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From Blame to Praise in Policing: Implications for Strategy, Culture, Process and Well-being

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From Blame to Praise in Policing:

Implications for Strategy, Culture, Process and Well-being

Organizational Learning at the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

Action Research Report

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| Impact Trail	
Conceived and developed with MPS action research participants	May - Dec 2018
BTP model first trailed at inaugural OL Network event, spearheaded by Chief Supt. Sally Benatar and Dr. Leah Tomkins	Oct 2018
First formally presented and discussed with the OL Board	Jan 2019
Formed basis of IOPC shaping of the new conduct regulations	From Dec 2018
Woven into discussions with Police Federation about impact of new conduct regulations on officer well-being	From Feb 2019
New police conduct regulations instated in legislation	Feb 2020
Shaped design of new Complaint/Conduct Reflection Scheme (CCRS)	From Mar 2020
Debated with professional standards representatives from 43 forces for UK Professional Standards & Ethics National Conference	Sept - Nov 2020
Document finalised at Version 4.0	Oct 2020

Executive Summary

- A learning culture is fostered where there is a positive association between learning and well-being. We express this heuristically as: learning enables well-being ('learn enough to be well') and, in reverse, well-being enables learning ('be well enough to learn').

- A sense of emotional and political/institutional security and well-being is needed for people to overcome defensiveness and be open to learning, especially within the context of learning from failure. Defensiveness is very understandable, because learning involves admitting to the *need* to learn; the idea that one could have done things better; and the anxieties of imperfection. Defensiveness makes particular sense in organizational environments where things happen quickly and unpredictably, and where the stakes are high, both individually and institutionally - in other words, an environment like MPS.

- Well-being at MPS is, therefore, not just an appealing objective in its own right; we argue that it helps to underpin a successful culture of learning. This means that efforts to enhance well-being are one of the ways to strengthen and improve OL.

- We have developed a model (figure 1) of five different reasons for failure, which depicts three types of failure: **Preventable**; **Tolerable**; and **Intelligent**. We are using it to help frame the challenges for MPS officers and staff to feel that it is safe to learn (e.g., in OL Network [OLN] events). Receptiveness to learning involves feeling reasonably secure in the belief that one will not be unjustifiably blamed for things that are not one's personal fault. For instance, where task complexity or unpredictability is the main reason for failure, the institutional response should not default to deviation.

Figure 1: From Blame to Praise
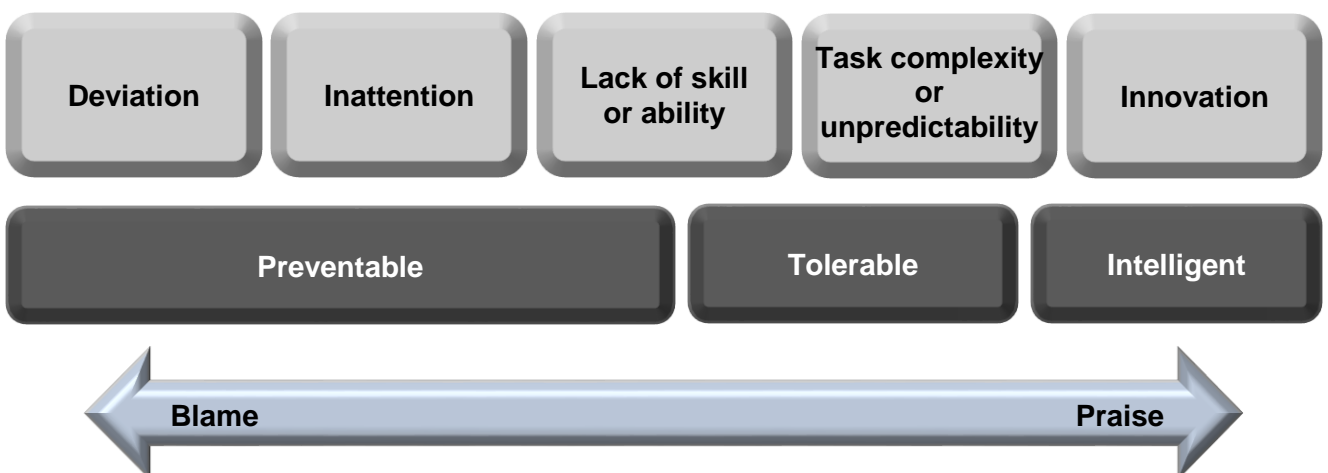
Strategy, Well-being and Psychological Safety

The Commissioner's Strategy, *Keeping London Safe: Focusing on What Matters Most*, contains significant implications for both learning and well-being, and for the relationships between them. As we have previously discussed with OL leaders, one of the challenges of this Strategy is that the three overall 'operational priorities'[1] are seemingly easier to operationalise and measure than the four 'enabling priorities' (pillars), which are articulated as:

Pillar one   Seize the opportunities of data and digital tech to become a world leader in policing
We want to harness data and use technology to our advantage in the pursuit of criminals, rising to the challenge of a fast-moving, data-driven digital age.

Pillar two   Care for each other, work as a team, and be an attractive place to work
We must ensure that our people are well-led, well-equipped and well-supported, championing difference and diversity of thought to create an environment where we all thrive.

Pillar three   Learn from experience, from others, and constantly strive to improve
We want to develop a culture of learning, listening to feedback, sharing ideas and insight with others and empowering people to be innovative.

Pillar four   Be recognised as a responsible, exemplary and ethical organization
We need to be effective, efficient and offer value for money. We also want to play our part in the city's sustainability, being recognised for our integrity, transparency and professionalism.

These 'enabling priorities' contain a mixture of the tangible (e.g., technology) and the intangible (e.g., care, integrity), as well as a blend of top-down and bottom-up change dynamics.[2] Moreover, the enablers are interdependent, i.e., one cannot be fully achieved without aspects of the others. This is significant for our work as OL Board members, because it means that fostering a learning culture requires not only activities which are *explicitly* about OL (e.g., the establishment of the OL Network; the standardisation of information management repositories, etc), but also acknowledgement of those *other* aspects of organization which are required for successful learning to take place, including those for which the OL Board does not have direct accountability. In other words, whilst the OL Board's main focus is pillar three, it is important to recognise that this both feeds into and feeds from work on the other 'enabling priorities'.

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[1] The three 'operational priorities' are: Focus on what matters most to Londoners; Mobilise partners and public; Achieve the best outcomes in the pursuit of justice and in support of victims.

[2] Such combinations of macro/micro, push/pull and hard/soft are, of course, very typical of this kind of organizational strategy document, especially in the context of transformational change.

This paper focuses on one of the issues that underpins all four 'enabling priorities' - the question of well-being amongst MPS officers and staff. There is vibrant debate about the precise meaning of 'well-being' in both academic and practitioner circles, and calls for greater clarity and consistency in the use of the term (Dodge et al., 2012; Forgeard et al., 2011). For the purposes of this paper, we talk about well-being specifically in connection with feelings of security, openness and receptiveness to learning, and we coin the expression 'well enough to learn' to make this point (see Tomkins and Pritchard, 2019), which is closely related to Edmondson's (1999) notion of 'psychological safety'.

In relation to MPS Strategy, well-being is arguably both cause and effect of caring for each other and thriving (pillar two). It is intimately implicated in issues of ethics and integrity, where it also extends to the well-being of the community and the environment (pillar four). Moreover, well-being is especially challenging to foster and sustain in fast-moving, hence high-pressure, environments (pillar one). But our main concern is with the complex, sometimes paradoxical, but also potentially highly *productive* relationship between well-being and learning (pillar three).

The Significance of Well-being for Organizational Learning

The relationship between learning and well-being attracts considerable scholarly attention, at both individual and organizational levels of analysis. Just as successful individual learning is necessary (but not sufficient) for successful organizational learning, so individual well-being is said to be synergistic with the well-being of the organization and the construct of 'organizational health' (Quick et al., 2007; Rosen and Berger, 1991).

When learning is considered in academic and (even more so) practitioner literatures, it is usually discussed in up-beat, optimistic terms (e.g., Kofman and Senge, 1993). The optimism of the OL message is that success is something to be worked on, requiring commitment, effort and energy rather than privilege, personality or luck (a variant of the argument that leaders are made, not born). Cultures of high performance can be learned into existence at an organizational level; and enhanced career prospects and professional fulfilment can be learned into existence at an individual employee level. As Senge (2006, p.4) proposes, the great appeal of a strategic emphasis on learning is that "the team that became great didn't start off great – it *learned* how to produce extraordinary results".

The popularity of the concept of the 'learning organization' (Burgoyne et al., 1994; Senge, 2006) has contributed to the emergence of a 'learning perspective' as one of the dominant paradigms in organizational research and practice (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004; Rashman et al., 2009). In a 'learning organization', employees at all levels are committed to learning in more than just the sense of addressing a particular 'training need' at a single point in time. Instead, employees -

indeed, all members of society - are increasingly expected to engage in life-long and career-long learning, where personal and professional development are a continuous focus over one's entire adult life (Berglund, 2008; Lundvall and Johnson, 1994). In both academic and practitioner literatures, therefore, loud voices proclaim that learning is a force for good - for both individuals and institutions.[3]

Does Learning Lead to Well-being?

Because learning is generally discussed in such optimistic terms, it is hardly surprising to find the argument that learning can lead to enhanced well-being. Senge (2006), for instance, proposes that the 'learning organization' inspires people to find meaning, self-fulfilment and happiness in their work. Moreover, the positive effects of learning extend beyond the boundaries of organization, and are explored in the literature on 'life-long learning', where an ongoing commitment to learning - both in and out of organization - has been associated with improved well-being (Merriam and Kee, 2014).[4]

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[3] As always in academia, there are some 'yes, buts' with this argument. Some kinds of learning are not so unambiguously a force for good. For instance, superstitious learning may occur when the subjective experience of learning is compelling but misleading, i.e., the connections between actions and outcomes, or cause and effect, are fragile (Levitt and March, 1988). Superstitious learning may happen when routines are considered 'best practice' not because they are demonstrably 'best', but because they have become associated with success (or, more likely in MPS, with the avoidance of failure and the reduction of risk). With superstitious learning, the organization becomes committed to a particular set of routines, but these arise relatively arbitrarily, rather than as the product of systematic, evidence-based learning (Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984).

From the different tradition of Critical Management Studies (CMS), there are also reasons to question learning as an automatic force for good. As Contu et al. (2003) suggest, a strong focus on learning can individualise responsibility (and guilt) for organizational performance and success. As responsible agents of their own skills development, charged with relentless self-improvement in pursuit of material and psychological security, employees are effectively agents of their own well-being. From a CMS perspective, this means an abrogation of responsibility on the part of the organization.

For the purposes of this paper, however, we want to draw out the more productive relationships between learning and well-being. These ideas are being used to stimulate conversations amongst MPS leaders, officers and staff, for instance, through the events of the OLN. As a result, the validity criteria emphasised here are Resonance and Relevance (cf Finlay and Evans, 2009: Resonance, Relevance, Rigour and Reflexivity model of validity for qualitative research). Our aim is to encourage a collective critical reflection within the dynamics of practice.

[4] The apparently positive effects of learning on well-being in a general sense do not, of course, mean that every person who takes a course will feel better about him/herself, or develop skills that will lead to a more fulfilling or rewarding career. The literature on CPD and life-long learning, in particular, often blurs the distinction between individual well-being and what Merriam and Kee (2014) call 'community well-being'. Thus, the efforts an individual makes with training and development are associated not just with feeling good about/through self-improvement, but also with *not being a burden to others*, both within organizational settings and in society more broadly (Brookfield, 2012).

Positive correlations have been traced both in a direct sense (e.g., learning increases people's optimistic feelings about themselves, their work and their lives, and their uptake of positive health behaviours, such as better diets and regular exercise) and in a more indirect sense (e.g., learning enhances career progression, employability and earnings, and hence facilitates a more comfortable lifestyle and a healthy relationship with work) (Field, 2009). For Jenkins and Mostafa (2015), the health benefits of learning are related to the social and interpersonal dimension of learning, as much as the learning *per se*. This suggests that experiences of learning can be good for us, even when the *content* of the learning is perhaps not all that relevant or well-delivered.

This apparently positive effect of learning on well-being is of particular interest in the context of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) - a term which connects a range of ideas and practices, including professional education, personal development and career advancement (Kennedy, 2014). Increasingly, CPD has become part of the regulatory fabric of organizational life, having "turned from acts engaged in by professionals for their own satisfaction to a systematized and codified set of activities that has consequences for their continued registration, and in many cases, their right to practice their profession" (Boud and Hager, 2012, p.17). A commitment to ongoing CPD has implications for our sense of identity at work (Mackay, 2017; Mulvey, 2013) for, whilst participating in CPD may be a regulatory requirement, individual enthusiasm for the ethos of CPD as an opportunity for growth, self-improvement and self-reconstruction is also a personal choice. For those who embrace CPD, a dedication to regular skills-refresh is one of the keys to professional success; and by implication, one of the keys to well-being (in both direct and indirect senses).

The connections between CPD and well-being are of interest to researchers working across a range of sectors. In the health sector, for instance, Hugill et al. (2018) trace positive health benefits of CPD, defined as enjoyment of improved supervisor-supervisee relationships, enhanced levels of motivation, and more effective provision and use of constructive feedback. In the education sector, Lofthouse and Thomas (2017) emphasise the significance of participation in the design of CPD, suggesting that well-being unfolds in collaborative partnerships designed to support individual learning plans and highlighting the health benefits of learning relationships. Mulvey (2013) suggests that CPD might have a positive impact on well-being in a more existential sense, namely, as a way of helping professionals move past periods of mid-career crisis and self-doubt.

In short, there appears to be empirical support - and a strong intuitive appeal - for the notion that learning has a beneficial effect on how people feel about themselves, their careers, the value of their skills portfolio, and the quality of their relationships with others. In all sorts of ways, therefore, learning seems to be good for us!

Does Well-being Lead to Learning?

A parallel set of arguments reverses the direction of influence, and sees the relationship not as learning-enabling-well-being, but rather, well-being-enabling-learning. This suggestion comes mostly from theorists of the emotional dynamics of OL (e.g., Clancy et al., 2012; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002; Tomkins and Ulus, 2016), who propose that people need to have a sense of security and well-being if they are to be maximally receptive to learning. This means being open to, and able to tolerate, the possibility that one could have performed a certain task or activity differently, in short, to admit - both to oneself and to others - that there is room for improvement (Vince, 2008; 2018).

For theorists of the emotions of OL, this question of whether we are effectively 'well enough to learn' is a crucial one (Tomkins and Pritchard, 2019). This is because the psychology of learning is inherently one of disturbance and disruption. Learning something new means unsettling and potentially replacing the way one has previously thought about, or approached, a task or challenge. One needs a certain amount of personal robustness to do this - robust in the sense of being sufficiently 'comfortable in one's own skin' to be open to thinking about things differently, not robust in the sense of clinging to the dogmatic certainty of one's existing position. Even with such robustness, the experience of unsettling our ideas and habits can be very uncomfortable. For scholars such as Gabriel and Griffiths (2002) and Vince (2008), the predominant emotion of learning is, therefore, anxiety.

It is one of the great paradoxes of OL that anxiety can *both* promote *and* discourage learning (Vince and Martin, 1993). On the one hand, anxiety can promote learning when people are motivated to work through and resolve the discomfort that feelings of uncertainty and not-knowing evoke. This means that learning is motivated by the desire to feel in control once more, i.e., to remove feelings of anxiety. On the other hand, anxiety can discourage learning when such feelings of uncertainty and not-knowing threaten to become overwhelming. When this happens, people instinctively resort to defensiveness, because it is easier to deny than to confront the feelings of discomfort of admitting our perceived inadequacies and shortcomings.

If people are unable to contain their feelings of uncertainty or unsafety, they are more likely to resist learning, whether actively in 'fight' or more passively in 'flight'. In this context, 'fight' behaviours include lashing out and blaming others when things go wrong; whereas 'flight' responses include sticking to well-known routines and being extra cautious (Vince and Saleem, 2004). An insecure employee is thus not 'well enough to learn', for when we buttress ourselves against anxiety through defences, denials and avoidances, we engage in 'willing ignorance' (Vince and Martin, 1993) or 'learning inaction' (Vince, 2008), in which we collude in preventing learning from taking place, mostly unwittingly and unconsciously. This kind of defensive

buttressing is natural, and it is perhaps especially prevalent in organizational environments where things often happen quickly and unpredictably, and where the stakes are high, both individually and institutionally. It is at the heart of the complex relationship between learning and well-being, for being 'well enough to learn' involves feeling *safe* enough to learn.

Is It Safe To Learn?

Defensiveness is a very understandable response when people are faced with the need to learn, and it is highly significant in the context of barriers to OL. There is a large literature on barriers to learning, encompassing both 'hard' and 'soft' factors (see, for instance, Schilling and Kluge, 2009). Storey and Barnett (2000) focus particular attention on the key barriers of: insufficient integration of OL with overall strategic objectives; difficulties with knowledge and information management infrastructure; and leaders' sponsorship of OL which fades away over time (all of which are on the OL Board's radar).

The barriers which are addressed in this paper relate to the idea that learning requires a certain underpinning of safety and well-being. Without this, people are more likely to sense (consciously or unconsciously) that it is not in their interest to admit to having room for improvement, either privately to themselves or more publicly to others. This helps to explain why, despite the optimistic rhetoric of OL, the reality - across all sectors - is that both organizations and their employees tend to struggle to learn (Cannon and Edmondson, 2005).

There are multiple reasons why it might not feel safe to learn, including:

- Learning may not feel safe if it involves having to confront and work through conflict with others. Thus, whilst some group conflict may be constructive in minimising 'group-think' (Eisenhardt et al., 2009), conflict is often feared, and therefore avoided, because it can jeopardise relationships (Vince, 2008);

- Learning may not feel safe if it feels more culturally valued to be a person-of-action than a person-of-reflection. This often manifests as people claiming that they are too busy to learn.[5] As Vince (2008, p.13) suggests, where learning involves too much unsettling and anxiety, "there is an implicit rule about there not being enough time to give to learning";

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[5] We have heard this quite a lot at MPS. We are not saying that it is not *true* that time for learning is being squeezed out, given the considerable operational pressures. We do, however, agree with Vince (2008) that it may *also* be a defence against the anxieties that admitting to the need to learn can evoke.

- Avoiding learning may be part of a broader ambivalence towards change; people long for change (i.e., for things to get better), but also fear change, because it represents the unknown and the uncontrollable. Thus, "there is an implicit rule that learning is important as long as it is not too disruptive" (Vince, 2008, p.13);

- Learning may not feel safe if making and admitting to mistakes is too costly, whether emotionally or politically/institutionally. Thus, there is an intimate relationship between not feeling safe to learn and the institutional handling of failure. This is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

Is It Safe to Learn From Failure?

As Cannon and Edmondson (2005, p.299) put it, "the idea that people and the organizations in which they work should learn from failure has considerable popular support, and even seems obvious, yet organizations that systematically learn from failure are rare". Edmondson's (1999; 2004; 2011) work is especially illuminating in this context, for she suggests that 'psychological safety' is vital to the establishment of a learning culture. 'Psychological safety' involves having a reasonable belief that some risks can be taken, that change can be absorbed, and that imperfections can be tolerated. It is a mostly tacit phenomenon, but it exerts an enormous influence on individual and collective performance and well-being. As she argues, OL will only thrive where "people perceive the career and interpersonal threat as sufficiently low that they do ask for help, admit errors, and discuss problems" (Edmondson, 1999, p.352). Thus, an ethos of 'psychological safety' involves people having a reasonable expectation that they will be supported, even if things go badly, as long as they have tried to do their best.

The opposite of this ethos of 'psychological safety' is, of course, the 'blame culture' - an expression one hears frequently in descriptions of the challenges of MPS life, and in particular, people's fear of the consequences of making and admitting to mistakes. An anxiety about being blamed for things going wrong can mean that people behave with greater caution and conservatism in the interests of self-protection. This is likely to have an adverse effect on organizational, not just individual, learning, because both the fear and the reality of blame undermine the ability and willingness of people at all levels to engage in processes of critical reflection and dialogue, through which constructive, open and healthy communication about the *systemic* causes of mistakes and failures might lead to genuine organizational improvement (Vince and Saleem, 2004). With a 'blame culture', therefore, it is the organization, not just the individual, which is not 'well enough to learn'.

Amplifying Impact with the OL Network and Beyond

Relationships between being 'well enough to learn' (both individually and collectively) and the classification of failure (both formally and informally) are key to fostering a learning culture at MPS. In other words, one of the most potent inhibitors of *both* well-being *and* OL is the fear that failures will not necessarily be categorised fairly, and that an individual officer will take the blame for something which is not really his or her fault.[6] This has been an important focus of our OLN discussions, because it seems to resonate as a major issue for OL amongst MPS leaders, officers and staff.

The first OLN event (OLN1, October 2018) included a session where Sally Benatar and I (LT) surfaced this notion of 'psychological safety', and began a public conversation about why this might be significant for OL. Based on examples from Sally's recent experiences of encouraging BCU staff to ask for help rather than feel they had to hide things when they went wrong, we started to reflect on whether people should be blamed or praised for admitting to not knowing how to do something, or being open to the suggestion that one could have done something differently or better. This session set an important tone for the programme of OLN events, and we felt it was vital for us to be open about finding things challenging if we wanted to encourage others to do the same.

Based on these conversations, we developed a model of different approaches to failure: From Blame to Praise (Figure 1 in the Executive Summary). This model was used to frame a session with Lis Chapple and Jean Hartley at OLN2 (November 2018), and was reproduced in the form of a credit card-sized 'take away' that network members might want to keep with their warrant cards. Further work with this model was then undertaken at OLN3 (February 2019), where we started to flesh out its impact on officers' day-to-day experiences and actions.

In terms of empirical foundation, the model is derived from our analysis of qualitative data collected in semi-structured interviews in two BCUs (SW and CW), as well as from a wide range of more informal conversations with MPS over the past 18 months. Rather than present this data directly (which might have compromised the anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed to our research participants), we used the data abductively. Thus, our initial data analysis produced plausible, rather than definitive, insights, which we then used to guide (a) the construction of the model and (b) the selection of an illustrative example which might help bring the model to life. This illustrative example was developed by Lis Chapple, who used the OLN2 session to introduce

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[6] Our research methodology does not allow us to say whether such misclassification of failure has any objective basis. We are interested in this fear as a dominant organizational narrative (Gabriel, 1995; Rhodes and Brown, 2005) i.e., a version of events which has a strong individual, collective and cultural currency. Such narratives 'ring true' subjectively and intersubjectively, even if they are not always objectively verifiable.

an example of a junior police officer being subjected to a lengthy disciplinary hearing because of alleged taser misuse.

In terms of theoretical grounding for the model, we follow Edmondson (2011) in proposing that not all failures are the same. Whereas some failures *are* faults (and hence blameworthy), others are not (and may even be/become praiseworthy). Thus, we present three main types of failure:

Preventable	learning from mistakes means avoiding them in the future;
Tolerable	learning from mistakes means acknowledging them, without blame;
Intelligent	learning from mistakes means constructively exploiting them.

We used Edmondson's (2011) nine-point scale as the basis for our own customised model, which chimed more with what we had been hearing at MPS (see table one). Our model depicts five potential reasons for failure - encompassing preventable, tolerable and intelligent failures - and five suggested organizational responses which would encourage and enable learning from them. A successful learning culture is one which can accommodate all five of these reasons and, crucially, is able to differentiate between them and adjust the official response accordingly. Each of these five reasons will be valid at different times, and in different cases, i.e., there is no single or permanent 'best position' for the organization to adopt. In the complex context of MPS, it may well be that combinations of reasons will be in play in many instances.

Table One: Reasons for Failure in a Learning Culture – From Blame to Praise

Reason for failure	Elaboration	Organizational response
Deviation	People deliberately and often recklessly violate rules, instructions or codes of practice.	Corrective and/or disciplinary procedures.
Inattention	People accidentally violate rules, instructions or codes of practice.	Refreshing of training/briefing/supervision, etc. Also, attempts to understand *reasons* for inattention, e.g., exhaustion?
Lack of skill or ability	Despite best efforts, people do not have the requisite capability to avoid failure consistently.	Review of recruitment as well as training, coaching, supervision and support. In a digital workforce, 'capabilities' encompass technological as well as cognitive tools.

Task Complexity or Unpredictability	The job is, by its nature, too complex to be executed failure-free every time. Even if all rules are followed, things may not always turn out well, i.e., even genuine 'best practice' does not shield us from failure.	Acknowledgement of the impossibility of guaranteeing absence of failure. This does not mean that MPS should drop its standards because 'it's all too difficult'; but a learning culture is one in which it is understood that not every single scenario can be predicted and not every risk avoided.
Innovation	There is an appetite for exploration and experimentation, which will not always work. Failures are seen as potentially useful and 'intelligent', i.e., they make sense in context, and provide valuable evidence of current problems and future possibilities.	Encouragement of a culture of 'promising practice' (Hartley and Rashman, 2018), which nudges us away from the rigidity of one-size-fits-all solutions. Possibilities for innovation are collectively debated, so that (individual) innovation does not come full circle and become (individual) deviation.

This model was used to unpack the case example presented by Lis Chapple. The decision to refer this incident for investigation as Police Misconduct reflects the dominant narrative in policing that the default explanation for failure is one of individual fault. This reflects an assumption of 'guilty before innocent' that has widespread currency and resonance in MPS conversations. In other words, this case was assumed to be an instance of deviation - a **preventable** mistake.

We would counter that this case could easily be reclassified as something reflecting the complexity and unpredictability of police work, in which decisions often have to be made quickly and in the moment, in the absence of the full facts of the situation that would be available in any post-hoc review and rationalisation. Thus, at the very least, this case typifies a failure which is to be **tolerated**, reflecting the sheer complexity of the job, under pressure and in that split second moment when decisions of consequence are made.

Moreover, this kind of failure could become **intelligent**. The advantage of a move away from the fear of blame is that the resulting openness makes it more likely that this sort of failure can be mined for what it might teach us, e.g., about potential changes to taser deployment. In other words, if we were to conclude that this sort of failure could happen to anyone in this position, then it becomes an invaluable opportunity for OL, moving the focus of learning from an attitude of blame towards an attitude of praise.

To conclude, if we find ourselves in a place where the immediate default assumption following failure is that an individual officer is at fault, we will be entrenching many of the factors that stifle learning, and lock MPS leaders, officers and staff into the sort of defensiveness of which leading OL theorists such as Edmondson (2004; 2011) and Vince (2008; 2018) warn. Assuming that the individual is at fault when it is more feasible that the complexity of the task is the/a major factor is tantamount to blaming officers for not having a crystal ball. If, as the dominant narrative of blame would suggest, we always revert to an interpretation of deviation, then it is the blame culture, not the learning culture, that will thrive. This will have implications beyond the immediate domain of OL, and beyond delivery of pillar three of the MPS Strategy. As the thesis of this paper argues, a blame culture is the group-level manifestation of an organization which is not 'well enough to learn'. That is *not* the aspiration of the MPS strategic vision for either individual or organizational well-being. It is encouraging, therefore, that the ideas and provocations in this paper are receiving such a warm reception within MPS (and indeed beyond, e.g., with the IOPC), and that there seems to be such an appetite for exploring their relevance for OL.

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