

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

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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.