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Is it complex environments or complex systems that undermines police reform in developing countries?

Abstract

This article is a reflection upon the challenges facing police reform in developing countries. In doing so it explores the usefulness of complexity theory both to understand the evidence of relative failure and to reconsider the explanations offered for that failure in terms of unique individual factors or the complex nature of the environment. The article suggests that the nature of police organisations as complex social systems may be a principal reason for failure. The article outlines some of the key features of complex systems and illustrates these from actual police reform. The article then turns to whether complexity theory can be of any practical use in police reform programmes. It concludes that greater success may be forthcoming if the insights of complexity theory are taken on board by reformers.

Key words

Complex social systems; complexity theory; police reform; developing world

The struggles of police reform

After many decades of substantial effort to reform police forces in the developing world, it seems appropriate to take stock and to review what has been achieved. This article is a reflection on the challenges that have been met and how they have been or might have been handled. Starting from the perspective that good state security institutions make good security for the people, the improvement of security in developing countries has focused for many decades on reforming states' police institutions. Donors have typically required those proposing police reform programmes to provide a theory of change (ToC) - an account of the underlying assumptions being made upon which the desired changes in the police organisation are promised and an ensuing log frame (logical framework) enunciating the interventions necessary to create the conditions that would achieve the objectives. Also expected have been the indicators that would evaluate the performance of the interventions (Anderson, 2005). The whole exercise has been based on a linear model of development, namely, produce the right causes and the desired effects will follow. Typical ToC assumptions are: build the capacity of central Security and Justice (S&J) institutions and there will be improvements in S&J services and increased public trust and state legitimacy; train police officers and there will be improved police attitudes and behaviour; provide services to female victims of crime and the incidence of violence against women will reduce;

improve community-police relations and there will be an improvement in police responsiveness and crime reduction (ICAI, 2015, p. 12).

Yet from the early 2000s growing concern was expressed about the limited success of police reform and hence the failure to provide all the desired security. Development was not following the linear log frame narrative. Call and Cousens spoke of efforts to build security institutions as not being 'especially encouraging' (2007, p.8-9). Englebert and Tull concluded that the results of the 10 UN peace operations in Africa, post-Cold War, to bring about state reconstruction, focusing on restoring the state's monopoly over the means of coercion, had been 'paltry' (2008, p. 106) and that the efforts had often been 'superficial and limited in their capacity to contribute to the restoration of lasting peace and security' (2008, p.129). Despite large investment of resources, the World Bank admitted that: 'the numerous rule of law assistance programs in post-conflict or fragile countries have so far resulted in few lasting consequences' (Samuels 2006, p. 15). According to Ball and Hendrickson, much of the work in SSR [security sector reform] had been 'misleadingly optimistic about the prospects for change' (2006, p. 38).

Deviations and complex environments

The explanations given for the disappointment were in the 2000s apportioned widely. Alice Hills found reform in Nigeria, 'to be superficial, localised and temporary' (Hills 2008) and she blamed corruption and the internal politics of the Nigeria police that had meant that desired reforms had to be balanced by political realities. Of the Mexico police, Daniel Sabat said there had been, 'a wide gap between creating a formal policy and seeing it effectively institutionalized' and he blamed corruption in the entire criminal justice system (2012, p. 21). A report on the Afghan police reform concluded that, 'despite seven years of international assistance, billions of dollars investment, and numerous reform programs, dividends have been little more than negligible' (RUSI & FPRI 2009, p. 6). It blamed lack of political will, poor training, and a focus on numbers rather than quality, amongst other factors. As regards Timor Leste, Ludovic Hood (2006, p. 143) claimed that the security sector reform had only 'produced security services devoid of adequate institutional development and woefully lacking in any democratic oversight'. This he blamed on poor leadership, negligible planning and unqualified mentors. David Lewis, writing of OSCE Police

reform programmes in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, concluded that they had ‘clearly failed to achieve their objectives’ (2011, p. 103). He blamed lack of political will and ‘vested interests in the security forces that controlled lucrative systems of corruption and criminality’ (Ibid, p. 106). In Brazil an attempt was made in the early 2000s to introduce a form of community policing, known as GPAE—Special Area Policing Unit. In explaining why it had proved a ‘high-profile public disaster’, Denyer Willis and Mota Prado (2014, p. 237) pinpoint the lack of political support and the fact that the police had not been specially trained for the challenges of the favela residents.

The finger of blame, then, for lack of success in police reform was pointed initially at different individual factors that were either unexpected or proved be less manageable than anticipated. Had the politicians backed the planned changes, had the police managers spent the money as directed, and had the police officers followed their training, then the programme would have been fulfilled. Essentially the programme design was fine; it simply had not been followed. Concerns about the effectiveness of police reform rarely questioned the typical SSR logistical framework that had been used for so many years, with its assumption that reform would follow training, equipment, improved management systems, accountability mechanisms and the introduction of professional standards units.

A step forward in understanding failure in the reform of security institutions came with the World Bank Development report of 2011, *Conflict, Security and Development*. From security problems in a country being seen as requiring no more than the reform of security institutions, there was a shift to perceiving the security problems in countries as inherently complex (a point anticipated in part by Wolf, 2004). In Chapter 5 of the Report, ‘Transforming institutions to deliver citizen security, justice, and jobs’, there is a recognition that reform is not straightforward because of the context in which it is taking place. Rather than explaining failure in terms of *un*-anticipated problems, it faced up to the fact that problems were inevitable, since reform programmes invariably took place in complex settings. The finger was pointed, not at individual factors, but on the complexity of the whole socio-political environment. It *could* be anticipated, especially in post-conflict countries, that there would be, simultaneously, civil institutions incapable of carrying out reforms; continued conflict; high levels of criminality by ex-combatants; ethnic division

exacerbated by the conflict; lack of political will; and severe government budgetary constraints. This awareness meant, in the World Bank's view, that programmes had to avoid being over-ambitious and had to be flexible. It also counselled that programmes had to undertake context analysis and broaden their scope to cover the complexity of the environment they were working in.

What the World Bank did not question, however, was the appropriateness of the standard elements of reform programmes. The World Bank still believed that security institutions could achieve success following the regular menu, even in complex environments, as long as the reform programmes were flexible. The Report, for instance, speaks of the transformation of the Haiti National Police, supported by MINUSTAH. The list given of programme's achievements is impressive. It is claimed that the force was 'professionalized'; its morale 'raised'; its officers vetted; women recruits were prioritised; the internal affairs unit was 'strengthened and acted decisively in cases of wrongdoing'; officers were 'properly equipped' and 'received regular salary payments'; the police uniform was changed 'as a public symbol of the change in the police force'; management was 'strengthened'; 'more authority' was delegated 'to the field'; and administrative and support functions were 'enhanced' (2011, p. 153). The implication was that all these achievements in Haiti were achievable anywhere provided that there is flexible use of the right procedures. Hence the conclusion is that, if a police service undertakes such 'progress in basic functions', then even the complex security and safety problems in a country can be tackled. It is presented as proof that 'basic reforms' can 'improve citizen security' (ibid). What the Report did not recognise, however, was that the very security institutions themselves that are called upon to confront complex problems, are themselves complex systems. The World Bank's focus was on transforming security *through* the security institutions, not on how the security institutions *themselves* will be transformed.

When Nicole Ball and Luc van de Goor (2013) surveyed security practitioners two years later, it became clear that the World Bank's alert to complex problems in complex environments had been absorbed. 'Many respondents underscored the importance of understanding local context, particularly the complex political relationships' (Ibid, p. 23). And they reference as good examples of this, a Swiss SSR project in Nepal and a Dutch-

Burundi SSD programme. In the former, the project did not follow a strict programming approach, but rather sought to engage in debate with political parties and other key stakeholders in order to determine whether it would be possible to get SSR on the agenda. In the latter, the programme was being guided by a Memorandum of Understanding rather than a logframe, in other words, it was setting out priority needs as identified by the partners, and was concerning itself with whether the intervention was having the desired outcomes, not whether it was following the logframe.

Three main issues were listed as important by the security advisers who spoke to Ball and van de Goor: 'Understand local context at multiple levels: Whose security and access to justice will be affected by donor programming and how. Engage in an iterative process of programme development and implementation. Understand what interventions will be politically and fiscally sustainable' (2013, p. 24). Again, as with the World Bank, there was the valuable reminder of the complexities of the post-conflict context and the recognition of the need for 'a non-linear, flexible, iterative approach to programming' (2013, p. 5). Yet nowhere was the very nature of security institutions as complex systems acknowledged. For Ball and van de Goor, the complexities lay largely outside the police and other security organisations.

Only a handful of scholars have acknowledged that the police themselves constitute a major problem to reform. Thus Skogan, (2008), Hills (2008) and Collins, Marenin & Chin-Chih Chu (2016) speak of *internal* organisational resistance to US and Nigerian police reform, and reforms in general. Yet in my opinion they fail to appreciate the scale of the problem. Though examining the police organisations, they are focused on identifying individual problems, rather than the systemic problem. They do not conceptualise the problem faced as being that of a complex system. This I believe is a significant oversight.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to consider whether police organisations are not complex social systems and to highlight particular insights of complexity theory that have a high degree of relevance to police reform. I will then reflect on whether complexity theory can be of any practical use in police reform programmes and whether greater success in

police reform might not be forthcoming if the insights of complexity theory are taken on board.

Complex systems

Currently in police reform circles, as noted, the linear development expected of log frames is frequently questioned and the complexity of security problems and post-conflict contexts is recognised. However, there is not yet widespread acceptance about the complex reality of security organisations, such as the police, who are being relied upon to deliver the internal security in a complex environment (with the exception of Hughes, Hunt & Curth-Bibb, 2013).

This oversight is important since the interpretation of the 'reality' of an organisation, just as the context, will never be complete, especially if it is by 'outsiders'. It is tempting to imagine that though police organisations may have different structures, policing work itself is similar and the values desired are universal. This seems to be the underlying assumption of Collins, Marenin and Chin-Chih Chu (2016, p. 73) who assert: 'democratic and professional policing can be defined fairly easily and in a globally accepted manner, even as it occurs in different forms. The underlying principles are similar and have been argued and accepted for a long time'. Assured of a recipe for success, thoughtful writers like Wolf feel confident that, 'potentials in post-conflict societies, where peace accords have been signed and where possibly even the reduction and adjustment of security forces have been agreed, are very positive indeed. Generally speaking, in such countries there is also a strong will to accept external support for reorientation and reform' (Wolf 2004, p. 7). His confidence is buoyed by the example of South Africa which, when he was writing in 2004, he believed demonstrated 'the deep structural transformation of the security sector' (Ibid), although he might have serious reservations in 2017. The assumptions of Collins et. al., Wolf and others, however, are in fact partial understandings and it is on the basis of such partial understandings that 'purposeful action' is designed to improve performance in perceived failing police organisations. Those purposeful actions will indeed impact the organisation and bring change, but they may not be the desired and expected change. The intervention will create a new situation, but one that will again be perceived incompletely. And so a new cycle of intervention takes place.

Can a definitive problem with a definitive solution be found for a complex social system?

From the emergence of complexity science in the 1960s (following work on systems theory, cybernetics and artificial intelligence), through its development in the fields of computing, ecological systems, chaos theory in the 1970s and 80s, to its more recent use in the social sciences (e.g. Morgan, 2005; Watson, 2006; Schneider & Johanes, 2007; Hughes, Hunt & Curth-Bibb, 2013; Baser & Morgan, 2008; Miskelly, Hoban & Vincent, 2009; Henderick, 2009; Miskelly, Hoban & Mowels, 2010; Jones, 2011; Körppen, Ropers & Gießmann, 2011) the answer has been negative. Those working in the field of complex adaptive systems doubt that transformative change of any institution or a part of it is really a matter of linear development; that the right inputs will ensure the desired outcomes. That they question logical frameworks is not because they question the need for logic; it is rather to say that when dealing with complex systems, it is logical not to be certain of the outcomes of interventions. Systems thinking questions whether the unexpected problems are due to the environment alone in which the institutions operate rather than due in large part to the institutions themselves. From a systems' perspective, reformers have tended to treat the organisation that they are focused on as if it were little more than a machine that will produce outcomes provided it is given suitable inputs. Their alternative approach to reforming organisations is to think in terms of 'systems'. Systems thinking is based on the understanding that though reform may be concentrated on a specific part of an institution, no individual, organisation or institution can be understood in isolation. A system can only be understood by contemplating the whole, not any individual part of the pattern. Therefore, in their view, though a development programme may be concerned with what is happening in a particular unit or to a particular process, in fact, in a complex system, many other things are taking place across a wide front.

Police organisations as complex social systems

What are the implications of understanding a police organisation as a complex social system? It means that the consequences of interventions when a reform programme is introduced are likely to be multiple and widespread. To answer just how multiple and widespread, we have to consider complexity theory or at least some of its ideas and principles. Applied to development, complexity theory entails the understanding of a range of concepts. First, *interconnectedness* and *interdependence* of the elements within a system.

Second *complex adaptive agents* and how people react to change around them. Third, *emergence* of unforeseen phenomena. Fourth, *co-evolution* of elements within the system, the one part feeding off the other. Fifth, *feedback* processes that set in motion either a positive or negative change process that moves through the system as a consequence of activity. Sixth, *sensitivity to initial conditions* and how those conditions arose. Finally, *non-linearity*, that is that development may not be a simple cause and effect. In summary, systems thinking cautions against making complete or final claims about complex systems (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008). As H.L. Mencken said, 'Explanations exist; they have existed for all time; there is always a well-known solution to every human problem — neat, plausible, and wrong' (1917).

In this article I highlight just three particular insights of complexity theory that appear to have a high degree of relevance to police reform, namely: interconnectedness; complex adaptive agents; and emergence.

interconnectedness and interdependence

All systems display interconnectedness. A system is complex when it is made up of multiple elements and processes which are constituted and influenced by other elements and processes within the system, as well as being shaped and influenced by the system itself. As the elements react, the whole system changes; as the whole system changes, elements react again. This interconnectedness leads to interdependence and promotes complex behaviour.

What does interconnectedness and interdependence mean for a police organisation? It means that neither the individual units (e.g. CID, traffic, counter-narcotics, strategic planning) nor the system as a whole are autonomous. It meant that police across all units in the Sierra Leone police could use very few of the 800 donated vehicles after the civil war since the Vehicle Maintenance unit lacked personnel and finance (Baker 2005, p. 374). Individual units cannot undertake their work uninfluenced by those outside. Rather, individual units are part of a web of interconnectedness and interdependence, a web that includes the entire police organisation and reaches beyond. Individual police units influence

one another, whilst external actors, both within and outside the criminal justice system, influence the police organisation and its units.

For example, police behaviour may change as a result of training, but training cannot be treated in isolation within a complex social system. The training of one unit may be undermined by the performance of other units. In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the unit that impacted training negatively was Salaries. Poor salaries or inconsistent payment undermined the motivation that officers needed to continue the good practice learned through training. A 2015 report says that though improved police practices took place as a result of training, motivation to continue was undermined. 'There seems little prospect that they will continue good police practice and the abandonment of corrupt practices' (DFID, 2015, p. 9). Similarly, despite initial positive response to training in Serbia, de-motivation of officers occurred. In this case it was due to Strategic Planning and its inadequate capacity development. According to a 2014 report, there was a 'lack of sufficient management and institutional structures, or the absence of a developed legal/procedural framework to support such changes (such as in the areas of strategic planning, resource management, and operational procedures)'. As a result, 'those who were taught new techniques could not utilize them' (Groenewald and Peake, 2004, p.7). Positive results do not necessarily follow from training inserted within a system. Indeed, the evaluation by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) of UK police training programmes in the developing countries was that: 'None of the programmes we reviewed has produced evidence that training – whether alone or in combination with other support – has resulted in overall improvements in police performance' (ICAI, 2015, p. 25).

The depth of interrelatedness and therefore of the obligation to respond to other elements in the system or the system as a whole, will vary according to the degree of interdependence (known as *coupling*). Hence what is loosely coupled will tend to be less responsive to changes induced by other elements or actors including reformers. Assumptions that criminal justice units working on the same task or case will respond effectively to requests from other national criminal justice institutions, may well be overestimated. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina it was found that there was little cooperation between the police forces, prosecutors and judges, due in part to, 'the many

rival police forces and the lack of legal protection for judges, prosecutors and witnesses' (Osland, 2004, p. 555). Even in developed countries like Canada, legislators did not anticipate that changes in mental health institutions would have any consequences for the police. Yet when the decision was made to close mental health institutions as inappropriate for those with mental health issues, large numbers were left unsupported in the community and it was the police who were picking up the ensuing problems on the streets (Baker and Das 2017; p. 8-9) and some of these cases then had to be put in already overcrowded prisons.

Interconnectedness and interdependence appears to be a feature of police organisations as it is of all complex systems. It should make reformers wary of interventions focused on a single unit in a police service. Individual units cannot be understood in isolation. Nor can they be subject to transformation and then reinserted back into the organisation without distorting the whole in some way. The same warning applies to interventions that treat the police as separate from society.

complex adaptive agents

The variable response of individuals to multiple pressures is why complexity theory speaks of 'adaptive agents'. Certainly the fact that a police institution is made up of individual employees and that employees relate differently with each other and with their physical and socio-political environment, is something familiar to police reform. Police officers and their units are subject to multiple influences originating far beyond their unit. These may be political, as in many countries the government regards the police as 'its own', there to do its bidding. Take the harassment of the opposition in countries such as Uganda (Amnesty International, 2015) and Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch, 2015) or the insertion of spyware into the mobile phones of investigative journalists in Mexico (New York Times, 2017) or the dropping of investigations into 'sensitive' cases as invariably happens with corruption cases brought by Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission against prominent political figures (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Individual politicians may be applying pressure for charges to be dropped, case files lost or for rivals to be probed. The concept that the police are servants of the citizens is by no means universal.

Other external influences may be plainly criminal. There can be threats to individual police officers to avoid persons or areas; or bribes to gain their collaboration. It is not unknown for the police to work with drug gangs, to hire out their weapons or, out of fear, to turn a blind eye on criminal activity. For example, court cases concerning bank robberies in Kenya have established that many were 'co-ordinated, planned and organized by some criminal police officers' (Anassi, 2004, p. 30).

More benignly, perhaps, the external influence on a police officer may be interpersonal. Every officer has family, friends, religious leaders, clan leaders and the like, expecting favours and calling for identity ties to trump the law. The combination of all these multiple influences can be regarded as culture and culture can be a stronger determinant of behaviour than training. For example, the Royal Solomon Islands Police staff sergeant had just received training from the Australian team in riot control, but when confronted with a potential riot he reverted to his cultural patterns of behaviour. No authoritative commands, no 'drawing a line in the sand'. Ignoring his trainer who was beside him, he sent a certain constable into the hostile crowd. His explanation? 'He knows the people, he's from their island, he can speak their dialect, or he knows who to speak to; he's best to deal with it'. The potential riot was dissipated. The Solomon Island culture of negotiating in all circumstances trumped the training (Curth, 2014).

The influence, on the other hand, may be economic. Underpaid and over-worked police are the norm in the world, and the pressure to make a living and reduce the work load will at times be stronger than the pressure to observe the rules and adopt the new initiatives. No wonder many police forces are notorious for their informal (and illegal) road tolls such as Zimbabwe (Newfarmer & Pierola, 2015: 105) and Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2010) and their resistance to new methods of working.

It is into these daily competing pressures that reform programme training days have to be inserted regarding changes in the law, new police duties and 'best practices' from the West about gender awareness, terrorism and human rights. Police organisational complexities nullify simplistic views or linearity in development. Is it any wonder if the training isn't always implemented fully? Is it any surprise that Alice Hills (2012) found in the Nigerian

police force that a pragmatic filter operated? Training that was perceived as of practical use and that would make life easier, was often adopted. But training that was perceived as ideological and arising from an alien culture, was typically ignored. Nor are we surprised that Franzisca Zanker (2017: 179) found that in Liberia, 'the blueprint of community policing (the policy that international and national actors sought to implement) was in fact legitimized and consequently understood in completely different ways amongst the same group of actors' whether that group was the police or the community. They differed on what was community policing: was it local people supplementing the police or doing what the police could not do? They differed on who was the community police: was it primarily the police or 'anybody that wants to protect life and property'? Even apparently effective training 'wears off' with exposure to work place realities. A review 2013 of police in DRC found that, 'while 70% of police trained in community policing were initially positive about the approach, after one year this figure had fallen to 30%' (UKSU, 2014, p. 8). Nor is this something confined to the developing world. Robin Haarr found that the positive attitudinal changes learned in the US training academy he surveyed 'dissipated as police recruits proceed to their respective police agencies where they are assigned a field training officer and are exposed to the work environment and organizational culture' (Haarr, 2001, p. 1).

It is true that police behaviour can seem contradictory and irrational. Here an officer investigates; now in a similar case there is indifference. Here an officer charges a suspect; here with a similar offence it is passed over. Is this irrational? It may be unexpected to the reform programme managers, but it *is* rational. It demonstrates the careful weighing up in each situation of what is in the best interests of the officer. It demonstrates that the officer is operating under multiple influences from interconnected elements inside and outside the police organisation.

The variable response of police officers to multiple pressures does indeed indicate 'adaptive agents'. They are following adaptive strategies (*self-organisation*) and acting for their own purposes and from their own view of what the organisation needs. In the process of their selective adoption of training and directives they are, of course, affecting all those they interact with, who will in turn react selectively. The complexity terminology captures the fact that individuals are not passive objects to be reformed. They are variable and changing

targets. They react to the system and to each other, and may make decisions and develop strategies (of resistance or endorsement) to influence other agents or the overall system. A senior officer in the Brazilian Military police recounts how the commander of the Academy resisted initial government attempts to encourage the recruitment of homosexuals in the late 1990s, arguing that such ideas were 'too fancy modern for the way things are here...such [people] must be expelled, there's no place for this here', and for three years he was able to prevail (Baker & Das 2017, p. 179). The inherent knowledge on which officers draw to analyse and respond to the system, develops over time. It is known as the *emergent property* of their experience and learning of that system over time. As we have seen, the process of receiving information and analysing it will necessarily be impacted by the agent's mental framework – what they believe and how they construct knowledge. So, in the case of pressure from criminal elements, the response of police officers will certainly in part be determined by their moral stance. Again, in the case of filtering out Western ideology, there is an evaluation of the new ideas against deeply held and widely respected contrary views (probably the views of their whole upbringing and their lifelong community) about, perhaps, the role of women or sexuality. In other words, the response of the agent is shaped by their socialising influences, whether communal, institutional or religious.

If we are dealing with complex adaptive agents, responses can range from resistance to embracing change. It means command and control management will be less effective than management that focuses on facilitation and empowerment, and promoting ownership (Snowden & Boone, 2007; Cameron & Green, 2015).

Emergence

Typically, in a complex system, what emerges over time is the product of both the experience of individuals, whose new responses shape the system; and the system that shapes the individual behaviour. In South Africa the transition period of 1993-4 brought together in the new single police service white officers with black officers who had received a quality of education and training far inferior to white officers. Yet as both racial groups' experience of the 'system' in and out of the police service has been different, so their contributions to the present shared leadership is different. The different backgrounds may be still 'problematic to this day' according to one Provincial Police Commissioner, but he

also acknowledges that after interventions (and despite initial 'severe resistance') black officers were now finally making a positive contribution at the executive level. (Baker & Das 2014, pp, 188, 190). Staying with the South African Police Service (SAPS), Faull (2016) describes another emergent feature that was not anticipated. He claims that the SAPS' Performance Chart has shaped the police as crime fighters, downplaying, despite rhetoric to the contrary, regard for community relations. In fact, community relations are absent from the targets by which police are assessed and the 'unintended consequences' have been angry demonstrations about the failures of policing. In other words, the introduction of the Performance Chart, instead of producing effective, democratic policing, has pressured police into behaviours that have eroded community trust in and co-operation with police. The police responses have shaped the system even as the system has shaped their responses.

The behaviour of the system as a whole can emerge, often unpredictably, from the interaction of the parts. As DeWolf and Holvoet explain, *emergence* in a complex social system has 'two important characteristics: a global behaviour that arises from the interactions of the local parts; and that global behaviour cannot be traced back to the individual parts' (2005, p. 5). It is the complex system's propensity for emergence that ensures its unpredictability. The interaction of elements within the system produce any number of emergent properties; such properties influence elements; which in turn produce new emergent properties. There is then an ongoing dynamic interaction. It is these unknowns, influencing the emergence of other unknowns, which make the prediction of theories of change uncertain.

Such emergence is something familiar in police reform programmes. Take the example of Central Asia. Substantial aid was provided to police and border guards to counter the transit of narcotics through the region. What in fact has developed is not the expected reduction of the narcotic trade. Rather it appears that it has been the strengthening of the monopoly of the big players, namely 'groups close to the political leadership and key players in the security apparatus' (Lewis, 2011, pp. 115-116). All that the international assistance programmes have done, in Lewis' assessment, is 'allow police and security forces to focus on smaller-scale drug traffickers that are not linked to the security forces or government officials' (ibid). It has not reduced the volume of drugs passing through the region.

To take another example, The Liberian National Police's (LNP) Educational Support Program from 2005, was designed to promote women's access to or promotion within the police. It offered them fast track education that would qualify them for positions that they could not otherwise fill. Though it did boost both the number of women in the LNP and their promotion, it caused, not surprisingly, widespread resentment among men in and outside the force who were not given the same opportunity. What was *not*, however, anticipated were the problems that it would cause for the female beneficiaries of the programme. Though they obtained educational certificates, these high school equivalencies did not actually amount to much and when faced with promotion exams the incomers did not fare well. The result was the emergence, in effect, of a caste system, where the pre-existing women who did have high school or college degrees, looked down on those who didn't. The newcomers were condemned to never doing more than patrol work, unable to compete with others in the force. And, in fact, they then become a liability to the organisation or else left (Bacon, 2012, p. 14).

The concept of emergence challenges the fundamental assumptions of state-building, whether it be the institution of the police or any state ministry and agency. It means that transformation is not (or not just) the result of management from the top. It is the assembly of an order that emerges as a result of the interaction of elements and processes. Though 'global' order is undoubtedly influenced by top down directives, it is largely something that emerges from local interactions. This should make those who plan police reform by the imposition of new processes and procedures wary of the certainty that the right inputs lead to the desired outputs.

The insights of complexity theory presented here, though brief, suggest that not only are police institutions to be understood as complex social systems, but that this essential characteristic offers a coherent explanation (perhaps the principal one) for the persistent failure of police reform.

Applying Complexity

Complexity might explain why police reform is not effective, but does it offer any solutions? Does the uncertainty of intervening into complex social systems, such as the police, mean that nothing can be achieved; or at least not without unexpected and negative results within the police (and those in politics, business and civil society connected with them)?

Though the uncertainty of interventions encourages modesty in ‘theories of change’, it does not demand despair and inactivity. What it does require is reflective practice that learns by doing and the sharing of that learning by all those within the system concerning the positive, negative and unexpected impact that interventions are having. Only then can interventions into complex systems begin to make some headway.

An illustration, though not perfect, of learning by doing is that of the Police Pacifying Units (UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Renewed outcries occurred in 2008 against the control of favelas in Rio by, in effect, protection rackets organised by drug gangs or the para-police militias that had sometimes replaced them (but were little better). As a result, the political decision was made to drive out the gangs and militias from specific areas by military force. The violent take overs, known as ‘occupations’, succeeded in driving out the gangs and militias, but it left the challenge of with what to replace the security vacuum. The police were ruled out as being widely discredited and held in low esteem for their abuses and corruption. Initially, following the first favela occupation, the Public Security Secretary did no more than establish what he called a new Community Police Post (*Posto de Policiamento Comunitario*). Apart from statements that this Posto was different and would be manned only by military police living in the favelas, the project was ill-defined. The politicians wanted an end of the illegal economies of the favelas and an establishment of peace and order, but did not know what form of policing was required to achieve that. Their lack of a defined development plan, however, did have the advantage of offering flexibility and the opportunity to experiment and learn by doing. In other words, it marked a very different approach to intervening into complex social systems, whether the favelas or the police themselves. The Security Secretary saw the intervention as a work in progress, as a laboratory’ (Denyer Willis and Prado, 2014, p. 236).

Recognising the differences of all the favelas from the rest of the city and from one another (UPPs now occupy 264 of the 650 favelas), the training of the new police attempted to take into account the needs of each favela. There are those who argue that a new policing order has developed. Prado commends its attempt to create 'a respectful dynamic between police officers and members of the community without creating institutional mechanisms of control by the community over the police force (Prado et al., 2012, p. 31). There are others, however, who say that the UPP police are backsliding into old police habits and have failed to build the new set of social services—health, education, and job training—that were meant to correct the traditionally absent or minimally present and poor-quality city service projects in the favelas (Fruhling, 2012; Wolff, 2017).

The point of this extended illustration is not to exaggerate the successes of UPPs or to recommend the Rio policy per se, but to draw attention to the *method* of the reform. It seems to me that, for all its contested outcomes, the programme has attempted to follow processes that are important for all interventions into complex social systems.

First, it was sensitive to the initial conditions. There was attention to the composition and history and past policing, not just of favelas in general, but of each individually. There was a willingness to be taught by those who lived there as to what was the policing context the project was moving into and how that context had arisen. It sought to avoid, as every intervention must, following a standard package of community policing, recognising the uniqueness of each complex social system that made up a favela.

Second, the continuous monitoring of change was given a high priority. Though the UPP project may not have maintained this, it is an important reform principle to recognise that complex systems can produce unexpected outcomes following interventions. At least in part there was an attempt in Rio to closely monitor the changes as they happened across the system, making use of the primary stakeholders of an intervention to record those changes. It is undeniable that only with short feedback loops can planning adapt quickly.

Third, the project was flexible. The intervention into the favelas and the police organisation was seen as an ongoing experiment that inevitably would have to be adapted as the results

were recorded. The funding action was seen, in effect, as 'seeding' emergent action. The project followed an incremental capacity development in terms of content, institutionalisation and geographic spread. This surely is a better way when faced with complex systems.

Fourth, the project, to a degree, stimulated self-organisation and the facilitation and empowerment of those involved. It eschewed command and control management. It allowed space for the intervention to have a life of their own. To the extent that it encouraged reflection and criticism by the citizens and police in the favelas it was a positive intervention.

Some may see in the failings of the UPP evidence for anxieties that, as Henderick (2009, p. 86) puts it: 'complexity may be used as an excuse for poor planning, and implementation'. Further, they may question whether it is realistic to expect co-operation and co-ordination between different partners when they have different interests and are competing with one another for funding and status. Despite these challenges, however, I would argue that if police organisations are to be managed as complex evolving systems and their reform programmes are to be progressed, then there must be sensitivity to the initial conditions, the continuous monitoring of change, a flexible approach to projects and the encouragement of self-organisation.

Conclusion

Many might prefer the organisations they seek to transform in the developing world to be machine like, responding with some degree of certainty to the inputs determined in the linear programme. Unfortunately, that is not the case and programmes that seek to reform police institutions have to better match reality if they are to be more successful. There is real value, in my opinion, in going beyond understanding that complex environments undermine police reform in developing countries, to seeing that police organisations are complex social systems themselves and that this also undermines reform. Complexity theory offers a way of understanding the nature of that organisation and the processes that follow intervention in them. It provides not only a more comprehensive analysis of why success is often limited, but it also offers an alternative approach to linear logframes. Though such an

approach requires a flexibility and detailed ongoing monitoring and evaluation that it is often hard to achieve in the real world of development, the end results could be substantially better than has been achieved before. Hendrick (2009, p. 87) summarises the benefits of such approach. He says that it offers potential for changes in at least three areas of police reform: first, how a police organisation in the developing world is analysed prior to a reform programme; second, how the programme or intervention is implemented; third, how interveners themselves perceive and respond to the unfolding developments (Hendrick, 2009, p. 87).

This article has not attempted to outline a detailed programme of how to intervene in complex social systems. There is clearly more to be aware of (see Hendrick, 2009 on conflict resolution and Jones 2011 on development). Nevertheless an outline of the advantages of such a conceptual framework is discernible.

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