# Centre for Policing Research and Learning

**Organizational Learning and the Metropolitan Police Service**

**Report from the Scoping Study**

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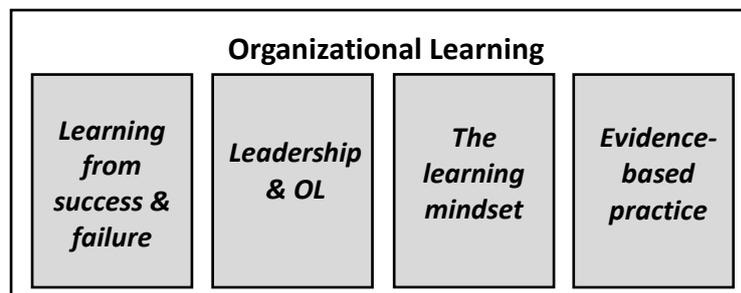| Impact Trail | |
|---|---|
| Scoping study conducted - data collection and analysis | Sept - Dec 2017 |
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# Contents

**Executive summary**

This report presents the findings from the scoping study for action research on the topic of organizational learning (OL) by academics at the Centre for Policing Research and Learning at The Open University. Its key reflections and recommendations are derived from insights, observations and conversations with a number of key stakeholders at MPS (Appendix A):

- Organizational learning is a complex phenomenon. This is not uniquely applicable to MPS, but MPS has issues of scale, accountability, scrutiny, and public and political expectation that create particular challenges for OL;

- Despite the scale of the challenge, much of what MPS already does in OL is excellent. Therefore, our action research programme is designed to support MPS in four main ways:

  o **Reflection:** Our research will aim to hold up a kind of 'mirror' through which leaders, officers and staff might see possibilities for thinking about, and acting upon, OL differently. This 'mirror' will take the shape of short reports, presentations and discussions, both within the new OL governance structure (OL Board) and elsewhere;

  o **Action:** Wherever possible, our work will aim to produce actionable ideas and recommendations for particular OL practices. We would also hope to contribute energy and momentum to OL actions initiated by others, both in the centre and in the boroughs;

  o **Connection:** We will also be able to connect with other major strategic change initiatives, such as the Transformation programme and the Commissioner's Blueprinting work, with a view to feeding in an 'OL perspective' and highlighting any implications for OL from these initiatives;

  o **Innovation:** Our research will draw on academic and policy literatures which present and develop findings from other police agencies and other sectors. This will help to ensure that MPS is working with the best available evidence on OL;

- During the next phase of work, we propose to conduct further empirical research, using interviews, focus groups and ethnographic observation, so that we can build a strong evidence-base for OL. Initially, we propose to target the following operational and functional areas (subject to agreement with MPS):

- o Sergeants and inspectors at both the pathfinder BCUs, and those BCUs currently engaged in 'local blue-printing';
- o Specialist officers with a strong responsive focus, e.g., Firearms Command;
- o A cross-section of people aligned with the Safeguarding Profession;
- o A selection of people in the roles of Advanced Practitioner, Subject Matter Expert and Strategic Leads (if they are not included in the categories above);

- A number of key themes emerged from the scoping study.  These will form the scaffolding for our research programme, because we believe that they represent some of the greatest complexity, but also greatest opportunity, for OL:

  - o **Learning and failure**: the significance (in practice and perception) of learning from failure; learning *as* failure; and failure to learn; looking to both challenge and develop existing thinking on mistakes and failure, especially in relation to deep-rooted perceptions of a blame culture in MPS, and its adverse effects on learning and innovation;

  - o **Learning, knowledge and evidence**: focus on the practices of interpretation, sense-making, legitimisation and use of evidence; including the ways in which some forms of evidence appear more trustworthy and useful than others, and some forms of evaluation of evidence more appealing than others;

  - o **Learning and professional identity**: how the evolving roles of officers on the front-line, in particular, are changing the nature of, need for, and responsibility for learning - specifically within the context of the Transformation programme, the Commissioner's Blueprinting work, and other strategic change initiatives; this extends to reflection on how the requirements of MPS leaders (sergeants upwards) are changing and need to change to enable and support OL;

  - o **Attitudes towards learning:** the influence of problem framings on the leadership, design and implementation of OL initiatives; this extends our analysis during the scoping study of the significance of learning mindsets, and in particular, the interplay between tame and wicked framings of OL;

- To anchor our discussions and map progress as we work through these core research areas, we have developed and agreed a schematic for this project, depicted below:

| Organizational Learning | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Learning from success & failure* | *Leadership & OL* | *The learning mindset* | *Evidence-based practice* |

- The theoretical framework we have used to explore OL's complexities is that of tame and wicked problems (Grint, 2010; Rittell and Webber, 1973).  If OL is approached as a tame problem, then this implies that most stakeholders will agree on the best way to tackle it, and the main challenge is to systematise access to evidence of previous 'lessons learned' for any new issues which emerge.  If OL is approached as a wicked problem, then this involves acknowledging that there is unlikely to be a single, all-purpose or overarching OL framework, that there are multiple, often counterproductive, interdependencies between OL and other organisational processes, and that stakeholders are unlikely always to agree on the most appropriate ways forward.  From this perspective, the priorities for OL include encouraging learning-as-reflection and learning from paradox as much as learning-as-information-management or learning from evidence.

It is important to emphasise that neither problem-type or approach is 'wrong'. Organizational learning can quite justifiably be approached as *both* tame *and* wicked, highlighting that OL represents a range of qualitatively different practices and challenges. In particular, this theoretical framework helps to account for:

  o Problems with implementation of OL, and with matching intervention to demand/need;
  o Different understandings of good practice, and hence different approaches to evaluation;
  o Different understandings of evidence-based practice;
  o The psychological challenges of leadership of OL projects and functions.

**Chapter 1: Background to this scoping report**

In May 2017, the Centre for Policing Research and Learning at The Open University was asked to consider undertaking a research project in the domain of organizational learning (OL). Discussions were held with AC Fiona Taylor, Paul Clarke, Supt Robyn Williams and Michael Clark to sketch out the overall priorities for such a project. We also discussed the project with AC Helen Ball as she become Head of Professionalism. It was acknowledged that a core concern of the MPS Professionalism agenda was to understand and improve the ways in which knowledge and learning are developed, shared and deployed, and gauge the extent to which current OL practices support the MPS Transformation model and the changes to organizational structure, culture, roles and processes that this is ushering in.

We developed a proposal for this work which breaks the project into three phases: a four-month scoping study (for which this is the report), followed by two years of further, targeted research in the light of the scoping study's key findings. We began the scoping study work in September 2017, so the three phases are currently envisaged to run as follows:

- Scoping study: September to December 2017, reporting January 2018;
- Phase 2: February to December 2018;
- Phase 3: January to November 2019.

Underpinning the proposal was an approach based on partnership between the OU and MPS, whereby both organizations would contribute resources to the project, and both derive benefit from its insights and findings. The key features of this partnership approach include:

- High quality, publishable research which is informed both by academic theory and by insights from detailed empirical research within MPS;

- Application of rigorous research methodology, balanced by pragmatism and a desire to see and make things happen;

- Co-operation, collaboration and support for other members of MPS to help build and sustain momentum for the sharing of key insights – both in the OL Hub and in other related OL and Transformation activities;

- Focus on the people factors which enable and inhibit learning, thereby addressing one of the key criticisms of OL in the academic literature, and also playing to the strengths and academic reputation of our research team on this work;

- Setting the MPS work in the wider context of the Centre for Policing Research and Learning at The Open University, so that other police agencies which are partners to the Centre may, at the appropriate time and with MPS consent, learn from - and potentially contribute to - the research undertaken with MPS.

## *Scope and approach*

Organizational learning is a complex phenomenon, involving individuals, teams, functions, institutions, systems and structures, and sometimes communities that the organization serves. Many scholars emphasise organizational learning as enmeshed in social interaction, relationship and practice (Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011; Rashman and Hartley, 2002). In other words, learning is not something which can be studied in isolation from the personal, interpersonal and organizational context in which it does - or does not - take place. For learning to successfully support organizational objectives, therefore, the scope of any project must include human aspects, not just systems, policies or structures. Consequently, our approach to this work is based on the premise that knowledge is more than a resource which can be aggregated, codified and stored; knowledge is deeply embedded in people's sense of professional identity, well-being and organizational belonging.

Guiding our work, therefore, has been a desire to acknowledge the complexities of OL, whilst also finding ways to unpack some of this complexity in order to make progress towards greater understanding and targeted action. With this in mind, our scoping study has been framed by three main research questions:

1. What are the strengths and areas for potential improvement in current practices of OL?
2. How and where can improvements in OL practice take place within MPS?
3. What can be learnt about fostering, deploying and spreading learning to enhance policing practice from this programme of work?

Although these research questions will be refined as we move towards phases 2 and 3, they are important research 'scene-setters', not least because they guide the overall selection of methodology (Corbin *et al*., 2014; Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Johnson *et al*., 2006). They also steer the criteria for evaluation of the research, including gauging the appropriate balance

between relatively narrow, technical criteria based on adherence to tried-and-tested method, on the one hand, and broader factors, such as sensitivity to context, resonance, impact and relevance of research, on the other (Finlay and Evans, 2009; Golafshani, 2003). In our case, the research questions focus attention on relatively high-level, strategic issues, as well as the connections between context, culture, meanings and practices. As a result, a framework of qualitative inquiry has been adopted for this research, with interviews, discussions and ethnographic observation as the main sources of data, and a range of thematic analytic methods for data analysis (see Appendix C for more on methodology).

**Chapter 2: Analysis of the challenges of organizational learning at MPS**

This chapter begins by reflecting on what is known about the policy context of public services in general, with a specific focus on what this means for organizational learning (OL). It will then consider the policy context of policing, and in particular, MPS.

*Policy context*

A systematic literature review of organizational learning and knowledge in public service organizations reflected that organizational learning is closely linked with the policy context (Rashman *et al*., 2009, p.484-485):

> *"The policy context for public service organizations is an important influence because, on the one hand, openness to sharing practice from external sources is encouraged but, on the other hand, risk and learning from failure are discouraged… For example, a context of competitiveness between public sector organizations or of punitive measures for failure may inhibit knowledge-sharing, transparency and risktaking."*

It has been argued that learning and knowledge are only likely to lead to better performance when they are aligned with the organization's strategy (Vera and Crossan, 2002). In contrast to private sector business strategy, where leaders seek to align organizational goals with a vision of required knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) to remain competitive (Fiol and Lyles, 1985), defining strategy in public organizations may be more challenging. In the public sector, organizations are subject to some of the same pressures to learn as private sector organizations, such as competitive pressures, globalization, technological advances, and changes in employee expectations and aspirations; but there are additional constraints and pressures that create a more complex context (Finger and Brand, 1999; Hartley and Skelcher, 2008).

The factors which contribute to this complexity include: the wide range of stakeholders, including politicians, policy-makers, public commentators, professional bodies, partner agencies and users (Hartley, 2006); the formal political environment with tensions between demands of political actors, citizens and stakeholders; bureaucratization; public and administrative law (Finger and Brand, 1999); public policy and reform (Rashman and Radnor, 2005); professional boundaries occurring between areas of specialist knowledge and practices, where there is reluctance to share knowledge between specialisms (Miller, 1996; Newell *et al*., 2003); the

changing nature of the public management role (Vince, 2000); and multiple and potentially conflicting strategic objectives (Finger and Brand, 1999; Moore, 1995). As a result of this complexity, there are many specific, distinctive and interacting aspects that determine the type of knowledge that is required to achieve performance outcomes in public services (Bate and Robert, 2002).

Turning to consider policing, there are a number of features of the policy context which impinge on OL, and many of these have been mentioned in the interviews and discussions we held as part of this scoping study. Overall, these accounts reinforced observations in a recent article about policing (Hartley *et al*., 2017), and the extent to which the demands made of the police have changed:

> *"The profession is almost unrecognisable compared with as little as ten years ago, with technology playing a major role in that transformation. The advent and widespread accessibility of online social media has led to a paradigm shift for policing services, taking it from a service concerned with protecting physical public spaces to an interconnected web of complexity in transnational virtual and real public and private spaces. A substantial increase in vulnerability has emerged from the world of cyber, and the modern-day officer is now faced with a very different world to that of their predecessors.*
>
> *Furthermore, society is changing as a result of globalisation and other factors, leading to changing expectations of the police, declining deference to authority, greater social and economic polarisation within societies, and other factors which place greater demand on all public services, including police forces and their individual officers and staff. Policing demand is a reflection of the society that the police serve, so these fundamental political, economic, social and technological shifts are fundamental to the tasks and roles of police."*

These changes in society and in the world of policing create strong pressures to both widen sources of learning and improve the processes of how learning is acquired, used, shared and retained within police forces. There are pressures both to explore new learning and also exploit existing learning (Levinthal and March, 1993). Learning also requires unlearning of knowledge and practices which are no longer as relevant as they used to be, or which may have been superseded by new learning.

There are also pressures for police agencies to *avoid* acquiring, using or spreading knowledge. Policing has a high profile politically in society and is therefore widely commented on by the press and other media, including social media; and this can make the revealing of mistakes and near-misses at best uncomfortable, at worst career- and liberty-threatening. State authorisation to apply coercive force means that there will always, quite rightly, be scrutiny of whether the use of force is legitimate and proportionate, so public scrutiny is widespread but not always conducive to openness to learning. Inevitably, there is a degree of controversy over what the police do and how they do it, and society projects onto the police some unrealistic expectations - as they do with many human public services (Hoggett, 2006). Policing exists in a societal context of blame, and this seems to be getting more extreme for a range of public sector organizations and activities which aim to serve the public sphere (Marquand, 2004). This has a particular relevance for any understanding of OL, because of the intimate connections between caution, blame and learning (Vince and Saleem, 2004).

In relation to MPS, there are a number of policy actors who may enhance or constrain organizational learning. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) handles inquiries when there are complaints or when a police force wishes to ensure that it has acted appropriately in relation to a difficult or contentious major incident. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (until recently HMIC) focuses on inspection and improvement, but more from a standards and disciplinary than a learning perspective. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) also has a role in supporting organizational learning and has been involved in some earlier MPS initiatives in OL; but in formal terms, the Deputy Mayor holds the service to account. These are some of the sources of review and critique which form the backdrop to efforts to enhance organizational learning at MPS.

### Cultural dynamics

In sum, therefore, the context within which MPS is operating is characterised by multiple, often conflicting demands, over which MPS cannot exercise full control; a complex and shifting relationship with society; and with the psychological pressure of being something of a canvas onto which a whole range of hopes, fears and expectations - both reasonable and unreasonable - can be projected by members of the public, special interest groups, politicians and commentators, affecting both individual police officers and the force as a whole. These elements will inevitably affect the ways in which MPS is developing, re-organising and changing culturally, in both planned and emergent senses (Burnes, 2004; Van der Voet *et al*., 2014). This is significant for our research, because a cultural lens on OL directs the analytical focus towards collective and social processes of learning and meaning-making, rather than the individualist

tone that sometimes characterises work in this field (Yanow, 2000). Many of the most significant culture change initiatives at MPS are associated with the Transformation programme, i.e., examples of planned change. But there are others which fall into the category of emergent change, including some we might categorise as 'unintended consequences'.

Several of these cultural factors have tension embedded in them, i.e., there are both enablers and barriers to learning even within individual initiatives. These tensions merit further reflection if we are to understand the complex, and sometimes contradictory, dynamics of OL in MPS. In this, we are connecting with discussions of the methodology of human meaning-making, in which the identification of tension can be a constructive, rather than destructive, way of unpacking the data of complex social and institutional phenomena (Gadamer, 1989; Tomkins and Eatough, 2018).

Based on our discussions and interviews in the scoping study, the cultural factors which we see as especially significant for OL include:

- As part of the BCU vision, there is a plan to shift towards individuals having greater end-to-end responsibility for, and ownership of, issues and incidents; there is a potential tension between the greater autonomy and emphasis on judgement that this implies and understandings of OL as principally concerned with codification and/or consistency of practice;

- Related to this autonomy is a shift towards greater personal responsibility for identifying and managing one's own learning and CPD; although this is recognised as a significant cultural shift, it also represents an opportunity to harness OL to ambition and desire to rise through the ranks;

- There is a desire to foster a culture of curiosity and openness, especially in the context of improving relationships in and with communities; this is made complicated by the phenomenon of memory, i.e., that the communities being served have longer memories of their interactions with the police than the officers themselves, who move on more quickly;

- Change initiatives which are designed for efficiency and effectiveness (e.g., greater use of personal devices and mobile technology), and which look as if they *ought* to support learning, might simultaneously be hampering learning by reducing opportunities for informal sharing of ideas and concerns;

- It is relatively easy to ignore things which are presented as 'opportunities for learning', especially if they are framed as 'recommendations'.  This seems to be linked to:

  o Highly matrixed structures, in which it is nearly always possible to claim that someone else is responsible;

  o Culture of 'fix and move on' (reinforced through the adrenalin rush of crisis management and the way in which the ability to handle unprecedented crisis, i.e., not to *need* the codification of 'best practice', is part of one's 'Legend');

- The power, success and automaticity of The Debrief as the primary vehicle for learning reinforces a retrospective orientation for learning.  There is an expressed ambition to do more future-focused scanning to predict, pre-empt and prepare (e.g., in the notion of 'failing forward'); but the power of The Debrief makes this challenging;

- Sharing information, admitting to the need to learn, etc, are not always seen as safe things to do.  Enthusiasm for experimentation and information sharing is, therefore, often tempered by the need to insure oneself against censure.  OL innovations and offerings have to pass two tests: (1) Is it a good idea? (2) Is it safe to raise it?   Whether or not the 'blame culture' has *objective* reality, it exerts a power on people's *subjective* assessments of their working worlds: Even when denied, it is a form of power which has both direct and indirect effects on learning;

- There is a perception that the identification of learning needs (even when couched in terms of opportunity, growth, etc) is a slur on one's professional capability.  The overt language may be that of 'feedback' or 'input', but the covert meaning is often 'criticism' or 'complaint'.  Within the MPS context, 'complaint' becomes 'misconduct', which threatens careers and livelihoods;

- And finally, individual learning is sometimes antithetical to organizational learning, especially where mistakes or near-misses are concerned, when the best and most rational thing to learn may well be to keep quiet.

***Purposes and meanings of organizational learning***

These cultural dynamics - and especially the tensions and inconsistencies within them - are significant for how the purpose of OL is framed. They make it challenging, for instance, to answer the apparently very basic question of 'what is organizational learning *for*?'. This is an important question, because organizational learning is usually seen as a means to some organizationally-advantageous end (often framed in terms of private sector market competitiveness), rather than an end in itself (unlike more individualised notions of learning) (Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Vera and Crossan, 2002). Embedded within these cultural dynamics, therefore, are a range of different, and not always complementary, meanings of OL.

There is a tendency in the academic literature to note two somewhat distinctive, but potentially complementary, intellectual traditions in OL (Newell *et al.*, 2003; Rashman *et al*., 2009). For instance, Vera and Crossan (2002) characterise the organizational learning and knowledge literatures as having two branches. The first branch is cognitive and informational, which results in a focus on knowledge as something which can be codified, sorted, stored and managed, both because it is separable from the human beings who generated it, and because it is seen as explicit knowledge. The second branch is one which conceptualises organizational learning as socially constructed, because knowledge is embedded, embodied, and tacit as well as explicit. As Rashman *et al.* (2009, p.471) suggest:

> *"There is a distinction between the possession of explicit knowledge that can be codified and stored, and tacit knowledge, which cannot (Nonaka, 1994; Polanyi, 1967). These two dimensions of knowledge are two sides of the same coin, and tacit knowledge underlies explicit knowledge (Tsoukas, 2005)."*

Within this overall and very typical taxonomy of learning into two main types, there are many different purposes and meanings of OL. From our interviews and discussions, we found examples of many of the most common definitions, both within and between individual accounts. These include:

- For some of the interview participants, the main aim is to be able to codify and catalogue information so that it is accessible across the whole organization, so OL is largely about sharing **existing** information. Here, OL is discussed as a product or package, which can be moved around the organization, and chunked up in different ways;

- For others, the purpose of OL is to ensure that new information/knowledge from outside MPS can be brought inside the organization – from communities, from other police forces, from other sectors, etc.  This shifts the focus onto the acquisition of **new** knowledge;

- For some, the main aim is **consistency**, i.e., the focus should be on spreading existing knowledge across different areas or functions of MPS.  For example, there is concern that boroughs in territorial policing do not share learning and may have very divergent ways of undertaking work which have come about by default (i.e., from not sharing learning) rather than by design (i.e., because there is a positive case for local variation);

- For others, the main point of OL is to support 'communities of practice' (both formal and informal) so that those working in similar activities can share, learn and **innovate** between themselves, and thereby enhance their own professional standing and promotability and/or secure their continued employability, as technologies and skillset requirements change;

- For some, the **retention** of organizational learning is a key issue, whether that is in databases or through being able to draw on the lived experiences, deep knowledge and judgements of particular officers and staff (including finding ways to pass on that learning before they leave the organization);

- For others, OL is closely linked with **evidence-based practice** (sometimes more narrowly called evidence-based policing).  EBP has a variety of manifestations (Sherman, 2013; Sparrow, 2015, 2016; Greene, 2014) and its scope is contested by different theorists and advocates.  At a broad level it is about trying to encourage action based on the most systematic evidence available, which may be a combination of scientific evidence, professional judgement, organizational data and interpretation of context and meaning;

- For some, organizational learning is about learning from mistakes in a systematic way, both from where errors and near-misses occur in performance, and through active experimentation using scientific method.  This is where OL is harnessed most strongly to the concept and function of **risk** management.

All these meanings and definitions are valid, and we are not suggesting any sort of hierarchy between them.  We think that exploring this diversity is a vital component of our efforts to add value with this research project.  This means not only exploring the nature of the problem or challenge of OL, but also trying to understand why different people come at this topic from such

different perspectives and with such different ramifications, often using the same word to mean very different things.

## *Framing the problem*

As we have talked to people both formally and informally, we have noted how many situations do not have unambiguous, 'clean' interpretations or solutions, but instead require a mixture of experience, skill, judgement, and sometimes luck, to navigate.  They also demand a tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, because even with best endeavours and the application of tried and tested technique, sometimes things just do go wrong.  This is very significant for OL, because there is rarely a simple mapping between quality or consistency of effort or approach and quality or consistency of outcome, and hence no straightforward identification of those lessons which should or could be learned and passed on to others.  As highlighted above, some lessons seem to lend themselves to being captured, packaged, shared and stored as items of explicit knowledge, but other lessons seem more tacit, idiosyncratic, private or too politically charged to be safely surfaced and shared.

In short, the events which present themselves as triggers for organizational learning represent a range of qualitatively different problems and opportunities.  It is no wonder, as more than one person we spoke to said, that the idea of organizational learning becomes 'overwhelming'. Because of this complex problem context, we have started to apply the notion of tame and wicked problems (Grint, 2010; Rittell and Webber, 1973; Verweij, 2011) to develop our understanding of the dynamics of organizational learning at MPS.  Originally applied to the field of social planning, the idea of tame and wicked problems is now widely applied to issues of complex policy and organizational systems, including evidence-based policy-making (Daviter, 2017), political leadership (Grint, 2005; Hartley and Benington, 2011), environmental leadership (Stahl, 2014), and leadership ethics (Tomkins and Simpson, 2018).

Tame problems may be simple, or they may be extremely complicated, difficult and time-consuming, but they are fixable if we intervene with the right skills, resources, tools and techniques.  When we confront a tame situation, we are operating on the assumption that there is an accepted way of approaching it and a best solution or outcome, based on theory, rules and regulations, and/or data from past experience.  With tame problems, most people agree on what the problem is and how it should probably be addressed.  The logic here is that a problem is tame (and tameable), because something similar, if not identical, has occurred before, for which an appropriate solution has been found.  Tame problems (and their solutions) lend themselves well to being captured, stored and shared as items of organizational learning in a

'knowledge management' sense, because they are often connected with explicit knowledge. However, this is not always the case, and tame problems can invoke tacit as well as explicit knowledge.

Wicked problems, on the other hand, are complex, and people may not agree on what the problem is, let alone how it should be addressed.  As Rittell and Webber (1973) suggest, identifying, articulating and classifying the problem *is* part of a wicked problem. Climate change, childhood obesity, mental health vulnerability are all issues where we are not always clear what the problem is, let alone what 'the answer' might be.  Wicked problems have many different, even contradictory, facets, and multiple interdependencies.  Significantly, they do not tend to look exactly like other problems which have occurred previously and been successfully tackled. Therefore, each situation requires a fresh diagnosis for which there may be no rule-book, and guidance from past experience may or may not be relevant.  Moreover, sometimes efforts to fix a wicked problem can exacerbate rather than resolve it, creating waves of new issues and unintended consequences.  Wicked problems therefore require tolerance, flexibility and the ability to contain messiness and anxiety.  Within the context of OL, wicked problems can be invaluable as opportunities for learning, but this is more learning-as-reflection and learning from paradox than learning-as-codification or learning from evidence.

One of the most important aspects of Grint's (2005) analysis is that tameness and wickedness should not be seen as properties which are entirely inherent in a situation, or static.  Rather, he emphasises that a key aspect is how we *choose* to interpret, construct or frame a situation as tame or wicked.  This is significant, because our mental framings influence our approach to a whole range of organizational challenges and events.  They even shape our behaviour towards others, especially during times of tension or disagreement.  This is because differences and inconsistencies are removed or resolved in tame problems, and team-work and collaboration can proceed with some degree of consensus.  However, differences of opinion and judgement are an inevitable part of dealing with wicked problems, so tension and contest over meaning will almost always be a factor.

Approaching OL through this lens means that the ways in which people *think* about organizational learning have a profound influence on issues such as:

- how they feel about learning – both their own and other people's;
- the likelihood of implementation of recommendations for learning;
- where they see the greatest barriers to learning;
- what other organizational processes are required to embed learning.

For instance, if we approach a situation with a taming mindset, we might expect learning to result from the *reduction* of complexity and idiosyncrasy, i.e., that there might be a direct application of a tried and tested solution from one situation to another.   On the other hand, if we approach a situation with a mindset of wickedness, we hope that learning might result from the *acknowledgment* of complexity, and a more indirect application of lessons from one situation to another, that is, as fodder for reflection, rather than things that can be easily proceduralised. As suggested earlier, a taming mindset lends itself more readily to 'knowledge management', where this is understood as the classification, storage and dissemination of explicit knowledge. The wicked mindset lends itself more readily to more discursive and exploratory interventions, such as team or leadership discussions, along with experiments with new ways of working. Thus, as suggested in figure 1, different framings suggest a range of different organizational behaviours, meanings and values.   Collectively, these patterns accumulate to influence the relationships between OL and key dimensions of culture, and they have implications for a range of both strategic and tactical activities.

**Figure 1: Tame and wicked framings…and their implications for OL**

| Tame | Wicked | DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE |
|---|---|---|
| Reduce uncertainty; value consistency | Acknowledge uncertainty; value diversity | *Attitudes towards complexity* |
| Make learning tangible & explicit | Recognise & explore tacit learning | *Focus of knowledge management* |
| Experience feedback as corrective | Experience feedback as opportunity | *Cognitive interpretations* |
| Trigger defensiveness | Encourage openness | *Reactions & behaviours* |
| Fix & move on | Develop & experiment | *Relationship with time* |
| Events & incidents are obvious framings for learning | Fewer natural breaks & check-points | *Triggers for learning* |
| Formulation of the OL problem is relatively easy | Formulation of the OL problem *is* the problem | *Organisational diagnostics* |
| Develop evidence-based policy capabilities | Develop interpretation & negotiation capabilities | *Focus of capability building* |
| Manage risk | Encourage innovation | *Strategic purpose of organisational learning* |

It is important to emphasise that neither problem-type or mindset is 'wrong'. Organizational learning can quite justifiably be approached as *both* tame *and* wicked. And we are emphatically not saying that the tame aspects of OL are easier to address than the more wicked ones. Both can be extremely challenging, but in different ways.

*Implications for design and implementation*

The framework of tame and wicked problems begins to explain some of the reasons why organizational learning initiatives in MPS may have failed to gain traction in the past. Although this is a conceptual framework, it has powerful practical implications for the issue of implementation, especially in cases where a proposal or project seems logical and sensible, but nevertheless fails to create or sustain the momentum required for change to take place.

If one approaches a wicked problem as if it were tame, the risk is that one will propose too rational a solution, fail to grasp the range of interdependencies and contradictions at work, and underestimate the need for active sponsorship amongst multiple stakeholders over possibly quite an extended period of time. It also means that one is likely to give up too quickly, as and when the wickedness of the situation starts to make itself felt. If, on the other hand, one approaches a tame problem as if it were wicked, the risk is that one neglects to apply the basic skills of management and control, and over-complicates what could be quite a simple and helpful way forward.

The framings of learning influence how OL initiatives are designed, developed and implemented, including whether they are offered as directives or recommendations. With these different framings in play - but probably usually unacknowledged - the very notion of organizational learning becomes confusing, and it is relatively easy to ignore good suggestions and ideas unless they are strongly mandated and their implementation tracked. Thus, the framework of tame and wicked problems helps to expose important dynamics around the *authorisation* of learning, and from there, to begin to explore the complexities of compliance and resistance to learning (Huzzard, 2004; Vince, 1998).

Mixing tame problems with wicked solutions, and wicked problems with tame solutions is unlikely to lead to lasting value for the organization. As suggested earlier, the value of this framework is in highlighting the need to tailor OL initiatives to the specific requirements, including emotional and cultural undercurrents, of individual areas of operation. For instance, the problem of there being no consistent approach to logging recommendations from IPCC reviews contains a strong element of tameness, and therefore, can be met with the procedural,

systemic approaches of 'knowledge management'.  In other words, this kind of problem is eminently fixable - with the right resources (time, expertise, technology, etc).  By contrast, the problem of discomfort with issues of diversity, and in particular, the threat of being labelled racist, contains a greater degree of wickedness. Attempting to handle this as if it were tame (e.g., by documenting and sharing a consistent approach to managing it) would probably be ineffectual, and perhaps even harmful.

Moreover, the presence of wickedness in at least some problem areas highlights the need to be alert to initiatives accidentally undermining each other – even when both seem to be very good ideas (see earlier section on Cultural dynamics).  One example of this in the interview data is the potential conflict between the drive to support greater autonomy for officers on the front-line (and hence recognise, reward and develop capabilities such as judgement, intuition, proactivity, etc) versus the desire to document and proceduralise more and more of what they actually do (and hence recognise, reward and develop qualities such as risk aversion, compliance and consistency).   This highlights some of the complexities of the MPS Transformation programme and its potentially contradictory steers for OL.

*Implications for understandings of good practice*

The framings of tame and wicked also influence how one defines what success looks like.  With tame problems and a taming mindset, there is something called 'best practice', and there are right and wrong answers.  With wicked problems, it is probably better to think of 'promising practice', and better or worse developments.  If MPS is to try to harness the things that have potential, and encourage a more innovative culture, then developing an understanding of the different definitions of 'good' will be important, not least, because without this, evaluation of the success of initiatives will be difficult if not impossible (De La Garde and Arney, 1998).

For instance, if we approach a situation with a taming mindset, 'good' involves things such as:

- Processes of learning, e.g., debriefs, happening routinely, automatically and transparently;
- Consistency of documented procedure;
- The effective storage of information, and ease of accessibility;
- Valuing and rewarding the outcome and closure of a situation.

If, on the other hand, we are inclined to see the wickedness in a situation, we may well see 'good' as meaning:

- Taking time to consult with multiple stakeholders over a proposed learning opportunity;
- Building in time/space to experiment safely with different approaches;
- Acknowledging the limits of one's own ability to remove risk;
- Learning to live with things not being neat;
- Valuing and rewarding the 'journey' through a difficult situation.

In short, if different units of MPS are experiencing qualitatively different problems (tame or wicked), and hence *qualitatively*, not just quantitatively, different challenges for OL, then we should not expect that what works well for one will necessarily work well for another. What looks 'good' from one perspective may not look so 'good' - or be so relevant - from another. One size will not fit all!

Furthermore, Grint's (2005) analysis emphasises the plasticity of these framings of tame and wicked. In other words, they are not hard-coded into people's personality, cognitive apparatus or any in-built requirements of role. Indeed, we can all vary in the way we frame situations once we become aware of our own *habits* of framing, and their implications for our behaviour towards both tasks and people. Mindsets can and do change, both consciously and unconsciously. If our habits of framing can be surfaced and explored, this can have a significant effect not only on attitudes, but also on broadening the range of individual and collective behavioural repertoires. Indeed, becoming aware of these different framings is arguably is a core part of organizational learning itself; and in particular, the challenge of 'learning to learn' (Morgan, 2014; Pedler and Burgoyne, 2017; Senge, 2014). Even if we might not like the essentialism of the concept of the 'learning organization', this particular aspect of 'learning to learn' strikes us as important for MPS, because teasing out the hidden contradictions in the way people talk about learning is of both practical and theoretical value.

*Implications for evidence-based practice*

The idea that organizational practitioners should make decisions based on the evidence available from previous, similar situations is not new. But over the past few years, the notion of evidence-based practice (EBP) and its offshoots, such as evidence-based policing and evidence-based management, have become something of a holy grail for many organizational theorists and practitioners (Briner *et al*., 2009).

There are powerful arguments for learning based on scientific methods of data collection and analysis of evidence. Within the overall framework of tame and wicked problems, this view of evidence as derived only from scientific and quasi-scientific sources both reflects and

encourages a tame approach to learning.  The assumptions underpinning such an approach are that the evidence that something has worked is unambiguous and unproblematic, and that a solution that has worked well once can be rolled out more broadly, regardless of differences in context.  Those who emphasise OL as primarily a question of 'information management' are often working from this perspective.

Alternative views of 'evidence' argue for a broader and more integrative understanding of EBP, and one which is consistent with an understanding of the wicked nature of many situations in policing.  For instance, Reay *et al*. (2009) argue for a range of sources of evidence, such as practitioner expertise and judgement; evidence from the local context; a critical evaluation of the best available evidence; and a sharing of perspectives amongst the people who are likely to be affected by a given decision.  As Briner *et al*. (2009, p.19) suggest, EBP is probably most usefully seen as "a family of practices, not a single rigid formulaic method of making organizational decisions".

A number of scholars argue for a problem-based approach to understandings of OL in policing, which acknowledges the value of both qualitative and quantitative sources of evidence, and appreciates that different skills and expertise are required to interpret and act on them (Greene, 2014; Pawson and Tilley, 1994; Punch, 2015; Sparrow, 2016).  Whilst not usually couched in the language of tame and wicked, such approaches to EBP reflect both kinds of situation and a range of different solutions and approaches.  Thus, whilst some problems and situations are best approached through the application of statistical and scientific method, others are not.  Problem-based approaches to EBP are especially relevant in the context of community-based policing, which requires the active engagement of, and challenge and dissent amongst, community members (Connery, 2017).

It is interesting to use the prism of tame and wicked to consider the key evidentiary issue of recidivism, that is, the tendency to make the same mistake over and over again.  From a tame perspective, the issue of recidivism is a failure of OL, i.e., it is a failure to identify the general applicability of learning from individual cases, and to make lessons available and accessible to others.  From a wicked perspective, on the other hand, the expectation that we might be able to replicate a single solution across lots of different contexts reflects an impoverished understanding of both the original situation and the other possible areas of application.  Both interpretations and perspectives are valid, but not always at the same time, or in the same circumstances.  In short, both tame and wicked framings have an important role to play in any OL strategy, but they have different implications both for how we see the problem and for how we mobilise potential solutions.

*Implications for OL leadership*

The notion of different framings of tameness and wickedness is relevant not just to conceptualisations of problem solving; it can also reveal something about people's understandings of their relationship with the organization, their relationships with colleagues; and, in the case of MPS, their relationships with society, too. It therefore speaks to broader connections between learning and professional identity (Handley *et al*., 2006), organizational identification and commitment (Egan *et al*., 2004; Pool and Pool, 2007), power and emotions (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002; Vince, 2001) and leadership (Benington and Turbitt, 2007; Hartley and Benington, 2010; Tomkins and Simpson, 2018).

In this section, we are choosing to focus on the issue of leadership, and specifically, leadership of OL. This is because tame and wicked problems both demand and imply different approaches to the direction and control of events, and the prioritisation and mobilisation of projects and initiatives. Grint (2005; 2010) offers a useful heuristic for this: Tame problems require 'management' (with associated competences of co-ordination and control), whereas wicked problems require 'leadership' (with associated competences of inspiration, understanding and engagement). This distinction is not based on role, i.e., it does not differentiate between leaders at the top of an organization and managers half way down. Instead, it suggests that any kind of seniority and responsibility probably requires both 'leadership' and 'management', depending on the nature of the challenge at any particular moment in time.

In the field of leadership, the concepts of tame and wicked problems bear considerable overlap with what Heifetz (1994) calls technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges are where the knowledge exists to tackle that problem, and most stakeholders hold a broadly similar view of what the problem is and how it might be approached. The challenge here is to provide a type of project management geared to the most efficient way towards a solution. In contrast, adaptive challenges are those where there may not be agreement on what the problem is, and certainly not on how to address it. There might be some relevant knowledge which can be brought to bear, but this is probably not immediately evident, or it may need to be reframed, or may not exist at all. In terms of stakeholders, people implicated in the situation may not recognise that they are part of the problem to be sorted out. For example, adaptive challenges (and wicked problems) might include obesity in society, an ageing population and, for our purposes, community policing. The case study of policing the Drumcree demonstrations in Northern Ireland over several years is a documented example (Benington and Turbitt, 2007). Leadership here is not to immediately orchestrate action to solve the problem. Instead, the requirement is to create space in which the exploration of the issue can take place,

acknowledging that different stakeholders may have different, but equally valid, views of the problem. This means encouraging all parties to listen as well as give voice to their own concerns, interests and insights. The Grenfell Tower Recovery Taskforce might be an example of the need for adaptive leadership, that is, the skills, capabilities and attitudes to handle a wicked problem.

Whether framed as tame/wicked, management/leadership or technical/adaptive, the challenges associated with responsibility and accountability include a psychological dimension. We include discussion of this here, because it may be relevant for those who read this report and find that some of our arguments resonate more than others. Framing a situation as tame reflects a particular approach to handling challenges and problems, often manifesting in taking firm and decisive action to reduce the ambiguity of the situation. It is not necessarily easy to do this, but it does come with the reward of a certain relief at having a sense of control and applying (apparently) tried-and-tested technique to reduce risk and predict outcome (Tomkins and Simpson, 2018).

Framing a situation as wicked, on the other hand, represents a different kind of psychological challenge. It requires that those in charge accept that the best way forward is unknown, possible solutions unlikely to be neat, and progress unlikely to be linear. It also means accepting that, despite best efforts, every step forwards may be followed by two steps backwards – or even sideways. Within a culture of heightened scrutiny such as MPS, this may be especially hard to tolerate, because one of the risks with the leadership of wicked problems is that it is sometimes so consultative, participative and reflective that it is easily, but mistakenly, confused with doing nothing, i.e., leadership as *laissez-faire* (Heifetz, 1994; Tomkins and Simpson, 2018). Thus, dealing with the relatively covert, often ambiguous, signs of progress required with wicked problems is hard work for those in charge. It is consistent with Syed's (2015) view of the power of marginal gains and incremental nudges, but we should acknowledge that this is psychologically challenging for those in charge, including those who will be reading and acting upon this report. If learning were a purely tame problem, life would be easier for those responsible for addressing the OL challenge!

To sum up, we have outlined a broad distinction, widely recognised, between tame and wicked problems. We think that this framework can be used to identify some 'typical' features of certain problem-types in OL and highlight the ways in which people's interpretations and framings of the OL problem can influence their actions and approaches to resolving it. We should also stress that, in practice, a problem, situation or issue probably has some elements which are tame and some which are wicked. It is, therefore, a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Also, acknowledging the importance of interpretation is not to imply that we have it totally in our power to choose to make a problem tame or wicked. This theoretical framework is most usefully applied to the *interplay* between problem-type and attitude or mindset, recognising that both evolve within particular social, cultural and institutional contexts.

**Chapter 3: Proposed ways forward**

This section outlines our summary proposals for the focus of:

- Phase 2 (February - December 2018, i.e., 11 months) and;
- Phase 3 (January - November 2019, i.e., 11 months).

*Key principles*

There have been many efforts to address the question of OL at MPS, both co-ordinated through the corporate centre of MPS (see appendix B) and initiated in the boroughs and elsewhere.  On the whole, these seem to have been well-grounded and insightful.  In devising the ways forward for this research project, therefore, we have been mindful of the need:

- To incorporate lessons learned from previous OL initiatives, both at MPS and in other complex organizations;

- To balance two not always complementary instincts: (1) to acknowledge the complexities of OL, whilst also (2) finding ways to unpack some of this complexity, specifically in relation to any systematic variations in practice which might help to explain why some OL initiatives seem to gain traction, whilst others do not;

- Guided by the notion of tame and wicked framings, to resist the push for a single overarching OL framework or architecture.  If OL has the diversity of meanings and applications suggested both in this analysis and in the academic literature, it will be neither possible nor desirable to have a one-size, one-process, one-application approach;

- To focus on understanding the issues associated with 'hearts and minds', as well as issues of institution, structure and process, i.e., the 'why' (and 'why not') as much as the 'how';

- To engage in 'joined up' thinking and action, i.e., to liaise proactively with other key initiatives, such as Leading for London and other key projects in the Transformation programme.  This is because many of the factors affecting OL are being shaped and driven through the overall strategic blueprint for MPS, especially the cultural and behavioural strands of the Transformation programme;

- To work to ensure that any proposals are 'pulled' by MPS, not just 'pushed' by the OU, i.e., that there is time and space to build a collective sense of ownership and engagement in the insights of the research;

- To ensure that our research is based on rigorous methodological, epistemological and theoretical foundations.

*Overall approach and priorities*

With these principles in mind, we propose to prioritise two main types of activity:

- Research streams which we will shape and deliver, and which are based on both the gathering and analysis of empirical evidence and engaging in-depth with the relevant academic literature(s).  These are sketched out in more detail in the section on Research streams below.  (See also Appendix C for the methodology of qualitative inquiry.)

- Provision of some advice, guidance and support for other activities with which OL is closely related – mindful that learning is intimately interconnected with issues of leadership, culture, performance management, information management, technology infrastructure, etc. Wherever possible, we will expedite connections and conversations with other people at the OU, who may be able to contribute additional expertise in specific areas of OL.  We assume, for instance, that a priority for the OL Board will be a review of the technology architecture for OL, and the extent to which current platforms and systems do / do not support the sifting, storage and sharing of the organization's knowledge capital.  This is something on which other experts at the OU may well be able to advise.

*Research streams*

As outlined above, we hope to balance two not always complementary instincts: (1) to acknowledge the complexities of OL, whilst also (2) finding ways to unpack some of this complexity, specifically in relation to variations in OL demands, understandings and practices. This means not racing to over-simplify in order to be seen to be making progress, but also not getting stymied into inaction by the fact that things are difficult. Our proposed programme for phase 2 will endeavour to address this dual challenge; and we will revisit this as we move towards more detailed planning for phase 3.

*Understanding complexity of OL: Four theoretical pillars*

We have crystallised the data from the scoping study into four main themes, which represent some of the greatest complexity, but also, opportunity, for OL:

- **Learning and failure**: the significance (in practice and perception) of learning from failure; learning *as* failure; and failure to learn; looking to both challenge and develop existing thinking on mistakes and failure, especially in relation to deep-rooted perceptions of a blame culture in MPS, and its adverse effects on learning and innovation;

- **Learning, knowledge and evidence**: in relation to practices of interpretation, sense-making, evaluation, legitimisation and use of evidence; including the power dynamics which make some forms of evidence appear more trustworthy and useful than others, and some forms of evaluation of evidence more appealing than others;

- **Learning and professional identity**: how the evolving roles of the front-line sergeant and inspector, in particular, are changing the nature of, and need for, learning - specifically within the context of the 'direction of travel' for/from the MPS Transformation programme. Also, what implications these shifting roles and responsibilities have for MPS leaders, their core skills and their development opportunities;

- **Attitudes towards learning:** and the influence of mindsets on the design and implementation of OL initiatives (continuing our strand on tame and wicked problems, and connecting with related conversations such as open and closed loop learning). Also, looking to develop further insights about the psychology of tame and wicked framings, and explore these in the context of leadership development.

*Unpacking complexity: Variations in the nature of work*

We believe that several factors may be exerting a quasi-systematic influence on practices and understandings of OL at MPS. We think these may be mappable onto some of the key features of tame versus wicked problems, and that this might enable MPS to target its OL resources and energies more effectively. We are specifically interested in exploring three of these factors which relate to the nature of police work:

- Differences between roles and functions which are considered specialist (tame?) and those which are more generalist (wicked?);

- Differences between roles and functions which are largely reactive (tame?) and those which are more proactive (wicked?);

- Differences between roles and functions already embedded in the new, larger basic command units (BCUs) and those which are about to transition (i.e., how do tame and wicked framings interact with stages in the Transformational change programme?).

With these factors in mind, we are proposing to undertake more detailed research in the following areas:

- Front-line territorial policing already experiencing new ways of working (sources of learning relating to change), i.e., a selection of sergeants and inspectors at one or both of the pathfinder BCUs (Camden and Islington; Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham and Havering);

- Front-line territorial policing soon to embark on new ways of working (recipients of learning relating to change), i.e., a selection of sergeants and inspectors in one or both of the two BCUs currently engaged in 'local blue-printing' (Kingston, Merton, Richmond and Wandsworth; Hillingdon, Hounslow and Ealing);

- Specialist officers with a strong responsive focus, e.g., a cross-section of personnel in the Firearms Command SCO19, because this is the unit most frequently cited for OL 'best practice', and because we think it represents an interesting instance of some of the dynamics of tame/wicked problems;

- Specialist officers with a more proactive focus, e.g., a cross-section of personnel aligned with the new Safeguarding Profession hub, e.g., mental health or domestic abuse;

- A selection of people in the roles of Advanced Practitioner, Subject Matter Expert and Strategic Leads (if they are not included in the categories above).

Targeting these groups would allow us to explore any quasi-systematic differences between those working in reactive and responsive functions, and those in more proactively-focused, relationship-building roles; to balance views from the corporate centre with views from the front-line; and to capture attitudes and issues from different stages of rollout of the Transformation programme.

*Methodological strategy*

We are proposing to undertake a programme of primarily qualitative inquiry, using mostly one-to-one interviews and focus groups. These will be supplemented by ethnographic observations, including fly-on-the-wall attendance at key OL events, such as debriefing from incidents and other formalised learning and knowledge exchange events. It will also involve observations of work which is not specifically labelled 'OL', i.e., if possible, we would like to shadow officers on duty.

We are happy to take advice from the respective borough commanders, heads of profession, and their leadership teams on how we should recruit participants for the research; when and where interviews are best scheduled, and other questions of participation and logistics. It should also be noted that we will not be mobilising our research efforts in all these areas concurrently. In relation to the four theoretical pillars (learning, knowledge and evidence; learning and identity; learning and failure; attitudes towards learning), we will aim to gather data relating to all four, even if we do not use it all immediately. In other words, we will avoid asking to go back to the same people over and over again as we work through different phases of the research programme.

The overall methodological strategy for this research will be abduction (see Appendix C). This involves a balance between deductive work based on the prior establishment of concepts, issues and frameworks on the one hand, and inductive work based on the emergence of new themes and interests on the other. We will be applying a range of both descriptive (Giorgi, 1992) and interpretive (Tomkins and Eatough, 2018) techniques, depending on the specific focus and requirements of individual pieces of research.

The deductive elements will be based on two main types of 'grounding' or contextualisation:

- The key themes of the MPS Transformation programme and other major change initiatives, specifically in relation to:

  - Encouraging and rewarding greater autonomy and responsibility for managing one's own learning and CPD – i.e., relationships between learning and roles and identities;
  - Fostering a culture of curiosity and openness to learning – i.e., relationships between learning and behaviours, values and meanings;
  - Encouraging and valuing learning from communities and other organizations, i.e., balancing internal and external perspectives and learning from their diversity.

- The key discussions in the OL literature regarding the challenges for OL specifically in the *context of strategic renewal*, for instance, Crossan *et al.*'s (1999) OL framework of:

  - Intuiting;
  - Interpreting;
  - Integrating;
  - Institutionalising.

*Research questions*

The research questions will be refined as we design and mobilise individual research initiatives, but they will be based on the following 'first pass' questions:

- What are the main implications of current OL practices for relationships between:

  - Learning and failure;
  - Learning, knowledge and evidence;
  - Learning, professional identity and leadership;
  - Learning mindsets?

- To what extent do current practices and attitudes in OL support the MPS strategic 'direction of travel' as envisaged by the Transformation programme? And what might be done to enhance these connections?

- What are the specific challenges in OL for MPS, as opposed to other complex organizations and other police forces? In other words, how do the specifics of context affect the practices, values and meanings of OL?

A plan for the various research streams will be developed once the overall focus, priorities and implications for resourcing have been agreed.

*Key outputs*

The deliverables from phases 2 and 3 will include:

- Discussion packages and short reports on the key research themes for use at the OL Board, and other events being held as part of Leading for London, Commissioner's 100, and the locations where the research is located (as appropriate);

- Ad-hoc advice and guidance on issues emerging from OL Board, OL team and other major stakeholder discussions;

- One to two journal papers for submission to relevant academic journals during 2018, increasing from this number during 2019;

- Discussion packages and reports for The Centre for Policing Research and Learning, to support their programme of education, knowledge exchange and evidence-based practice across the 18 police forces in the Centre partnership, and subsequently more widely across the UK police service.

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**Appendix A: Discussants and interview participants**

AC Helen Ball

Michael Clark

Paul Clarke

Peter Fox

Stephen Greenfield

Ch. Supt. Jason Gwillim

AC Martin Hewitt

Det. Ch. Supt. Clarke Jarrett

Cmdr Neil Jerome

Insp. Ben Linton

PC Ian Mayhew

DAC Graham McNulty

DAC Alison Newcomb

Supt Andy Pink

Ch. Supt. Iain Raphael

Ch. Supt. Catherine Roper

Det. Ch. Supt. Simon Rose

DAC Mark Simmons

Cmdr Richard Smith

Ch. Supt Dave Stringer

AC Fiona Taylor

Sam Upton

Robin Wilkinson

Supt. Robyn Williams

Cat Woodward

**Appendix B: Previous OL initiatives**

*Courtesy of Michael Clark, Organizational Learning Hub, MPS*

**Previous Activities & Initiatives:**

- Borough Risk and OL Reviews
- Funding made available for Corporate OL Team (3 BWT) for 3 years - lasted slightly longer then disbanded as a cost saving
- Senior Business Group OL Leads Appointed
- Regular OL meetings scheduled with Corp Team & OL leads
- Corporate OL Tracker devised to standardise recording and facilitate compilation of Met wide learning. OL Register/Tracker based on CASE model
- Appraisals altered to include need to evidence how individuals have learned
- Selection Processes altered to require individuals to evidence how they have learned
- All Business Groups Risk Registers reviewed for common themes and differences in same cases recorded on more than one register
- Perennial Issues identified from common themes e.g. Missing Persons, Mental Health, Domestic Abuse, Rape & Serious Sexual Assault & Death following Police Contact/Custody
- Diamond Groups set up for each theme and senior NPSS (ACPO) officer lead appointed to lead pan-MPS not just the Business Group they worked in
- Board Level buy in - Deputy Commissioner ratified appointment of Diamond Group Lead and provided governance and oversight of them
- Cultural Survey towards learning drafted - pulled from staff survey as not seen as important as other questions
- OL section of the new performance framework from the last promotion process
- Drafted OL Maturity Model and started to assess Business Groups against this
- 5 years of recommendations reviewed from multiple sources for each Diamond Group theme and presented to leads as common recommendations, reviewed by subject matter experts
- Incorporated Learning Cycle into operation policing e.g. significant ops such as - Op Appleton & Op Benson & Op Kirkin & Op Weeting
- Allowed for different methods of highlighting learning to corporate centre & OL leads - phone, email, proforma etc
- OL Model promulgated - CASE - Capture, Analyse, Share, Evaluate

- Sharing bulletins devised - "CASE Notes" - consulted other forces and employed marketing firm to assist

- OL Forums - involving both leads & practitioners

- Engaged with external bodies - MoD, Scottish Government, DFID, Oxfam, BP plus others

- Looked for best practice across policing and beyond

- 4 x attempted to introduce an IT solution to capture OL across MPS including Sharepoint, 'Free' MoD system, bespoke system and getting it onto corporate IT plan - all unsuccessful

- Consulted Staff Assoc, Police Federation & Supts Association

- Set minimum OL standards & measured against them

- Debriefing conducted & learning identified from major change programs and at operational level

- POLKA promoted - present on front page of Intranet & made Single Sign On compliant - encouraged use and put people in contact with each other where common aims were identified

- Learning from Hydra Training Events identified and incorporated into learning

- Olympic Learning & Debriefs conducted - fed into Scotland - Commonwealth Games

- Reviewed previous Olympiads & Commonwealth Games for learning & fed into London 2012 -

- Devised a Communication Strategy

- Conducted OL Workshop for Senior Officers - based on critical risks & perennial issues

- Set up OL Forums

- Definition of OL devised and shared

**Recent Activities & Initiatives:**

- Revisited - GMP, COLP, Sussex/Surrey, MoD

- Engaging with Thematic & Professional Leads to introduce academic expertise into their world

- Engaged with CoP, NPCC and other forces re National Learning

- Hub & Pod concept introduced

- Set up OL Board

- Initiated OU OL review & support structure
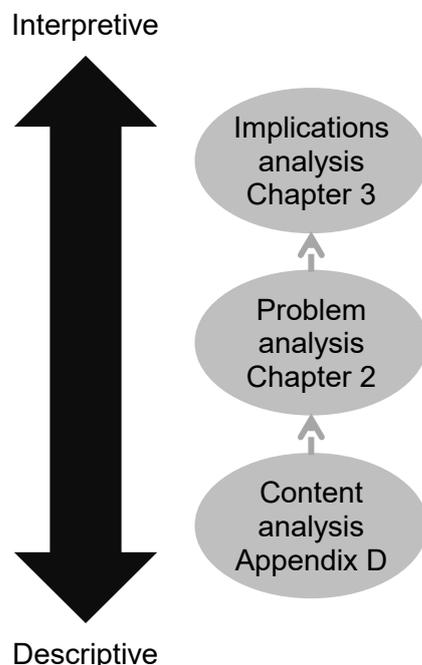
**Appendix C: Methodological strategies**

A framework of qualitative inquiry has been adopted for this research, with interviews, discussions and ethnographic observation as the main sources of data, supported by a range of methods of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Clarke and Braun, 2014). This is because the nature of our research questions points towards epistemologies which emphasise the complexity, relationality and negotiation of the phenomena of investigation.

Within an overall framework of qualitative inquiry, inductive, deductive and abductive logics can all be applied. Induction is the movement from a specific instance towards more general conclusions, and reasoning is therefore not unduly constrained a-priori by theoretical hypotheses, or even framings. Deductive reasoning, by contrast, involves examining a particular instance specifically and deliberately within a previously established theoretical framework or premise. It therefore starts with an a-priori theoretical construct, and seeks to map individual instances onto this. A third option is abduction, which involves a balance between deductive work based on the prior establishment of concepts, issues and frameworks on the one hand, and inductive work based on the emergence of new themes and interests on the other. Abduction is increasingly popular in organization and management research (Birkinshaw *et al*., 2014).

Qualitative inquiry can involve a number of different levels of analysis, each involving a different relationship between the analyst and his or her data. A key distinction is often drawn between descriptive and interpretive levels (Giorgi, 1992; Weick, 1995). With description, the analyst keeps close to what research participants have said, and tries to bracket his or her own interpretations to create a clear and transparent audit trail between the raw data and any summary report (Giorgi, 2009). With interpretive work, the analyst grounds his or her work in the raw data, but moves beyond (and above) this in order to synthesise and extrapolate from what has been said. Interpretive research involves a balance between taking the participants' accounts at face value, on one hand, and asking additional questions of the data, such as 'what concepts might help us to make sense of this?', 'what is the gist of what is being said?', and 'what might this mean within the context of what other people are saying about this?', on the other. Within the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation and sense-making, this process is often referred to as a 'hermeneutic circling' between faith and suspicion – or between believing too much and believing too little (see Tomkins and Eatough, 2018). Hermeneutic circling aims at a rich, multi-faceted understanding of the research phenomenon, because it acknowledges that different levels of analysis are mutually illuminating and co-constitutive.

In this report, we present three kinds of findings, integrating descriptive (i.e., concrete) and interpretive (i.e., increasingly thematic and extrapolative) levels of analysis - figure 2.

**Figure 2: Levels of analysis**

Interpretive

Implications analysis Chapter 3

Problem analysis Chapter 2

Content analysis Appendix D

Descriptive

An additional key feature of our methodological approach is its alignment with the notion of 'action research' (Bradbury-Huang, 2010; Reason and Bradbury, 2001).  Action research is a family of methods, rather than a homogenous approach to research.  Although individual methods emphasise different aspects, they share a grounding of knowledge creation in a context of practice.  Consequently, action research is often highly participative and collaborative, and assumes that expertise is available throughout an organizational setting, not limited to the expertise of external researchers (or other consultants or advisors).  This collaborative approach is part of the Mode 2 approach to research undertaken through the Centre for Policing Research and Learning (Hartley *et al.,* 2017).

Action research is also orientated towards effecting change.  Such change may come about in a range of different ways: Sometimes the research will produce immediately and directly actionable results and recommendations.  At other times, the influence will be a little more indirect, and the research will hold up a mirror through which practitioners might reflect on how others see them, suggesting possibilities for thinking about things differently.  In this sense, action research hopes to effect change through enriching understanding as much as mobilising action. Throughout the course of this research project, we will be alert to the possibility of effecting change in both senses (as well as any others which emerge).

**Appendix D: Summary content analysis**

In this appendix, we provide a snapshot of the descriptive content analysis which was the first step of our analytical journey (see levels of analysis in Appendix C). Following the broad principles of deduction, these findings were thematised using the headers suggested a-priori in our proposal, namely a focus on key understandings, enablers, barriers and challenges for organizational learning. As we move into phase 2, we will be revisiting the data underpinning this preliminary analysis through the prism of our more targeted research questions.

*Understandings of organizational learning*

The discussions revealed a wide range of meanings and definitions of OL, both within and between different accounts. When asked about what they understood by organizational learning (in general as well as in relation to their own role), many participants saw OL as being principally about capturing learning from specific events, for example, through debriefing or evidence-based research, and sharing this via training and/or operational guidance. Several said they thought that this approach operated well in certain areas, particularly specialist areas such as the Firearms command. However, many participants noted that learning was often not shared beyond the individual team, borough or business area.

Some participants emphasised that organizational learning has tended to focus on what has gone wrong, often in critical incidents but in other situations as well. There was a sense of frustration at this approach to managing organizational learning, which is seen as reactive and at times defensive, producing piecemeal responses which were sometimes focused more on avoiding blame than on achieving good practice. Participants said that HMIC guidance did not help in this, because it focuses on individual issues or themes, and neglects the ways in which these unfold within a much broader context of policing activity. Responding to each issue separately, they felt, could get in the way of a more integrated approach to OL.

Many participants wanted OL to have a much more positive and proactive purpose, including learning from success and good practice, with an emphasis on generating and sharing knowledge to improve performance and foster a culture of greater innovation. Related to this was a desire to create and maintain a greater sense of corporate memory so that learning about good practice can be captured and stored. Some wanted this in a central database, making it possible to access learning from previous experience and thereby avoid unnecessary duplication. Others thought that a database would work for some kinds of information or knowledge, but that it was insufficient on its own.

*Barriers to organizational learning*

Participants said that some of the barriers to sharing learning between different parts of MPS are structural. Hierarchy was mentioned by several people, who said that the distance between the front-line and others, including management, makes sharing knowledge less likely. The sheer size and complexity of MPS can make it hard to share learning across various parts of the organisation, particularly where there is silo working.

Many participants highlighted the vast array of OL initiatives across MPS, and a general desire for learning to be promulgated more widely, but suggested that infrastructure issues were a key part of why these are not always well advertised or co-ordinated:

> *"We know a huge amount, but it is on separate systems or in separate people's heads."*

Thus, IT infrastructure was seen as a major inhibitor for OL, for instance:

> "*The most agile organizations that learn from failure tend to have that ability to be really, really quick at understanding when new technology should be adopted in order to improve things [and] that's not quite joined up yet."*

There was also a sense amongst some participants that the reduction in operational policing support had made OL more challenging. This was particularly relevant in territorial policing where support staff numbers have been reduced in response to budget cuts, in preference to reducing front line staff. One participant commented:

> "*There is a belief in this organization in organizational learning and improvement but there is little supporting structure to help."*

*Cultural challenges and opportunities*

Most participants recognised that learning from experience involves being willing to acknowledge when mistakes have been made and to view them as potential opportunities to learn. It was widely reported, however, that there had been a 'blame culture' in MPS in the past, although most suggested that this was changing. Nevertheless, some suggested that the perception, at least, of a 'blame culture' still exists in certain parts of the organization, and that this has lingering effects on attitudes to risk and learning.

Several participants commented that they themselves were committed to creating a culture in which it was acceptable to make mistakes and learn from them and/or that there was not a 'blame culture' in their part of the organization. In part this was attributed to changing attitudes among senior members of the organization:

"*I don't think we are in a blame place. I think it's got better. I think we've got a generation of different leaders.*"

Some participants pointed out that there is also resistance at times to learning from other organizations, including other police forces, and internally to learning from other parts of the organization. This was related to a reluctance to learn from others or to be *seen* to be learning from others - the issue of 'not invented here', some suggested. This was also associated with the uniqueness of MPS's position, being so much larger than all other UK police forces and located in a global city. As one participant put it:

"*Sometimes the Met is a little bit arrogant. We know best.*"

Participants also acknowledged that the external scrutiny of MPS, most notably by the media, IPCC and MOPAC, combines with the regulatory regime under which all police officers operate to create an environment in which it is risky for police officers simply to assume that mistakes will not be punished. One commented:

"*Police officers are not free to reassure officers that they will not be sanctioned for mistakes because of external scrutiny.*"

Another suggested:

"*I think the culture is probably there to allow open and honest discussion of low risk stuff. I think it is less overt the higher the risk.*"

The researchers were informed that work is currently underway within the Home Office to make changes to police regulations which may help to moderate this problem of blame and punishment. However, until this happens there is likely to be a reluctance on the part of some officers to admit to mistakes and this means that 'near misses' which can be a rich source of learning to avoid future problems may be ignored or even covered up. This reinforces suggestions that there is a case for providing confidential reporting mechanisms.

Some aspects of culture were also evident in the way participants talked about personal learning.  If individuals throughout the organization are taking increasing responsibility for their own learning and continuing professional development, then this might enhance OL.  On the other hand, such a cultural shift needs to be supported by other mechanisms and incentives to ensure that OL does flourish.  Some participants expressed doubt over how wide-spread such a commitment to managing personal learning was in MPS; and several suggested it might take a long time - and a significant change in mindsets and behaviours - for individual officers to stop relying on the organization to provide learning.  The proposed new Professional Development Review system, recently piloted, is intended to encourage attitudinal change in the workforce by requiring appraisees to show how they manage their own learning. Some thought this would be a substantial cultural challenge, however, not least because needing to learn is still sometimes seen as a weakness.

*Gathering, interpreting and retaining knowledge*

Participants informed the researchers that there were many processes and procedures through which organizational learning is created and sustained in MPS.  Many participants pointed to structured debriefing after events and incidents as the paradigm OL method.  Discussions of debriefing mostly expressed confidence that this is done well in specialist areas with routine debriefing at team, command, MPS and (at times) national level.  Debriefs are used to capture the learning from critical incidents in boroughs and BCUs or from events which have had significant consequences.   Learning from debriefs was often shared routinely with other members of that specialist area, and through incorporation in operational guidance and training.  However, some questioned whether learning from debriefs was always shared effectively with those who had not been physically present yet needed to understand what had been discussed.

The researchers were informed that debriefs are supposed to be carried out by Post Incident Managers who are given training to do this, but that they are few in number and not many incidents are debriefed in this way.  Front-line managers carry out routine debriefs on daily operations in boroughs and BCUs.  Some participants were not confident that these managers always have the skills, time or commitment to do this (or to carry out productive performance conversations which include learning).  Debriefs are primarily about capturing post-event reactions and reflections and some participants flagged up the need to look at these in more depth.  Some participants said there was value in looking further back so that the whole process can be surveyed and understood.  This could aid the appreciation of longer term causes, contributing factors and outcomes.

A number of participants emphasised the importance of gathering information from sources external to the organization.  Evidence-based policing was mentioned by several participants as an important way of creating a body of knowledge – both within and beyond MPS.  However, some also sounded warning notes about the skills needed to gather and interpret evidence accurately, contextually and robustly.

***Learning from and with communities, partners and other external bodies***

Participants said that specialist departments tend to be good at knowing their counterparts in other forces and sharing learning.  In particular, MPS is part of the national CT network, which it also hosts, and there is significant resource allocated within this network to supporting the capture and sharing of both operational and non-operational learning (although the systems to achieve this are not yet fully developed).

Commitment to learning from local communities at borough level is also seen by some as an important strength in the MPS OL environment. The researchers were told that there is significant investment in learning from and with the wider communities through, for instance, Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) in each borough.  Some operational officers told the researchers that they have a strong commitment to consulting ward panels and involving lay agencies in feedback and decision-making.  Others questioned how well the learning gathered locally from communities is shared across MPS, and suggested that there remains scope for more engagement with, and learning from, local communities.

The establishment of the Global Institute for Policing was recognised as particularly valuable for enhancing learning from outside MPS.  Several participants also reported that the Commissioner is committed to learning from other forces and has recently undertaken visits to a number of them, accompanied by senior officers and staff, for this purpose.

The challenges of learning from outside bodies also relate to the suggestion that feedback and information provided by HMIC, IPCC, Coroners' reports and crime reports are not always systematically reviewed.

As one participant commented:

> *"[What] we haven't done for a very long time is to thematically assess all of that stuff, to draw out those areas where actually we've got a continuing gap, but we could actually do something about it now."*

### *Sharing learning*

Several participants identified that there is good practice in relation to both published operational guidance and training as ways of sharing learning, particularly in specialist areas. However, some participants expressed doubts about these in the domain of territorial policing. The researchers were told about a number of forums for sharing learning in different parts of MPS. Crimefighters, for example, provides a forum within which borough and BCU commanders can share experiences. Participants said this involves being encouraged to think about learning, including from when things have not gone well. Senior leadership team meetings also provide opportunities to share learning within boroughs and BCUs.

Several participants wanted a single repository where explicit information can be captured and made accessible to the whole organization. Other participants recognised that a single or central repository might be necessary but not sufficient, because important learning is often hard to articulate, especially when it is related to judgement, wisdom and gut-feel, and highly dependent on the specifics of context. At least one participant argued for a culture of greater curiosity, which would encourage informal sharing and have the agility to develop systems and routines as new knowledge develops.

One of the most frequently mentioned mechanisms for sharing learning was training. Many participants held training in specialist areas such as firearms, public order and detective training in high regard, even calling it 'best in class'. Several participants commented on the importance of leadership training, particularly training for front-line supervisors and middle managers so that they can develop the skills to support the learning of their teams. This includes having the leadership skills to support the new work processes in the Pathfinder BCUs, for example. Some participants doubted whether there was enough support for leadership development; and the planned Leading for London project is one of the initiatives expected to encourage a significant improvement to leadership training and other areas of leadership development.

Some expressed doubts about the ability of trainers to respond quickly to emerging operational issues by creating effective training, and about how close the relationship really is between training and operations. In the boroughs and BCUs particularly, where there is felt to be relentless pressure, participants said it can be difficult to make training time available, with a tendency to view training as a cost rather than an investment, especially if the training is not of high quality or immediate relevance. Several participants commented on the need for a new training and development strategy which is more adaptive to changes in external contexts.