when endeavouring to deal with situations:
W.B. Yes, What I'm interested in is how do you try and deal with the sorts of problems that you're faced with as a police officer.

Well you have to deal with them however you can deal with them. You don't have resources etc. that are available to you, you know, we're just told to get on with what we've got, you're not gonna get any more in the way of resources or anything like that.

(Const.)

Some officers consider that the managerial levels of the Police Service of Western Australia consciously avoid dealing with issues of resourcing and attempt to create a façade of dealing with problems. For example:

_The bosses to my mind, I mean er you know I think they have very much a head in the sand approach. They don't want to know. A lot of the stuff they're going on about in the media and that is very much a warm and fuzzy feeling, you know.... Yeah, they don't have the resources to that, but they say it because they appease the public right. And that's what they've been doing for bloody years._ (Sgt.)

Many officers expressed agreement with the need to apply a problem solving approach to policing but clearly described the serious restrictions caused by an acute shortage of staff. For example:

_My only comment is yes but you have to give us the people to do it first._

W.B. Do you mean numbers of people?
There's no way in the world that our people could be tied up arranging for welfare workers
to come along and trying to convince people that they need counselling and all the rest of
it when they've got about thirty seconds to do the job and get on with the next one.

W.B. Right.

To have that sort of approach we'd probably need to double our staff. They're never going
to do that so therefore it's a lot of crock as far as I'm concerned because our people could
not cope. They're not coping with the amount of work that they've got to do now. (C.O.)

This member also made reference to the degree of almost specialist training that officers would
require in order to be able to perform many of the functions required of a problem solver and his
concern that this would not be forthcoming:

They are very good in theory and if we did we would, certainly there would be a lot more
training required for them to be able to deal with the jobs in that manner because stuff it
up and you're just gonna blow it all again so they've got to be trained to be able to, almost
trained welfare workers to be able to convince people that they've got to have this extra
attention due to their particular problem and that. The training of police does not cater for
that at the moment. You've got to have inter-personal skills, you've got to be able to, and
we are confrontational we are always confrontational, you got to able to, in the shortest
possible time, be able to convince this person that he's going to do what you want him to
do instead of him stop doing what he's doing that's causing the problem. That's really
basic policing and you've got to be able to do that very quickly. These people are then
putting on another load of welfare, considering the welfare of that person, considering the
ramifications of, or making them consider the ramifications of what they're doing etc etc. It
all takes time and it would take training. The idea is brilliant, it's great. We are the people
that could do that cause we're there in the frontline all the time. We could do that but they
have to give us the resources to do it and the resources and the training. And they're never going to do that therefore it's crap. (C.O.)

One officer described the problem that would be created by the fact that the same limited staff resource would have to both attend reactively to issues and solve the larger more ongoing aspects of situations:

I don't think we're equipped at all to perform that type of role. To basically look at the problems before they occur so that you can take relevant steps so that they don't occur to me is an extremely good way of policing. I have got no problem with that. But, until you find out what the problem is you still have to deal with the people that are committing the problems. You can't just wipe that off and say okay we're going to find out why people are doing home invasions and while we're doing that we won't target the people who are doing home invasions. We'll just let them run riot. Because the people that we need to find out why these people are doing home invasions have to come from the pool of people who are out there having to attend the home invasions. As I said before you've only got a limited amount of resources and unless they give you the resources to do both jobs it's never going to work, it's never going to work. (Sgt.)

This officer also expressed concern regarding the approach of the W.A. Police Department in relation to a lack of commitment to providing officers with the type of training that would allow them to perform various functions that they are expected to carry out:

One of the problems that I've always perceived with the Police Service in general is that they ask people to do tasks that they're not qualified to do. To do these sort of things you need, you've gotta have some form of specialised training to be able to look for these sort of things and we don't get that. One of the biggest problems that I can see with the
Service at the moment is that they have people in place that are given tasks to perform who have neither the qualifications nor the ability to perform those tasks. I call it the bums on seats mentality where they say we've got four jobs and we need to fill those four jobs. So they fill those four jobs and at the end of the day they say yup, tick that off, that particular problem is solved because we have four people sitting there. The four people that are sitting in there might not necessarily know exactly what the hell is going on and exactly what they are doing. (Sgt.)

Another more senior officer also commented on the lack of training and the volume of reactive work that officers are required to deal with:

No, look we can't deal, we can't deal with the work that's coming in now. So, I mean obviously if that was going to be our way of doing business in future then there'd have to be some very very intensive planning and direction as to how you intended to achieve your, that style of policing. There'd have to be a lot of training in relation to that. You'd probably have to double the police force. (C.O.)

Other officers also commented on the extent to which the volume of tasks that require an immediate reactive approach precludes consideration of more long-term action to address underlying causes of problems:

They simply don't have time, right.... So the guys on the track are that bloody flat out doing those jobs that they just don't have time to come down, sit down at the end of their shift and say, right, that job there needs addressing. Could be a domestic, we'll stay with the domestic which is the principle. That domestic, I've been to that domestic bloody six times and I'm going to ring up these people, ring up these people and ring up these people and try and, you know, do something about it. They don't have time, plain and
simple. The sergeants don't have time because they're obviously in charge of the shift, they're running the shift and with the skeleton crew they have they're too busy juggling bloody rosters and making sure the statistics, which is another issue because you've got the statistics for everything these days. (Sgt.)

Another senior officer stated:

With the current level of resources, unless something is freed up markedly from non-operational areas then we don't have a hope in hell. We can have localized problem solving issues but we can't I don't think dare introduce any major state wide strategy, generic, that we can all go and follow because we won't be able to service them. (C.O.)

And further:

Well again, unless some of these electronic gadgets, devices and systems are going to give us the benefits and realisation that people keep talking about then I don't think we're ever gonna be well placed, as I said before, to introduce any grandiose bloody generic problem solving strategy because we won't be able to service it. The troops on the ground don't have the time. They're all too busy responding reactively and just moving around generally to keep up with the workload. (C.O.)

The final aspect to be dealt with in this section on a problem solving approach is the extent to which the activities of officers are influenced by the existence of a wide variety of governing bodies, scrutiny and rules and regulations covering many aspects of what occurs each day. As will be seen there are a variety of factors that operate to prevent a completely free approach to creating unique solutions to any problems that officers may be faced with.
For example a number of members referred to the fact that officers often have to accept that their activities are circumscribed by rules and regulations. One senior officer made the following comment:

*And given the fact that the nature of the duties is such that they also don't have that great an opportunity for I guess flexibility in the way they do their things into the, I think there's an opportunity for them to be innovative and creative but that's within I guess a limited span because as you mentioned earlier they've got rules and regulations, they've got statutes they've gotta abide by, policies they must keep to and they've got that ever present accountability sort of hanging over them.* (C.O.)

Another officer described some of the practical difficulties and considerations that working police officers must grapple with in attempting to carry out their duties:

*W.B. So with, are you saying that police officers are more or less inhibited now in doing their job?*

*Hugely inhibited….I certainly think that they're more inhibited now than they ever were and they're quite happy to be, I mean more and more now people are encouraged not to worry about life and property but worry about one's own well being both financially and physically and are more willing to draw a line and say well that's as far as I go because I can't afford to go any further.*

*W.B. Now is the system officially encouraging them to do that or is it?*

*Yes. (Sgt.)*
This member described a hypothetical situation in order to indicate the kinds of thoughts that would be occupying an officer’s mind while trying to decide whether or not to become involved in a particular situation:

Okay, in relation to our organization I would suggest that if they concentrated, yeah in my view if they concentrated a little bit less in steering us in a direction of perhaps going to the edge and stopping because we’re not sure of you know, the legislation is there but there’s a lot of grey areas so walk to the door, have a look in but don’t go in yet, and we’ll sort that out while you’re walking up the driveway. If they worried about, if they concentrated a little bit less on that and perhaps as little bit more on, er, honest belief, I’m not going to allow that to happen, and while we’re not allowing that to happen, locking him up, putting him before the court, I mean the court’s going to decide, okay, not, is it a legal search whatever, but did he smack his missus, did he not smack his missus or should I let him go because his missus asked for it. Instead of stopping at the door and worrying about whether you’re legally entering the house and everything’s the copper’s fault, perhaps they should concentrate on talking to the other departments and saying right, what do we need to have you do in relation to this problem instead of having my people going up to the door and me having to worry about the door while they’re walking up the driveway. The problem needs to be sorted at an inter-agency level before, they seem to have it the wrong way around at the moment. (Sgt.)

Finally, this officer spoke about how police are often reluctant to take necessary forceful action because of uncertainty about a variety of new regulations:

Once upon a time we could walk to the door, we could kick the door, we could arrest the man, we could chuck him in the bin and take him to court.
W.B. Why can't we do that now?

Because you've got to worry about all the different legislations and the new Acts that have come into place over the last ten years and oh I don't think, I don't think they let policemen out, I think that's going to affect us. (Sgt.)

A more senior member described his own perception of how younger officers have been conditioned to be very circumspect about how far they are willing to go in pursuing their tasks:

But then you'll have a nucleus of people, probably the great majority of operational police will be thinking Jesus, I've got a problem here but I can't solve it if I've got to stick absolutely to the rules. If the trooper and his partner can see that they've gotta go over there to find what they're looking for, but the law doesn't allow then to make that transition as smoothly as they like they'll simply turn around and say to each other, look we know he's done the break, we know he's whatever he's supposed to have committed but I don't think we should take a chance and go any further with this. So, did you do the break Bill, no I didn't, well thanks for coming and turn him away. The crooks must be laughing at us, we are not. (C.O.)

A junior member described the restrictions that officers feel and potential consequences of wrong decisions:

Well, I think most police officers, common sense wise, can solve a problem. It just depends on the restrictions and the limitations placed on them by statute law, by police department policy and all those little things that come into being, that you can and can't do, generally can't do..... Well, you're, once again your bound by the restrictions and limitations placed upon you by laws and more so police department policies. (Const.)
The officer went on to provide more detail about the limits on effective action created by the need to abide by a wide range of regulations and the feelings engendered in officers by this situation:

Well, well I mean you can disregard any rule or regulation you want to but subsequently if it becomes discovered or you get a complaint well, then you can't justify what you did well you're in trouble. And constables are gonna be held to account much more so than sergeants, sergeants are to be held to account as well I suppose the same level as constables but then above that rank they rarely have to account for their actions.

W.B. This gets back to what you were saying before but isn't it preferable, sometimes, that constables be allowed to change or ignore general guidelines?

Well you have to, you have to ignore them to get your job done. If you obeyed every rule and regulation and policy and guideline in the reams and thousands and bits of paper work that float around and come into your office about this or that or the things that get put on the computer about this and that you'd, it would take you eight hours a day to read them and familiarise yourself with them and acquaint yourself with them every day to remember what you had to do, and what you couldn't do. The police department is just one big ream of statistics and paperwork that bloody, has lost sight of itself, has lost it's way, it doesn't you know, the job's not getting done anymore. (Const.)

In relation to the impact on officers of this working environment this member stated:

Well it's just a hopeless feeling; it's a useless feeling of why am I here if the commandment of the police department place all these restrictions on me, why am I doing
Summary

For some years now commentators have referred to the increasing complexity of the various systems and organizations that exist within modern society. In order to deal with this increased complexity it is accepted that an important skill for those involved is the ability to adopt a problem solving approach to the multitude of factors that require consideration. It is also accepted that such an approach requires elements of creativity, risk taking and some entrepreneurial flair. These are seen as important attributes as they facilitate the creation of imaginative solutions to new, complex and often interrelated issues.

Many people accept that the forces impacting on modern police services are evolving in the same manner as those of other organizations. Some police officers believe that the role of the police is still a simple one that is in danger of being over complicated. Notwithstanding this opinion there exists a sufficiently influential view in support of implementing a more sophisticated approach to ensure that problem solving continues to be a part of current policing methodology. The Police Service of Western Australia supports this approach and this is evidenced by the production of a variety of departmental publications and documents that advocate problem-solving policing.

The topic of problem solving in a policing environment is obviously the central theme of this dissertation. The elements identified from the analysis of the quotes of those officers interviewed gives an insight into the manner in which they interact to form the structure and style of the organization. This information can then be used to predict the likely impact on the ability of police officers to implement a problem solving approach to their duties within such an environment.

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The officers interviewed during this research project expressed strong views about a number of aspects of a problem-solving approach. Not all officers had an understanding of the concept. Some were aware of the origins of the philosophy and the writings of Goldstein while others were aware in a general sense of the principles and general methods. But, almost without exception, they all expressed an acceptance of the usefulness of the approach based either on their own existing knowledge of the process, consideration of the explanation of the concept discussed during the interview or the practical sense of the philosophy.

The officers interviewed were fairly unanimous in their acceptance of the benefits of applying a problem solving approach. However, the greater majority also expressed strong reservations about the extent to which the process could be applied to the policing environment of Western Australia. This view was based on pragmatic considerations such as the staff numbers that would be required, the inhibiting effects of various rules and regulations and the general ethos of the organization that they believed would render any such attempts ineffectual.

Many officers actually stated their belief that police officers have, in fact, always adopted such an approach to their work and that they are actually very good at it. However, most officers expressed serious doubts about the ability and willingness of the Police Service of Western Australia and, in particular, the senior members, to allow junior officers to put such practices into operation. These reservations were in relation to several distinct aspects of the general concept and indicate a sound understanding and appreciation of the negative aspects of the organization and their impact on a problem solving approach.

The factors detailed in this section that were considered to create serious barriers to the successful implementation of a problem solving approach have already been discussed in
previous sections of this work. They include aspects of the organization such as the lack of
devolution of real power to deal with local issues, the complex set of rules and regulations that
must be adhered to, a fear of making mistakes in a blame culture, the conservative nature of
police officers, the lack of commitment by the organization to the need to foster creativity in
policing, the real acceptance of honest mistakes and creating a learning environment for officers.

Other factors mentioned include the self-interest of commissioned officers and sergeants aspiring
to such positions, the control exercised by those officers over junior members and the blaming of
junior staff for failures that occur.

An important issue raised by many officers was the serious lack of assistance from other
government agencies especially during periods outside normal business hours of nine to five on
Monday to Friday.

A major element of a problem solving approach to dealing with issues facing members of society is
the ability of police officers to formulate solutions that frequently require input from various other
trained professionals. Where this assistance is so seriously lacking the task of the police is made
far more difficult.
7.1 Discussion

The reforms arising from the Delta program of 1994 were clearly aimed at changing most aspects of the style, structure, standards and systems of the Police Service of Western Australia. A central feature of this process was the official endorsement of the application by police officers of a problem solving approach to their duties.

The problem solving style of policing is a methodology that has been adopted by police agencies in many parts of the world. It is closely linked to the approach known as problem-oriented policing that has been clearly described by Goldstein (1990). Although he acknowledged that the problem-solving style had merit, in his 1996 work he asserted that this approach was inferior to his more advanced system.

This is due to the organization's continued emphasis on efficiency as demonstrated by the focus on issues such as response times, internal information and communication networks, business systems, arrest rates and internal discipline. The Police Service does not exhibit the same degree of commitment to the more fundamental and important issues raised by Goldstein (1990) that deal with effectiveness.

The departmental publication “Purpose and Direction” contains a set of 7 strategic intentions that are intended to provide all officers with clear guidance about the new style of policing that is to be implemented (Police Service of Western Australia, 1994). This document does not specifically mention problem-oriented policing or the thoughts of Herman Goldstein. However, when the provisions are read with Goldstein's works in mind, the links are very clear.
The document contains references to the delivery of policing services that satisfy the needs of the community, to the development of plans and tactics based on the unique requirements of a particular localised community and to actions based upon the application of a problem solving approach by police officers that takes account of causal factors rather than merely dealing with incidents that arise.

There is also a clear commitment to the development and motivation of personnel so that they are better equipped to engage in effective decision-making of a type that reflects innovation and creativity. These are central to the role that Goldstein (1990) advocates for police officers. Therefore, the official documentation exhibits a clear commitment to this new approach to policing.

However, as this research clearly demonstrates, the situation bears closer examination as the analysis of the circumstances of the Police Service of Western Australia reveals two important aspects concerning the local model.

The first concerns features of the organizational culture of the Police Service of Western Australia that are impeding the implementation of the problem solving approach. The second involves a major departure from, or perhaps more accurately, a failure to implement the problem-oriented approach to policing advocated by Goldstein (1990).

This is not simply a question of terminology as the differences have important consequences for the Police Service of Western Australia in terms of whether or not it is able to address the kinds of deficiencies that the full Goldstein model is designed to overcome.

The Police Service of Western Australia, like many similar organizations around the world, is able to point to individual examples of the use of a problem-solving approach with respect to a specific
situation. But more is required if the organization is to gain the full benefit of this approach and achieving this is not an easy task. This fact is accepted by agencies such as the Australian Securities and Investment Commission, cited by Sparrow, (2000, p. 155) as exemplified by the following quote:

The challenge we face is how to ensure that problem solving, or our preferred terminology of an integrated risk based approach to compliance and enforcement, becomes the organizational framework and not just an add-on activity…. It is a much more difficult task to seek to adopt this as an overall whole-of-organization approach.

7.2 Problem-solving Policing

The current research has revealed a particular organizational structure within the Police Service of Western Australia. It exhibits many of the undesirable characteristics of those other organizations that Goldstein clearly had in mind when he originally formulated his views on the need for a problem-oriented approach to policing that would counteract what he considered were negative influences and barriers to effectiveness.

The various official publications of the Police Service of Western Australia consulted during this research clearly show that a problem solving approach to the policing function is intended to be an important component of the local system. The current research has also shown that there are a number of cultural and structural issues that create serious obstacles to the implementation of a problem solving approach by officers ranging in rank from constable to superintendent. This situation is the cause of several disadvantages for the organization and generates issues for both officers and the Police Service of Western Australia.
In relation to the inability to implement problem-solving policing, the reasons for this arise from a number of features of the organization that have remained constant for many years. The data gathered during this current research clearly show that there is widespread acceptance among the officers interviewed that the internal organizational culture is one that is heavily influenced by a number of these factors. They include such things as rank, power, personal interest, lack of true devolution of authority, a blame culture, close scrutiny of officers' actions and the constant fear of being blamed for outcomes.

In addition, the external working environment is greatly affected by factors such as customer focus, the service delivery model, staff shortages and excessive workloads. Many officers view these demands as being unreasonable and based upon expectations of a level of service that they cannot provide. This situation exposes them to criticism from the public when demands are not met.

Both the organizational environment and the working environment largely influence the organizational culture that exists within the Police Service of Western Australia and give rise to the Basic Social Problem that has been termed “Feeling Vulnerable.”

These factors all display negative aspects and collectively they create an atmosphere of constant apprehension and fear at many levels and ranks concerning the possibility of complaints and criticism arising from their attempts to address issues. This leads to the widespread implementation of work practices that avoid activity that would be likely to address issues head-on due to the need to reduce the likelihood of any kind of criticism.

This is the Basic Social Process that has been termed “Controlling By Avoidance.”
7.2.1 Organizational Environment

Although these factors exist as discrete elements of the organizational environment in which police officers function they combine in ways that create a greater impact than would be the case if they operated in isolation from one another.

For example, the various ranks within the organization carry with them substantial power and officers occupying such levels possess considerable official authority to compel compliance from those of lesser rank. Many holders of rank are motivated by strong self-interest in terms of maintaining their existing position or advancing further within the organization and are viewed as wielding this power to further their personal needs.

The organization and its personnel are focussed on aspects such as internal systems and procedures, compliance with a myriad of laws, rules and regulations and an emphasis on efficiency with regard to the application of official systems but with little regard to their effectiveness. Police officers at many levels focus on their own career aspirations and carrying out their duties in a manner that emphasises personal safety and avoidance of any kind of new or creative approach to problems because of the risk of failure and subsequent attribution of blame.

A consequence of this is that many officers make decisions about their policing activities according to how such actions will assist them in their careers. They focus on the need to avoid investigation and criticism and achieve or maintain a particular promotion. They have little incentive to carry out their duties in a manner that is intended primarily to address the problems of policing.

Although the Delta reforms that were commenced in 1994 required senior officers to practise a considerable degree of devolution in respect of many administrative functions, this research has shown that this does not happen in practice. The style of authoritarian management practised at
many supervisory levels within the organization, up to and including assistant and deputy commissioner levels, is viewed as being designed to control the actions of any one junior in rank for the purpose of preventing actions that might reflect badly on the senior officer.

Likewise there are links between the factors of accountability, scrutiny and the blame culture. An emphasis on accountability without an effective method of scrutiny would be ineffectual. The existence of strong internal controls conducted with a focus on problem solving and systems improvement would be far less likely to produce the concerns that attend the present system of fault-finding and the attribution of blame to as many individuals as possible whenever a complaint is received.

This research has shown that a major cause of this situation is the disciplinary system, with its emphasis on individual responsibility and the laying of blame for events that can so easily be described as personal mistakes as the result of a complaint received about some aspect of an officer's actions. The essence of this approach lies in the capacity of senior officers to use the power that accompanies their rank to pass blame down the chain of command to their subordinates and, thereby, avoid any direct responsibility for events or outcomes that are 'deemed' to be undesirable.

Junior officers are then subjected to the blame focussed internal scrutiny system applied by senior officers with their own personal agendas and the power to enforce their view of the situation under review.

All of these factors together produce the underlying atmosphere of fear and inhibited activity that attends many of the activities of police officers.
7.2.2. Working Environment

In relation to the working environment, there is also an interaction of factors that has an impact. The customer focus and service delivery approaches that officers are required to apply are admirable ideals and, no doubt, are goals to be aimed for, certainly within private enterprise, service type industries. However, the advocates of this style of policing seem to ignore the confrontational nature of much police activity. Police officers are frequently called upon to act when one citizen has a grievance against another and the situation has reached the point where there is tension and an unresolved issue.

If the police officer is to satisfy one customer he or she must take unwelcome action against another customer. The dissatisfied customer is then free to avail him or herself of the internal complaint system that is designed to deal with such issues. Once the internal investigation system is activated many officers believe that they are powerless to avoid the inevitable outcome. This is likely to result in blame being attributed to them in relation to some aspect of the overall situation under review in order to appease the complainant.

As many officers interviewed for this research have made clear, the personnel of the Police Service of Western Australia suffer considerable stress from the twin problems of ever increasing work loads and staff shortages. They are unable to attend to tasks in the manner and at the rate promised to the public by the Police Service of Western Australia. Officers in Western Australia are subject to high workloads and this creates a situation where they are moving quickly from task to task with little opportunity to come to grips with the underlying issues of a situation.

Many officers believe that the Police Service of Western Australia has given the public an expectation of a level of service that cannot be provided. Because of this unreasonable
expectation of efficiency officers who ‘fail’ to deliver this level of service are constantly open to complaints and criticism and the stress that flows from scrutiny of their actions that takes place under the blame culture ethos.

7.2.3 Avoidance Strategies

The above combination of factors pushes officers into considering a range of self-protection measures that have as their primary focus avoiding or controlling situations rather than engaging with them in a manner intended to produce solutions to problems and issues. A consequence is the implementation of informal work practices that support avoidance of effort likely to address issues head-on due to the need to prevent any kind of criticism.

These tactics involve the exercise of control by senior officers over the actions of subordinates, junior ranks deferring decision making to senior members, creating the façade of meaningful activity and simply ignoring many issues that arise. All of these work practices are designed to create the appearance of meaningful activity yet simply ignoring occurrences that require attention by police.

This organizational culture affects all ranks from constable to superintendent. As has been the case for most of its history, all positions within the Police Service of Western Australia are currently held by individuals who have progressed through the organization starting from the rank of constable. Thus it can be argued that the organizational culture has been a major factor in shaping each individual’s outlook.

The importance of this fact is recognised by others. For example, Schein (1985, p. 313), argues that:
Leaders create cultures, but cultures, in turn, create their next generation of leaders.

The Police Service of Western Australia model refers to problem-solving. This has become the dominant feature of an approach to policing that has gained worldwide popularity rivalling that of the problem-oriented approach. In common with many other police agencies The Police Service of Western Australia can no doubt point to specific examples of successful problem solving. But this kind of activity falls a long way short of the ideals of the full problem-oriented policing model.

With regard to the implementation of the official approach of problem solving policing, it is clear that the actual model of the organization discovered during the current research does not support this style of policing. Officers from all levels are focussed on protecting their own positions against the dangers presented by a managerial regime and working environment that constantly exposes them to events and outcomes that can have serious consequences for their careers and livelihoods. As a consequence they are not willing to engage in the creative approach that is the hallmark of an uninhibited problem solving approach to their activities.

Bearing in mind that complaints from the public have such a potential for being the cause of so much trauma for police officers it can readily be seen that senior management would be extremely reluctant to relinquish the level of control over the actions of junior officers that the existing systems permit. This would remove their ability to lay responsibility for failed attempts to problem solve at the feet of junior officers. This would in turn expose senior officers to criticism that would be likely to adversely affect their own self-interest as a result of the existence of a strong blame culture.

These are very powerful incentives for avoiding the implementation of the problem solving approach to policing.
The merit-based promotion system ensures that the majority of officers will not rise above the rank of senior constable, which is the last rank that can be attained on the basis of time served. In addition many ambitious officers will only be successful in achieving one or two promotions and this will mean that they plateau at the rank of sergeant or inspector while still young.

While there is a clear drive within the Police Service of Western Australia to enhance the professional image of the organization and to attract applicants with higher levels of education, the absence of any real attention to the elements of a problem solving approach to policing has the propensity to detract from this aim in the longer term. This situation may be exacerbated by the lack of promotion prospects for many of the better-educated class of applicant.

7.3 Problem-Oriented Policing

The question about the lack of acceptance and application of a full problem-oriented approach is somewhat more complex as this was not the focus of the current research. However, on the basis of analysis of the data gathered during this research, coupled with an understanding of the thoughts of Goldstein, it is possible to suggest some sensible reasons for this situation.

The problem-oriented policing approach seeks to introduce a system where the judgements made by officers are rational and based on accumulated knowledge about proven strategies. Rational judgements could deviate from ‘the book’ but they can be surfaced, discussed, guided and, thereby, controlled. Professional judgements can be institutionalised. Supervisors can influence rational exercises of discretion that are shared. They cannot influence hunch-based discretion unless disastrous errors of judgement are made, in which case it is usually too late for remedial action.
In relation to the actual culture and structure that operates within the Police Service of Western
Australia, the current research has shown that this creates an essentially negative and fearful
outlook on the part of the majority of police officers who, therefore, concentrate on avoiding any
situation that experience tells them can be the cause of conflict. This in turn detracts from the
implementation of any form of creative or innovative approach to policing issues.

This is the case in relation to problem solving policing and it is argued that it would also apply to
the implementation of the more ambitious version of problem-oriented policing. In fact that
situation is likely to present senior management with even greater difficulties because they would
be required to officially accept that the approach is inherently risky and that junior members, the
ones making the greatest number of operational decisions, will make mistakes.

Problem-oriented policing places greater responsibility on senior management to initiate the kinds
of policy initiatives that are required to allow all officers to address substantial problems affecting
the entire community. They must also give their approval for officers to devise and implement such
actions, to have an influence over the policies under which they operate and to support their
subordinates in the event that outcomes are viewed as being less than perfect by some members
of the community.

7.4 Implications
The results of this research have provided some clear reasons for the lack of success of a problem
solving approach to policing. Given the existence of so many well-articulated versions of the full
problem-oriented policing philosophy, the question also arises as to why such an apparently
valuable and productive model has not been fully embraced by The Police Service of Western
Australia. The data gathered during this research also provide an answer to this question of why the Goldstein model has met with so little acceptance in Western Australia.

The environment in the Police Service of Western Australia disclosed by the current research is one in which officers still have no professional guidance or basis on which to apply solutions to issues that confront them. But the issue is compounded by the fact that many officers will not even engage with issues because of the prevailing blame culture so the potential for devising effective solutions is further decreased.

The research shows that police officers in Western Australia are unlikely to exercise their discretion if it involves any degree of contravention of policy, guidelines, rules or regulations. The consensus is clearly that the risks are too great.

Where police officers in the past could have been successful in achieving the aims of policing due to their willingness to implement problem solutions based on the needs of a situation, this is no longer the case. The combination of circumstances existing in the Police Service of Western Australia precludes any form of innovative or creative activity by police officers.

Toch and Grant (1991, p. 60) describe the old style of decision-making and contrast it with the more logical and open system that is a major component of problem-oriented policing. For many years police officers have emphasised decision-making based on personal intuition and street sense. Because they do not discuss what they do theirs has become a profession based on art rather than systematic knowledge.

Although police officers are required to make judgements according to their department’s book of rules and regulations they nevertheless make hunch based judgements and apply actions based
upon the use of their discretion. Supervisors and managers are often unaware of such activities and, therefore, these decisions are unconstrainable because they are inaccessible.

As Toch and Grant (1991) make clear the process of problem solving in the environment of free discussion and analysis that can be achieved with the implementation of the problem-oriented policing approach is job enriching, encourages personal growth and development and increasing organizational knowledge. The dangers that are inherent in unfettered discretion, and which have generated the old style command and control managerial approach, can be reduced because problem solving and decision making becomes reviewable.

The organizational factors present in the Police Service of Western Australia that govern the way in which police officers function do not permit such a productive approach to decision making.

Although the advocates of the problem-oriented approach to policing take issue with many aspects of the commonly applied policing methodology it appears that officers in the past actively confronted issues and vigorously applied accepted tactics to problems encountered. The current research shows that many officers will not even entertain involvement with people and issues for the purpose of applying any strategies, problem solving or otherwise. Therefore the likelihood of police considering the application of more creative solutions to issues is remote.

The environment of policing in Western Australia has changed with regard to the basis on which officers will make decisions. In the past police officers had greater actual autonomy in the sense that they could act according to their own assessment of a given situation. This allowed them to formulate methods of dealing with issues that met some personal criteria of correctness even though their actions may have failed the problem-oriented test of effectiveness.
In cases where official policy conflicted with the practical requirements of what a police officer should ideally do in any given situation a problem arose. Although this situation has long been widely recognised by commentators such as Goldstein - indeed it is one of the basic grounds on which he promulgated his theory of problem-oriented policing - police officers were still left to confront the issue.

Where the exercise of discretion by an individual officer is potentially in contravention of official policy officers have two options. The first option is to act according to the rules, accepting that whatever action they take may not actually address the needs of the particular situation, and be free to openly discuss their actions if required to do so. The second option they can take is to apply the solution that their experience tells them is the most appropriate and then deal with the consequences. In the event of adverse consequences this leads to a further choice between concealing the true nature of their activities to avoid blame or being honest about their actions and accepting the possibility of criticism for failing to abide by some element of the rulebook.

However, this first, ‘safer’ approach to decision making, with its focus on blindly following the rulebook without consideration of the implications for successful problem solving, fails to apply a fundamental requirement of both the problem solving and the problem-oriented approaches to policing. This requirement is an acceptance that innovative solutions to unique problems are often required and that officers must be given a degree of latitude to formulate and apply appropriate solutions to issues facing them. The constant threat of being penalised when solutions devised lead to undesired outcomes or a breach of rules or regulations is detected - which this research shows is the current reality of the Police Service of Western Australia - inhibits this freedom of action.
As this research clearly demonstrates, police officers are now so inhibited and fearful of blame for any action taken that they refrain from any level of involvement where possible. This situation must significantly reduce the capacity of the Police Service of Western Australia to build up that body of knowledge about the activities of its members that is the hallmark of professional occupations.

When deciding what to do to correct this situation there would appear to be little to be gained from a programme designed simply to remove the organizational impediments to the local problem solving version of a new style of policing. The shortcomings of the current organizational structure and culture that so adversely affect the local model would also have an adverse impact on the promotion of a problem-oriented approach. The best approach would appear to be one that addresses these shortcomings in conjunction with a serious attempt to fully endorse the philosophy advocated by Goldstein (1990).

In relation to the issue of why the problem-oriented approach has not been embraced by the Police Service of Western Australia, Brown and Sutton (1997) provide some guidance. As they explain, organizations tend to sustain and regenerate themselves. In doing this they employ two main strategies. The ‘hard’ response is to quickly crush or stifle any threat to the status quo. The other approach involves the ‘softer’ approach of cooption. Under this method the organization entertains a new and potentially threatening notion, but in such a way that the threat is effectively neutralised.

This provides a possible explanation as to why the Western Australian model of problem-solving policing gives the façade of being based on an acceptance of the principles of the philosophy of problem-oriented policing while avoiding the issues that can be problematic for senior management.
It is clear from this research that successful implementation of either the local version of problem-solving policing or the more ambitious problem-oriented policing requires two issues to be addressed.

Firstly, an official organizational structure must be created that makes this process a fundamental aspect of all policing operations and functions. Secondly, the organizational culture must embrace the concept and ‘permit’ it to take hold and be applied.

With regard to a problem-solving approach this research shows that the official policy of the Police Service of Western Australia does endorse this approach to policing activity although this is lacking in key aspects such as training officers in the required techniques and incorporating consideration of successful attempts in performance evaluations.

However, the research also clearly shows that the actual culture that pervades the organization presents major obstacles to the application of problem solving in a free manner.

This attitude begins with the lower ranks that quickly learn to practise avoidance strategies in order to prevent themselves from incurring the kind of stress that arises from the existence of the blame mentality that renders them constantly susceptible to criticism and the serious consequences that can emanate from unsuccessful attempts at problem solving.

This desire to avoid potentially contentious, that is, almost any, situations arises very early on in an officer’s career and appears to be regularly reinforced at various times during his/her career. This can be as a result of both personal experiences and exposure to similar events affecting other officers of which they become aware. This attitude is fully absorbed and becomes a feature of the outlook of most officers as they settle into their policing careers.
If a particular officer is successful in achieving a promotion, or desires further advancement, s/he will be presented with an additional motive to practise avoidance of problematic situations. Concern about the blame culture now has greater impact over such members. This is with regard to their own activities and as importantly, to those junior officers over whom they now exert control.

In relation to the problem-oriented style of policing, this research can be used to predict that this approach is even less likely to be successfully implemented.

The examination of the official documentation issued by the Police Service of Western Australia during this research clearly shows that this approach has not received official acceptance. This is despite extensive discussion of the concept and its benefits in policing circles and the literature and the acceptance by a number of policing agencies in other jurisdictions in Australia.

The findings of this research concerning the widespread impact of the blame culture and the need that most ranks feel to practise avoidance strategies present the strongest grounds for predicting that such an approach is unlikely to take hold unless major changes are implemented.

In order for this philosophy of policing to be adopted senior managers would be required to accept that they must become more tolerant of practices and procedures that may generate errors from time to time. They must become more comfortable with uncertainty and lack of clarity in relation to many policing tasks requiring the exercise of innovative and potentially risky solutions.

In the current climate of self-protection against the threat of criticism this is unlikely to occur.
There are a number of issues that arise from the two problems detailed above concerning the inability of the Police Service of Western Australia to implement the chosen version of the new approach to dealing with policing issues and the lack of commitment to instituting a full-blown approach to problem-oriented policing. These are inter-related due to the links between the two concepts and the issue about the apparent confusion in the minds of various levels within the management of the Police Service of Western Australia about the subtle differences.

Dealing firstly with the local style of problem solving policing, the similarities with the Goldstein model are sufficient to permit one to argue that the absence of the kinds of benefits that Goldstein and other advocates of problem-oriented policing claim for their approach are detracting from the ability of Western Australian police officers to be as efficient and effective as they could be.

This research shows that the culture of the Police Service of Western Australia exhibits features that detract from the implementation of a problem-solving/problem-oriented approach to policing matters. These are as follows:

- There is an excessive focus on matters of internal management and organizational efficiency and insufficient emphasis on the development of effective measures to deal with substantive policing issues.
- The present climate of scrutiny, blame and control over officers’ actions detracts from their dignity, professionalism, a mature approach to issues and effective policing.
- The merit-based promotion system results in the majority of officers remaining at the lower ranks, being unable to develop to their full potential and eventually experiencing frustration with their situation, and
- There is insufficient emphasis placed on the accumulation of professional knowledge, improving officers’ expertise and raising the sense of professionalism of the lower ranks.
If the senior management personnel of the Police Service of Western Australia decided to officially implement a problem-oriented approach to policing they would be required to put into place mechanisms to deal with some specific issues. They would have to adopt a flexible management style that provides increased freedom to senior officers, supervisors and rank-and-file officers. If they are to be effective problem solvers officers must be given the latitude to deal more directly with the community, to devise and explore alternative solutions to problems and to make independent decisions. Senior management must also accept that mistakes will be made occasionally.

Under such a system senior management would be required to create and endorse a more flexible set of guidelines or general principles to guide officers as opposed to the present fairly rigid set of rules and regulations that govern, some would say restrain, current thinking and activities. They must recognise that police officers frequently encounter unique situations that have not previously been covered by any official policy or guidelines.

In terms of the current research, the above four features of the organization have implications as they generate a number of issues that in turn create a barrier to the successful implementation of the problem-oriented approach to policing and consideration must be given to the steps required to overcome them. These steps are:

- Changing the corporate culture so that creativity, autonomy and continuous learning replace conformity and obedience;
- Developing a new, more creative and flexible style of leadership, management and supervision leading to a more trusting relationship between the various ranks;
- Practising true devolution and developing a network of autonomous units rather than the existing rigid pyramid structure in order to allow policing based on local conditions;
• Being proactive rather than reactive, developing a tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty and creating new and innovative methods of dealing with issues;

• Creating a flexible working environment that values officers and treats them as equals and not subordinates;

• Redefining the role for rank-and-file officers and encouraging innovation, experimentation and risk-taking in order to create a more challenging and creative environment which should assist in overcoming some of the problems caused by the lack of promotional opportunities for many officers;

• Recruiting and training officers with the capacity to function in the new style and encouraging officers to develop their full potential;

• Providing officers with the responsibility to deal with substantive policing issues and to apply their own time, expertise and imagination in devising solutions to problems;

• Increasing attention to researching policing issues and best practice in order to improve the body of knowledge about the profession of policing; and

• Incorporating recognition of problem solving activities in performance appraisals of all levels.

7.5 Recommendations

The Police Service of Western Australia has officially accepted that the implementation of some form of problem solving approach to the provision of services to a modern community is beneficial.

Consideration of the findings of this research provides a basis for making a number of suggestions that need to be considered seriously if the organization is going to be successful in achieving the full range of benefits that come from the implementation of this type of approach.
In order to ensure an organization-wide acceptance of the problem-oriented model to all aspects of police activities senior management must demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that this occurs. The problem-solving policing approach advocated by the Police Service of Western Australia inadvertently, or perhaps deliberately, does not incorporate this most important feature of the problem-oriented model.

All of the recommendations are dependant on one major issue. That is, that the commitment to this task must start with the Commissioner of Police and his senior executive supported by the administration of other agencies at similar levels.

Senior management must take direct action to promote the problem-oriented model of policing and create the environment that will allow this to flourish. In order to achieve this they must come to grips with the implications of the Goldstein model and actively take steps designed to ensure that the existing obstacles are removed.

An official policy aimed at installing the problem-oriented philosophy will require the removal of the existing organizational and cultural impediments revealed by this research. This is likely to prove to be a more difficult task than officially supporting the implementation of the new model. This is the case because these factors have existed for many years and have persisted despite the Delta reform agenda.

These issues arise from consideration of the information gathered during the current research and should be the basis for the formulation of a series of initiatives designed to bring about the required changes. In order to provide a solid foundation for the acceptance, implementation and on-going development of the problem-oriented approach to policing, further action in a number of key specific areas is important.
These are detailed below as recommendations. As stated above, all of the recommendations are dependent upon one major issue. That is, that the commitment to this task must start with the Commissioner of Police and his senior executive supported by the administrators of other agencies at similar levels.

Recommendation 1

- The primary recommendation of this research is that the senior executive of the Police Service of Western Australia must make a renewed, formal and unequivocal commitment to establishing the problem-oriented policing philosophy across the agency.

This action is fundamental to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Police Service of Western Australia. The following recommendations provide pathways for the achievement of the major recommendation. The actual sequence in which they would be implemented would depend upon the management of the Police Service of Western Australia, but the sequence that follows provides a guide.

Recommendation 2

- Research should be conducted with a view to fully detailing the nature and extent of the structural and cultural impediments to the implementation of the problem-oriented policing approach that have been identified in the current research and devising a strategy to overcome their effects in order to ensure that this philosophy becomes the standard mode of operation for the organization and its members.
Recommendation 3

- An educational process must be implemented to ensure that all levels of management and supervision within the organization depart from their emphasis on the traditional blame-culture based method of dealing with mistakes, in order to encourage junior levels to become more creative in their attempts to deal with issues.

Recommendation 4

- The Police Service of Western Australia must change its focus from one of concentrating on matters of efficiency, internal management and ensuring strict obedience to rules and procedures to one of establishing what constitutes the best response to substantive policing issues in order to ensure effectiveness in police procedures.

Recommendation 5

- Procedures for establishing lines of responsibility for action must be established based on the seriousness and complexity of a given problem in order to clearly delineate the level within the organization required to take action in a given situation so as to ensure that matters are dealt with by personnel having the required experience and resources.

Recommendation 6

- Education must be provided on the benefits of the problem-oriented policing system together with incentives designed to encourage the implementation of the approach.
Recommendation 7

- Training in problem solving methodologies must be provided to all levels together with an increased emphasis on evaluating officers according to the frequency and effectiveness of solutions formulated to deal with substantive issues.

Recommendation 8

- The organization’s internal reward system must be modified to support the effective implementation of the problem-oriented approach.

Recommendation 9

- The Police Service of Western Australia must increase police officers’ freedom to make or participate in important decisions. At the same time, officers must be accountable for their decision-making.

Recommendation 10

- The Professional Standards Portfolio must take a more active role in assisting with the development of problem-based learning and the accumulation of professional knowledge about best practice in relation to dealing with policing issues in order to provide a solid basis for ongoing and properly documented improvements in police practice.

Recommendation 11

- The effectiveness of new responses developed must be evaluated so these results can be shared with other police officers and so that the department can systematically learn what does and does not work.
The current research provides a strong indication that improvements to the operational philosophy of the Police Service of Western Australia are necessary. This research also shows a way towards realistic and positive change that goes a long way in ensuring that the Police Service of Western Australia can become an effective and efficient instrument of public safety in accordance with its statutory requirements and the expectations of the Service and the community.

Because of the complexities of problem-oriented policing further research is needed into how economic and political factors might affect the introduction of the above changes. These issues were not within the scope of this thesis but further research on these factors could be very valuable.
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Total Mentions by Category

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